

HOW TO GET AWAY FROM MURDER

GENESIS 4:1-16 AUGUST 4, 2021

In the classic *Twilight Zone* episode, *Button, Button*, Arthur and Norma Lewis are offered a box with a single button. They're told that if they press that button two things will happen: They will receive \$200,000 and someone they don't know will die. After a lot of deliberation and bad acting, Norma presses the button. The couple goes to bed only to be greeted the next morning by the keeper of the Box who gives them the cash, and then assures them that the button will be reprogrammed and offered to someone whom *they* don't know.¹

In the hours following the button press, it seemed like very little happened. But, by the end of the story we discover that all sorts of consequences immediately started unfolding which would have lethal and tragic results near and far.

The last time we were in Genesis, Adam and Eve had made the choice to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They had been promised that, if they did so, they would die. But then, what happened? They *didn't* die. Not physically at least, not *yet*. But just because it didn't happen immediately didn't mean that death wasn't on its way. As James explains to us:

James 1:15 - After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.

Is sin really that big of a deal? We know theologically the answer is yes. But, if we're honest, we're a lot more casual about pushing the sin button. And, why not? God is a God of grace after all and not every sin leads immediately to death. But nonchalance toward sin and the warnings God has given to us about it is the same mistake that Adam and Eve made. And not only does it bring terrible consequences into our lives and the world, it also drives us away from God.

If we come to terms with just how gruesome sin is, the next question is: What can be done? If this plague is so deadly and so pervasive, passed to us from our parents and infecting our hearts, minds and souls, what hope do we have to escape its terrible effects? God gives us an answer here in Genesis 4. One we must still take to heart thousands of years later.

As we begin, one reminder might be helpful. This has come up before and will come up again. The book of Genesis is a historical account of things that *really* happened, but that doesn't mean we're given *all* the information about each situation. We have a lot of questions about this period of time before the Flood and we aren't given all the detail we would like. Some of our questions will go unanswered or we'll have to make an educated guesses about things. That's ok. The key is to remember two things: Just because I have an idea that makes sense to me doesn't mean that's how it was *and* we are given what we need to know. God is focusing in on specific instances for specific reasons. So, while we speculate or imagine answers to questions that arise, don't forget to focus in on what *has* been delivered that you might be complete and equipped for every good work.²

Genesis 4:1 - The man was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. She said, "I have had a male child with the Lord's help."

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Button,_Button_\(The_Twilight_Zone\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Button,_Button_(The_Twilight_Zone))

² 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Adam and Eve had been driven from the Garden, but they still had as much relationship with the Lord as they could, considering their fallen state.

Notice Eve's perspective: She assumed God's prophecy about her Seed to be literal and imminent. It seems she had some expectation that, perhaps, Cain would be the deliverer God spoke about in Genesis 3:15. She felt that God was *actually* involved in human affairs, including the family life.

This is how we want to approach Biblical prophecy. God has made specific promises. We have no reason to think that He isn't being literal about them. In fact, He has a long track record of fulfilling His promises literally.

Now, let me say this: we are not specifically told that Cain was Eve's first son. It *seems* like he was, but there is some ambiguity. I've heard people say that Adam and Eve had a bunch of kids before the fall who were *not* corrupted by sin. That is an unbiblical idea. But we don't know how many total kids Adam and Eve had, nor when they *started* having kids. It's kind of a mind blower, but Eve *could've* had a child at age 1!³ We know from Genesis 5 that they had Cain and Abel *before* Adam was 130 years old and we know that they had other sons and daughters than the 3 boys that are named in Genesis. But we have no reason to believe that they didn't have, essentially, a kid a year.

We see that, despite the pain and difficulty now associated with child birth, Eve was not resentful against God, but was *thankful* for how He was involving Himself in their daily life.

Genesis 4:2 - ²She also gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel became a shepherd of flocks, but Cain worked the ground.

The boys grew up and took up different vocations. Some suggest that Abel did the *better* thing of being a shepherd than Cain being a farmer, since shepherding is such an important concept in the Bible. But the fact of the matter is that *both* of these jobs were part of the commission God had given mankind. To have dominion over the animals *and* to be gardeners, tending the earth.

There's an encouragement for us here if we bring it up to our day and age: There's a lot of different work God wants to accomplish through His people. Every Christian shouldn't be doing the same thing when it comes to ministry or your life's work. Every Church shouldn't be doing the same thing. God is a God of variety and complexity. He calls out missionaries *and* medical workers, commentators *and* correctional officers. Peter said that each believer has received a gift to serve others as good stewards of the *varied* grace of God.⁴ As Christians and as a local fellowship we're not supposed to look around and just be a *duplicate* of some other person or church. We're supposed to be *designated* to specific works by God the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 4:3-5 - ³In the course of time Cain presented some of the land's produce as an offering to the Lord. ⁴And Abel also presented an offering—some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵but he did not have regard for Cain and his offering. Cain was furious, and he looked despondent.

There's a lot of speculation here as to *why* God was unhappy with Cain's offering. Many say the problem was that Cain brought a *bloodless* sacrifice. The shortcoming with this view is that the word

³ <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/cain-and-abel/>

⁴ 1 Peter 4:10

used for offering is the same word that will be used for a grain sacrifice later in the Levitical law (both were written by Moses). We also have to remember that, while it's true without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, two things are also true: First, we're not told this was an atonement offering *and* God is on record as saying, "Hey, it's not the blood I want from you as much as I want your heart."⁵ It wasn't the bloodlessness that God was upset about, but the state of Cain's heart.

The New Testament gives us some comment on this scene. In Hebrews 11 we read:

Hebrews 11:4a - ⁴By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts...

The problem was with the man, not the material. It's possible that Cain had, at the last minute, grabbed a few raw sheaves of grain to throw at the Lord. Or it's possible that he had meticulously prepared a very fine basket of fruit. The problem was the heart. Hebrews tells us that Abel was full of faith. Jesus says that he was the first prophet.⁶ Meanwhile, Cain did *not* have faith and, more than that, we're told in 1 John that his deeds were evil and he was "of the evil one."⁷

So, why would Cain show up to bring this offering at all? Scholars point out that the terms used for "presenting an offering" is used for a subordinate bringing *tribute* to a ruler.⁸ Based on the language used, it seems that this was a regular meeting that God had scheduled with these two men.⁹ And, even though we find that, from the beginning, Cain had nothing but disdain for the Lord, he still presented himself, probably each week on the seventh day.

Why would he do that if he hated God and had no faith? Well, God had announced the cosmic struggle between His Seed and the seed of the serpent (the Devil). And for all of human history Satan has been trying to sabotage and stop the plan of God. He's been a killer from the beginning and in Cain he had a willing operative who was full of resentment and jealousy toward God and those who loved God. And so, I think the Devil had Cain stay very close to his brothers, waiting for a chance to spring an attack.

Now, in some way they were made aware that God did not approve of Cain's heart or his offering. We don't know if it was fire coming down on the altar or the Lord speaking directly to them. But something in Cain snapped. He was lit up with anger and it showed right there on his face.

Again, we don't know in what *specific* way his offering was inferior, but it's clear that it was the result of his purposeful refusal to do what God had asked of them. Abel brought an animal from the flock. Not just any animal, the finest specimen from the firstborn of his stock. Cain had brought "some produce." It was willful and defiant. A bare minimum attempt to payoff the Sovereign.

In that moment of hard-hearted rebellion, as Cain seethed with anger, the Lord held him back and called him to the side and spoke tenderly to him.

⁵ See Isaiah 1:11-13, Psalm 40:6-8

⁶ Luke 11:50-51

⁷ 1 John 3:12

⁸ See *Vines Dictionary & Dictionary Of Biblical Languages*

⁹ A.W. Pink *Gleanings In Genesis* | W.H. Griffith Thomas *Genesis* | Henry Morris *The Genesis Record*

Genesis 4:6-7 - ⁶Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you furious? And why do you look despondent? ⁷If you do what is right, won’t you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

God invites Cain to think through his life and his choices. He warns Cain about the path he’s on and what it’s going to lead to. Cain’s anger is directed at God and at his brother, but his failure was not either of their fault. It was Cain’s. What God had asked was not too hard to accomplish. And, as Albert Barnes points out, God had not given up on Cain yet! Despite knowing how much hate was in his mind and how hard his heart was, God was still trying to guide and instruct him.

The Lord said, “Do what is right so you can *escape* the trap of sin. Sin wants to dominate your life, but you must rule over it.” This is the same command God has given to us. In fact, the basic relationship God had with Abel is the one we are meant to enjoy today. The circumstances are different, but the nature is the same. God reveals His word which is the foundation of our faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. We freely choose to *believe* what God has said. Then, as Paul discusses in Romans 6, we do *not* let sin reign in our mortal bodies but instead we present and offer ourselves to God and allow His grace to fill us that we might be made righteous.¹⁰ We believe God that if we live according to the flesh we will die. Instead, we choose to be led by God’s Spirit¹¹ and are empowered to overcome our sinful nature as God leads us in righteousness. As we go, we continue to have hope in God, which purifies us and we are able to put God’s righteousness into practice more and more.¹²

God had told Cain, “Listen, if you will believe Me and do what I have revealed clearly to you, I will lift you up.” That’s what the term “accepted” means. God does all He can to give us victory over sin and lift us up as He accomplishes His redeeming work in us. But we have to be willing participants. The alternative is to be savaged and dominated by sin. God gives all we need to be victorious over it. But He will not force us to believe Him and do what is right.

Sadly, Cain has no response to God. Instead, we read:

Genesis 4:8 - ⁸Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

This was a vicious, premeditated murder. One commentator pointed out that here we not only have the first murder, but the first martyr.

Now, clearly Cain knew what he was doing was morally wrong. He did it out where no one else would see. And in a moment he’s going to fully expect that he will be executed for this atrocity. He had slaughtered Abel on the altar of sin. In fact, one Bible dictionary points out that the term used for killing here is often used for the sacrificing of animals.¹³ And so we see a dramatic contrast. *Both* the brothers were killers: Abel had killed his pride and killed a lamb in submission to the God of mercy that he might receive righteousness. Cain killed his own brother because of the jealous hatred he had. The Lord had said to Adam and Eve that their sin would bring forth death and not we see Cain *becoming* sin, he is the *bringer* of death. Because sin does not only affect us, but those around us as well.

¹⁰ Romans 6:12-14

¹¹ Romans 8:12-13

¹² 1 John 3:3-7

¹³ *Vines*

Genesis 4:9 - ⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s guardian?”

The callousness of Cain’s response is shocking. There’s no fear, no remorse. In fact, he mocks God with his answer, maybe even taunting him with the suggestion that even He, God Almighty, wasn’t able to protect his servant.

The question is: Why didn’t God stop Cain? He *could* have. Clearly He was able to drive Adam and Eve from the Garden. He had regular meetings with human beings. He had warrior angels at His disposal. So why allow this terrible thing to happen? Because though He is a God who is intricately involved in the course of history He is also a God who has given human beings a genuine free will.

God repeats His pattern here of compassionately confronting the sinner. He did so with Adam and Eve. He would do so again, famously, with Saul of Tarsus. There are other examples. And so, again, we see just how *immense* is God’s compassion. He has love and mercy for *murderers*. Even a man like Cain, who disdained God so much, was not beyond the extent of God’s grace.

Genesis 4:10-12 - ¹⁰ Then he said, “What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! ¹¹ So now you are cursed, alienated from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood you have shed. ¹² If you work the ground, it will never again give you its yield. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

This scene establishes a few truths. First, that the killing of a person is a particularly heinous crime, one that demands justice. Second, that there is no such thing as hidden sin when it comes to the eyes of God. He sees all and knows all. Third, God sometimes *does* bring temporal judgment as a consequence to sin. Of course, Cain would be judged eternally after he died, but he’d face this curse on this side of the grave as well.

Genesis 4:13-14 - ¹³ But Cain answered the Lord, “My punishment is too great to bear! ¹⁴ Since you are banishing me today from the face of the earth, and I must hide from your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth, whoever finds me will kill me.”

He’s not upset about how he butchered his brother. Cain is upset that he’ll have a tougher life from here on out. It is amazing to see just how poisonous sin is. *This* is what it does to a human heart. Maybe not leading to the same result in every case, but this is what sin does if we let it rule in our hearts. This is what God is trying to save us from and from the results of our sin. In Isaiah 57 we’re told there is no peace for the wicked. Ironically, the murderer wants someone to protect *him* from being murdered!

Genesis 4:15-16 - ¹⁵ Then the Lord replied to him, “In that case, whoever kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” And he placed a mark on Cain so that whoever found him would not kill him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

God’s grace really is confounding. It almost feels like Cain got away with murder! Of course, stepping back we know that’s not true. He was judged then and eternally. Meanwhile, God *still*

offered him grace. He gave Cain assistance. He put this sign on him so that he wouldn't be executed for his crime.

What was the mark? No one knows. Of course, some despicable men in history suggested it was black skin and used that completely unbiblical delusion to defend slavery. You may be interested to learn that a variety of Bible commentators don't think there was an actual mark on Cain at all, that it was some sort of sign he had, rather than what we might think of as a tattoo.¹⁴ Whatever it was, it must've somehow conveyed information, otherwise what use would it have been?

Once more, the sinner goes east. Adam and Eve had gone to the east. Cain moved to the east. When men migrate toward Babylon in a later passage of Genesis they go to the east. We see men moving further away from the presence of God and the place He had established. And now God draws all men *back* to Himself. We want to be like Abel, who - by faith - believe and present ourselves to the Lord in loving devotion.

Along the way there's sin to contend with. We may not be murderers, but, remember, if you're angry in your heart, you've committed murder there. Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Sin is a serious danger. It wants to destroy you. It crouches at the flap our tent, trying to claim our lives. But, if you're a Christian, you need not fear. God has given you victory over temptation, over sin and over the Devil. But neither should we take sin lightly. Instead, we remember this story and remind ourselves that we have a responsibility to put God's righteousness into action in our lives. Bringing *ourselves* as living sacrifices, putting to death what belongs to our earthly nature and instead putting on the new self as we are renewed in knowledge according to the image of our Creator.¹⁵ Living a life of devoted worship and thankfulness and spiritual richness because of what He has done on our behalf.

¹⁴ Henry Morris *The Genesis Record* | W.H. Griffith Thomas *Genesis*

¹⁵ Colossians 5-11