

CAIN AND ABEL

Genesis 4

There is a very close connection between Genesis 3 and 4. The third chapter portrays the beginning of sin in man; the fourth chapter portrays the progress and fruits of sin. In the former it was sin in the individual and against God; in the latter it was sin in the family and against a fellow-man.

I. The First Family. Genesis 4:1-2.

We have brought before us here those family relationships, conjugal, parental and brotherly, which constitute the foundation of all social life. The first home, which was of divine appointment, was designed for the increase of the human family, the happiness of the race and the training of children.

In expressing her great joy at the birth of her first child, Eve rightly acknowledged the hand of the Lord in the birth of her son. She called him "Cain," which means "acquisition" or "possession." But, how little did Eve know that acquisition would be the dominant characteristic of the human race. When her second son was born, he was named "Abel," which means "vapor." That implied the recognition of the brevity of the physical life.

As to the work of these two boys, Cain became a tiller of the ground or an agriculturist and Abel became a shepherd or a keeper of sheep. Thus, early in the history of the race we are reminded of the necessity and dignity of work as one of the essentials of human life and progress.

II. The First Worshipers. Genesis 4:3-5.

These brothers not only worked, but they worshipped. Man must worship as well as labor. Born in the same home, taught by the same parents, trained to the same duty of devotion, the first brothers became worshippers of the same God, in the same place, at the same altar and in the same way, namely, by the presentation of offerings. Worship is giving, not getting; ascribing, not appropriating.

There was a particular place where they were to worship God. Not only was there a definite place of worship, but there seems also to have been an appointed time for worship. "At the end of days" seems to imply the end of the week. In other words, this expression appears to point to the Sabbath day as the time when God was to be worshipped formally. Another thing which is implied is that of a prescribed means of worship. God could be approached and worshipped only by means of sacrifice.

This incident seems to intimate that the sons of Adam and Eve had been definitely instructed that there was a place where God could be found, that there was a time in which to come before Him, and that appointed means of approach had been established.

The nature of the offerings which Cain and Abel brought unto the Lord, and God's rejection of the one and acceptance of the other, point us to the most important truth in the chapter. Attention should be fixed not so much on the two men themselves as upon the difference between their offerings. Their offerings were not the same in matter. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground; Abel, of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. The one was bloodless; the other, bloody.

Acknowledging the existence of God and preparing to worship Him after his own fashion, "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord." But, note three things about his offering: first, it was a bloodless one, and "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22); second, it consisted of the fruit of his own toil, and it was the product of his own labors and the work of his own hands; third, in bringing of "the fruit of the ground" he ignored the fact that God had cursed the ground and for that reason would not accept the fruit thereof as an offering for sin. There is no doubt that his offering cost him considerable labor and toil, and probably it was with much satisfaction that he came before the Lord, but the Lord had no respect unto his gift.

Abel "brought of the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof," which was the best that he had. To do so, sacrifice had to be made, blood had to be shed and life had to be taken. He simply took a lamb, slew it and took it to the Lord. He did so by faith. Abel recognized the fact of sin, the penalty of which is death; and, when he approached his Creator, he placed the shed blood of a substitutionary victim between himself and God. Abel seemed to say, "Death is what I deserve and I confess it, but I come to Thee depending entirely on the merits of another." His sacrifice, in which atoning blood was shed, was therefore at once his confession of sin and his faith in the interposition of a substitute. It was the recognition by the man of faith in the twilight of the world's history that without the shedding of blood there is no remission. Abel's lamb prefigures the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world; and, when we approach our God relying on the merits of that Sacrifice, we do so in the spirit of the well-known words:

"Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

Cain and Abel were sons of the same parents; yet, one was godly and the other was not. This shows that godliness is not inherited. Cain's religion was that of a man who thought God would accept the best that he could do. He brought an unbloody offering, the fruit of the cursed earth produced by the labor of a cursed man, and thought that God would accept it. God does not accept any offering from any man who is under the curse of sin. One of Cain's heresies was that God would accept a sinner's gifts and offerings if he did the best he could. God accepts the offering from the man whose sins have been atoned for by blood. Cain was heretical on the subject of total depravity; also, he thought that man could do something good and that God would accept him for it.

Cain offered that which sustains life, while God was demanding life itself. His religion was destitute of any sense of sin or need of atonement. He rejected God's way of access, and God rejected him. Without the atonement the gospel is like a fair building without a foundation, like an arch without a key-stone, like a solar system without a sun.

Whereas Cain's altar spoke of pride, self-will, unbelief and self-righteousness, Abel's spoke of repentance, faith, the shedding of blood and the spotless lamb.

III. The First Murderer. Genesis 4:6-8.

The condition of Cain's heart was clearly revealed by his anger at God's refusal to receive his offering. Perhaps he reasoned that there would likely be a change in the order of primogeniture and that his younger brother would become his ruler. Hence his

wrath against him. Cain intended to be first at all costs. Refusing to sacrifice according to God's requirements and fearing that Abel would become his ruler, he decided that rather than submit to this he would kill his brother. His attitude toward his brother was very unseemly in its character, unjustifiable in its cause, wrathful in its manifestation and murderous in its termination.

In his anger Cain slew Abel. Here we learn the sad truth that sin which ruined the first man prompted the second man to slay the third man. Very soon God inquired of Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" While there may not have been a human witness to the murder of Abel, the eye of God had seen the crime of Cain. To the Lord's pointed inquiry, Cain replied, "I know not." He refused to acknowledge the death of his brother. He had killed him, but he denied any knowledge of the murder. So far as he was concerned, there was no contrition for sin, no confession of sin, but instead there was a repudiation and an attempt to cover it.

IV. The Judgment Of God Upon Cain. Genesis 4:9-15.

In attempting to lead Cain to repentance and confession, God told him that he was his brother's keeper and that his brother's blood cried unto God from the ground for vengeance. The fact that God cursed the ground showed that Cain was a free moral agent and responsible for his actions. Cain realized something of what he had done although it seems that his thought was more of his punishment than of the sin that led to it. In mitigation of the results of his sin, the Lord gave Cain a pledge of protection from vengeance.

In the life of Cain we see human thought as opposed to divine revelation, human wilfulness as opposed to the divine will, human pride as opposed to divine humility, human hatred as opposed to divine love and human loneliness as opposed to divine fellowship.

V. The First Civilization. Genesis 4:16-24.

Going out from the presence of the Lord, Cain and his descendants sought to reproduce Eden artificially and to make themselves as comfortable as possible on a blighted earth. They founded a city in which appeared every element of material civilization--agriculture (verse 20), music (verse 21), manufactures (verse 22), etc. It should be noted that Jubal was the discoverer of what to this day are regarded as the only two real methods of producing music--the stringed instrument--the harp; and the wind instrument--the organ.

As to the perennial question of Cain's wife, evidently she was his sister. In the absence of any law there would, of course, have been no sin in the marriage of a sister. Within historic times the marriage of brother and sister was in practice in the royal family of Egypt, in order to secure unquestioned royalty of blood in the descent; and this was the case when the civilization of Egypt was at its highest.

In Lamech we have the culmination of Cainite irreligion. He glorified two great evils--polygamy and murder. In verse twenty-three he tried to excuse himself for committing murder. It is that sort of thing which we have in our modern civilization. Those who practice such things are the people who do not know God.

VI. The Second Line. Genesis 4:25-26.

When God gave to Adam and Eve another son, whom they named Seth, there began the line of the godly who called on the name of the Lord. Cain's descendants pointed out the Sethites and said, "They are the Lord's. We have the world, but they have the Lord." All of that is true. If you live and witness for the Lord, you will be pointed out; if you are the Lord's, you will have a life of prayer; if you are the Lord's, you will be named among His people.