



THE WAY OF CAIN

SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

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Genesis 4:1-26

Sixth Message

Gary Vanderet

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In our study in Genesis 4 today, we come to the final story concerning man at the time of creation. These stories begin in Genesis 2, verse 4, with these words, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven." A new division begins in Genesis 5, with the account of Adam's line.

At the end of the third chapter we saw that there would be two seeds: the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent. If we are to learn our roles, and understand the conflicts we face in life, we must see the tension between these two seeds. The seed of the woman is that spiritual seed that believes and trusts the word of God and the character of God, that he is good and kind and trustworthy. The seed of the serpent, on the other hand, is that spiritual descendant that does not believe the word of God, or that God is loving, kind and good. The seed of the serpent regards God as an ogre, a restrictive force.

The birth of a child is a happy occasion. At the birth of our first son, Joel, I was so excited by the event I kept charts detailing every one of Kathy's contractions. Our study today in Genesis 4 records the birth of the first child to be born in history. Doubtless, this was a very exciting occasion for the first parents, Adam and Eve. Verse 1:

Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD." (4:1, NASB)

They named the child Cain, meaning, "something produced," or "I have produced or acquired something" from the Lord. Although it isn't quite clear in the translation, it appears that Eve thought this child would be the God-man who would trample on the head of the serpent. In the NASB, there is a side note that says, "I have gotten a man, the Lord." Apparently, it had been revealed to Eve that the man who would be born, her seed, the man who would trample on the head of the serpent, would be a God-man. He would be the one to set things right.

But it quickly became apparent that he was not the one who would correct the problem that the serpent had introduced into the world, because she names her second son Abel, which means, "vanity." This word occurs many times in the Book of Ecclesiastes, including the introductory statement of the book, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." "Vanity" means "vapor," "breath," "nothing." Eve knew that Cain, whom she thought would be the deliverer, was not a deliverer at all. He was merely part of the problem. He wouldn't pick up his toys; he complained whenever he was asked to do something; he stamped his foot and shouted, "No!" Cain demonstrated from the beginning that he was an independent being. He was going to go his own way and live his own life. That is why she named her

second son Abel, "vanity," because she realized that Cain was not the man who would set things right.

Next, we learn that each of these sons chose a vocation. Verse 2:

And again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. (4:2)

There is no hint of censure here that there was anything wrong with the vocations which these brothers chose. Abel was a keeper of flocks; he raised sheep and cattle. Cain was a tiller of the ground; he worked the soil.

And each of these men brought an offering to the Lord. Verse 3:

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. (4:3-5)

Cain selected some of the fruit which he had produced from the ground and brought them to the Lord, while Abel brought an offering from his flocks—"from the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions," says the text. In the Ancient Near East, the firstborn was considered the very best animal; and the best part of the animal was the fat. Abel offers God the very best of what he had, the firstborn; and he brought the fat, the very best he could bring. And, we read, "the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard." Abel's offering was received, but Cain's was rejected.

I do not think that Abel's offering was received because it was a blood sacrifice and Cain's was refused because it was not. Both were legitimate offerings. The author is saying that the problem was not in the offering, but in the attitude that lay behind the offering. There was something wrong with Cain. John in his epistle says that Cain was "of the evil one" (1 John 3:12). There was something wrong with his heart attitude. Cain made a sacrifice, but the sacrifice was wrong because his heart was wrong. A sacrifice symbolizes an offering up of ourselves. But Cain's offering was minimal. He brought something "from" the fruit of the soil, but he did not give the best. Thus the symbol did not represent the reality. He offered up something that was symbolic of the offering up of his life, but he had no intention of giving himself wholly to God. He was holding something back, reserving the best for himself.

A number of years ago, Dave Roper told a story of a friend of his who was a missionary in the hills of Kentucky. After he had been there awhile this man noticed

that everyone on his street flew a flag on national holidays and other special days. It had never occurred to him to do that until one day a neighbor came by and chewed him out for not having a flag and flying it. The man told him he was unpatriotic, and that if he had any allegiance at all to his country he would buy a flag and fly it. So he did. Three days later, the missionary awoke in the middle of the night to the sound of screeching tires. He looked out the window and saw a number of police cars at the house of the neighbor who had rebuked him. There was some gunfire, and after a while the neighbor was taken away in handcuffs. Later, the missionary found out that the man had a still in his basement and that he was making and running moonshine liquor. It struck the missionary how contradictory it was that his neighbor had an allegiance to the symbol, but there was no reality there. He was not subject to his government. Some people are strongly committed to symbols, but their hearts are far from the reality of the symbols.

Cain offered a sacrifice, but there was no reality behind his action. God had no regard for his symbol.

Verse 5 gives Cain's response: "So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell." Cain was resentful because God did not accept what he had offered. He became depressed, which is often the case when people get angry.

Verse 6:

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." (4:6-7)

The Lord presents two options to Cain. If Cain does well, that is, if he does what he knows God has called him to do, then there will be a lifting up; there will be forgiveness. But if he does not do well, then sin is crouching at the door, like a wild animal, "and its desire is for you, but you must master it." If he did not do well, sin would ensnare and defeat him. That is the nature of sin. We think we can play around with sin and let the flesh have its fling, but we cannot. Sin will always get us. The Lord tells Cain, "If you do what is right—and you know what is right—then there will be a lifting up; there will be forgiveness. But if you do not do what is right, then sin will master you."

Here we have a picture of what Paul would later write about in Romans 6, that man was made to be mastered, either by God or by sin. We think there is a neutral position, that we can run our own lives and live independently. But that is not true. We are either going to let God master our hearts, and be ruled by him, or sin will control us and conquer us. We think we can sin a little, like cheating on our income tax returns. I am working on my income tax these days, and I have to fight the temptation to cheat a little. You know how that line of reasoning goes: The government gets enough of my money already, and they squander what I pay them. I have certain income that it would be easy for me not to report, so... But the problem with that kind of thinking is that once we set out on that road, there's no stopping. If we let sin control us a little bit it will master us in the end. That is what happened to Cain. Adam and Eve's firstborn had a divided heart; he wasn't fully committed to the Lord.

The result was that sin, like a wild animal, conquered

him. Verse 8:

And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. (4:8)

The Hebrew literally says, "chopped him into pieces." What a graphic picture of Cain's anger and resentment. How far sin had taken him! He probably had not planned to go this far. Cain killed his brother! The chapter continually underscores the fact that this was a brother who was slain. The enormity of this act comes into focus when we realize that Cain killed one-fourth of humanity! No one has ever done that in the history of the race.

Verse 9:

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (4:9)

What Cain actually said was, "I am not my brother's keeper, am I?" The question does not expect an answer. He was saying, in effect, "I'm not responsible for my brother! I have enough to take care of, thinking of myself and my own needs. Why should I care for my brother?"

Verse 10:

And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." (4:10-12)

So Cain is driven out from the portions of the land that could be cultivated, to the east of Eden, to what is now the Iranian Highlands, a wild and rugged country.

Verse 13:

And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear!" (4:13)

There is no indication that Cain ever repented. He simply felt that his circumstances were too difficult. Scripture says, "The way of the transgressor is hard." That is what Cain experienced. He felt his punishment was more than what was justified, more than what was demanded by the nature of his sin.

He continues (verse 14):

"Behold, Thou hast driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Thy face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will come about that whoever finds me will kill me." So the LORD said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, lest anyone finding him should slay him. (4:14-15)

Although there is no indication here that Cain's heart was ever softened, no indication that he was anything but a rebellious man to the end, concerned only for the consequences of his actions, God still takes steps to protect him. (God cares about unbelievers!) So he appoints a sign for Cain. We are not told what it was. It was something that would protect Cain so that wherever he went, if anyone tried to slay him, God would protect him. Everyone was related to Abel, and Cain knew they would avenge Abel's

death.

Verse 16:

Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. (4:16)

“Nod” means wandering. Cain begins a life of rootless, empty searching, without God, estranged from his family.

Cain had chosen sides. Part of the consequences of the fall was that there would be two lines of spiritual descent—the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman—and there would always be enmity between them. These are the two choices in life. Man can either choose to subject himself to God and to do things God’s way, or he can choose to go his own way, live his own life, make his own decisions. And as we have already seen, that is what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolizes. It was not the fruit itself that poisoned the man. There was nothing inherently evil about the fruit. It represented the choice that man had to make. He could either let God tell him everything: what is good and what is evil, or he could go his own way and learn about the nature of good and evil and determine his own code of conduct.

Cain chose to side with the seed of the serpent, to go his own way. The result was restlessness, rootlessness, and emptiness. He is turned out into the land of Nod. But despite his rebellion, God loves him, and God would protect him. Cain is told that if anyone sought to avenge the death of Abel by killing him, than his death would be avenged seven-fold.

The rest of the chapter deals with Cain’s descendants. Verse 17:

And Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son. (4:17)

All of the literature of the Ancient Near East says that this city, Unich, or Eric, was the first city ever built. Cain built it because he was afraid. He wasn’t willing to trust God and let God be his defense. He built a walled city to defend himself, because that was the purpose of cities in those days. The earliest cities that we know anything about, such as Jericho, which is the oldest city that has ever been discovered in that part of the world, had enormous walls for protection. Cain was afraid for himself and his family, so he built a city and named it Enoch.

Verse 18:

Now to Enoch was born Irad; and Irad became the father of Mehujael; and Mehujael became the father of Methushael; (4:18a)

Notice that the last two letters in each of these names, “el,” is the word for God. But though these men took the name of God, and they had a form of religion, they denied the power of religion, which is trust and confidence and belief in God. They were religious, but they had already decided that they were going to go their own way and live their own lives.

and Methushael became the father of Lamech. And Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah. (4:18b-19)

Thus we have the beginnings of polygamy. These men

have already rejected God’s word, given to Adam and Eve, that it was God’s intent that man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two become one flesh—not three or four, but one flesh. So this line of descent rejected the truth about the home. They went their own way and established a polygamous lifestyle.

Verse 20:

And Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. [Here we see the beginnings of the Nomadic life.] And his brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. [Culture, music and the arts develop.] As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. (4:20-22)

Thus we see the beginnings of metallurgy and man’s ability to produce farming implements and weapons. The Iron Age in Israel did not begin until shortly before the time of Saul and David, and yet at this stage in history, before the flood, men were working in iron. These people weren’t cave men; they were very sophisticated and accomplished.

And we are further told (verse 23):

**And Lamech said to his wives,
“Adah and Zillah,
Listen to my voice,
You wives of Lamech,
Give heed to my speech,
For I have killed a man for wounding me;
And a boy for striking me;
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” (4:23-24)**

The point of this all is that by now Lamech feels he doesn’t even need God to protect him; he thinks he can protect himself. Cain, despite his rebellion, cried out to God for protection and God responded. But Lamech says, “who needs God? I will use these instruments that my son has developed, and I will defend myself.”

I am reminded of the lines from the poem *Invictus*:

Out of the black that shadows me,
Dark is the pit from pole to pole.
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

That is man’s attitude, “Who needs God?” I can protect myself with my technology, my weapons.” On our coins we have inscribed the words, “In God We Trust,” but what we are really trusting in is our defense budget, our gadgetry and our ability to set things right. When man gets in a mess he thinks he can get himself out simply by applying his knowledge and technology, but he just makes things worse. Every generation thinks that it is going to set things right. Politicians offer themselves as saviors who are going to make everything work out. But they are merely men. Like Cain and Abel, and they are weak; they just make things worse.

Scripture says that the whole world lies in the hand of the wicked one. The philosophy of the world is that mankind can make it without God. As Christians, this should be our greatest concern, not the blatant attempts in the media to lure us into sin with alcohol or sexual allurements. At

times we do not recognize this, and it often gets into our unconscious. We are told that we can run our businesses without reference to God; we can run our families without faith; we can live without God; our technology will make the world right. But we only succeed in making things worse.

At last, man recognized the truth of this. Verse 25:

And Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel; for Cain killed him." ["Seth" merely means "appointed"; so this is a replacement for Abel.] **Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh** ["Enosh" means, "weak or "frail"]. **At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.** (4:25 [NASB], 26 [NIV])

They were beginning to get the message. Adam and Eve had a son, and they name him "acquired," or "created." Cain was going to be the one who would set things right, but he was not; he killed his brother. He was merely a part of the problem. And so they have another son. Eve is still hoping. She names him Seth ("appointed") in place of Abel. But he isn't the answer, either. Seth has another son, and they name him Enosh ("weak") because the picture is getting a lot clearer. Then "men began to call upon the name of the Lord." That is where man's strength comes from, not from technology or science, as good as those things may be.

Without God, we are unable to live life as he would have us live. He created us that way. We can't do it. As Jesus put it, "Apart from me, you can do nothing." We can do many things. We can go to the moon, we can make remarkable discoveries and achievements in medicine, but we can't be what God intends us to be apart from him. We can't be godlike in the world; we can't set the world right apart from God.

At last, as we see in these closing verses, man began to get the message. So a line came down, from Adam through Seth, of people who believed God, who trusted him and

counted on him. Notice that very little is said about their achievements. This line probably shared in many of the accomplishments of the line of Cain. And they probably intermingled with the Cainites. But they had an entirely different attitude. They depended not on science and technology, but on God. And this attitude can best be seen in the seventh generation, in the person of Enoch.

When we find ourselves in the way of Cain, and we all feel that way on occasion, so we can identify with him, that is when we must remember the words of the letter to the Hebrews:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:22-24, NIV).

The blood of Abel cried out for vengeance, but the blood of Jesus cries out for forgiveness and cleansing. It is a better blood. The blood of Abel is a righteous blood. It cries out that innocent life will be avenged. But the blood of Jesus is a better blood. It cries out, "Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." The blood of Jesus cries out, "Father, cleanse them from all of their sins." It is a better blood. All of us were in the ways of Cain, all of us deserve the judgment of God, but the blood of Jesus provides a lifting up, a cleansing, a washing, in the forgiveness of our sins.

Do you know this cleansing, this forgiveness? Do you believe that all of your sins were taken to the cross? God wants you to have a childlike trust and dependence upon him, and this process begins by repentance. Tell God that you have gone astray, that you have tried to live life without him, but you have learned that is not possible. Trust him for that, and let today be the day you begin your new life in him.

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