

GENESIS 4:1-24

Introduction

Cain and Abel were stillborn.

"Stillborn" means "dead at birth"; Cain and Abel were dead at birth. They were obviously alive physically; but they were certainly born dead spiritually!

All of Adam and Eve's offspring - - including you and I - - are *born dead!* You are described in the New Testament as being "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). You are obviously alive physically; but you were certainly born dead spiritually. Some Bible commentators make a distinction between the two words, "trespasses" and "sins." "Trespasses" refer to actual sins you commit; "sins," they say, is a reference to the sin nature you inherited from your parents at birth. You are not a sinner because you sin; you sin because you are born a sinner!

You inherited a sin nature from your parents as they did from theirs, and so on back to the first parents, Adam and Eve. After they sinned in God's garden they could only reproduce after their own kind. Their children were sinners at birth; everyone born into this world is a sinner at birth. As David declares in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." You have an inherited sin nature from conception.

Cain and Abel were both born with the same sin nature. Their lives, though, were very different: Abel *mastered* his sin nature while Cain was *mastered by* his sin nature! God Himself encourages Cain to master his sin nature rather than be mastered by it: "...sin lies at the door...its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

When you look at Cain and Abel *you are looking at yourself!* You were born with a sin nature. How can you *master* it so that you are not *mastered* by it?

#1 If You Walk By Faith, As Abel Did,
You Will Be Master Of Your Sin Nature

#2 If You Walk In The Flesh, As Cain Did,
You Will Be Mastered By Your Sin Nature

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Abel was born dead, as was Cain, but he is described in the New Testament in ways that indicate that he was made spiritually alive by his faith in the Savior. His spiritual life and faith are described for us here in Genesis 4.

Genesis 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD."

Here we have the first use of the word "knew" to describe sexual intercourse between a husband and wife. It's not a quaint or naive way of discussing a subject that Christians ought to be embarrassed about. It is a beautifully descriptive word to describe a subject that Christians ought to be excited about!

When Cain was born Eve thought he was God's promised Savior. "I have acquired the man from the Lord"; there is a strong indication in the Hebrew that she believed that this child was the redeemer. We should rather be patient with God's promises...

Genesis 4:2 Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

Your children ought to be familiar with hard work. As they get older you should help them to desire to discover the kind of work God has called them to.

Genesis 4:3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

Genesis 4:4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

"The process of time" means "at the end of days"; it could be that they brought an offering every Sabbath. We'll look at Cain's offering in a moment.

Adam and Eve had instructed their children on how to approach God. So should we!

God Himself had shown them the proper approach, in Chapter 3. Their sin meant certain death - - but God would accept the death of an innocent lamb in their place; the blood of the lamb would cover their sin. As we saw last week, the lamb spoke of the promised Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world! Abel's sacrifice of a lamb spoke of his personal faith in the promise of God to save him.

Faith is the key principle of Abel's life. He was saved by grace through personal faith. He is the first person mentioned in the "hall of faith" chapter, in Hebrews 11:4.

We see him described in the New Testament as having spiritual life. He is called a prophet by Jesus in Luke 11:50-51, Who also commends him as the first martyr.¹

Abel's saving faith in the work of Jesus led to a daily walk of faith. Walking in faith, he was enabled to be master over his inherited sin nature. He never was free from his sin nature; but he wasn't enslaved to it as his brother was.

You are saved by grace through faith in Jesus; He is *your* Lamb! As with Abel, saving faith ought to lead *you* into a daily walk of faith by which you are enabled to be master over *your* sin nature. You will not be free from your sin nature in this life, but you need not be enslaved by it.

The sin nature is still a living, vital part of every believer and it will continue to be a part of you until the physical body is changed at the coming of Jesus Christ or until you leave your physical body behind in death. In the mean time the Bible says that Jesus has broken the

¹see also Matthew 23:35

power of your sin nature and given you the indwelling Holy Spirit to have daily victory over it - - to be master over it!

Romans 6:11-14, " Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you..."

"Reckon yourselves to be dead to sin" means to look back on the Cross where your sin nature was crucified with Jesus Christ; "do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies" implies an internal warfare by which the power of the sin nature can be mastered if it is fought in the way and with the resources that God has provided; and "present yourselves to God" reminds us of the moment-by-moment availability of the power of God the Holy Spirit Who indwells us.

Abel was a prophet and he was martyred. His being a prophet speaks to us of daily power to walk in faith; his being a martyr speaks to us of daily perseverance to walk in faith. Enabled by grace through faith, he mastered his sin nature. A dependence upon God's power and disciplined perseverance should characterize our lives.

Walking by faith doesn't mean you will never sin, or that you can achieve sinless perfection in this life. It does mean that you ought to be making progress and showing growth in your life. J.C. Ryle writes,

"We may take comfort about our souls if we know anything of an inward fight and conflict. It is the invariable companion of Christian holiness...Do we find in our hearts a spiritual struggle? Do we feel anything of the flesh lusting against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, so that we cannot do the things that we would? Are we conscious of two principles within us, contending for the master? Do we feel anything of war in our inward man? Well, let us thank God for it! It is a good sign. It is strongly probable evidence of the great work of sanctification...Anything is better than apathy, stagnation, deadness, and indifference."²

1 Timothy 6:12 "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

²quoted in Basic Theology, Charles Ryrie, p. 234

#2 If You Walk In The Flesh, As Cain Did, You Will Be Mastered By Your Sin Nature

The Bible sometimes uses the word "flesh" to describe the inherited sin nature. "Flesh" speaks of both the principle of inherited sin and the practices of the sin nature. Cain is presented to us as a man who, rejecting faith, remains in the flesh - - and who is mastered by inherited sin.

Genesis 4:3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD...

Genesis 4:4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

Genesis 4:5 ...but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

Cain offered the work of his own efforts - - perhaps even in pride. The statement that "his countenance fell" indicates he had come with a haughty look, with pride. God had cursed the ground so that only with great effort would it yield. Cain now presented God with his own great, self-efforts. It is religion because it lacks the redeeming power of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Genesis 4:6 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"

Genesis 4:7 "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Inherited sin would rule Cain's life or he could rule over it. Faith or flesh were his choices. Tragically, he would choose the flesh.

Genesis 4:8 Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

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

Genesis 4:10 And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.

Genesis 4:11 "So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

Genesis 4:12 "When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth."

Some commentators say that certain Hebrew texts indicate that Abel, in his ministry as a prophet, was seeking to encourage his brother to

do what was right; this is what they "talked" about. We ought to talk to each other in such a way...

The entire story of Cain and his children becomes an illustration to you of being mastered by your sin nature as various works of the flesh are identified - - pride, anger, deceitfulness, murder, and lying are obvious in Cain's life. As we read of his descendants, the lusts of the flesh master their lives as well.

God's judgment on Cain tells us that good works fail without prior faith. Good works follow saving faith but cannot precede it.

Genesis 4:13 And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!
Genesis 4:14 "Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me."
Genesis 4:15 And the LORD said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.

God's judgment is merciful, not giving Cain what he deserved. He is merciful today as He withholds final judgment; God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

We are not told what the "mark" on Cain was; it certainly was *not* something racial! There is no place for bigotry in God's Church.

Genesis 4:16 Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.
Genesis 4:17 And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son; Enoch.
Genesis 4:18 To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methushael, and Methushael begot Lamech.

In Genesis 5:4 we learn that Adam and Eve begat other sons and daughters. Cain's wife was a sister. Brother/sister marriages were not genetically dangerous at this early stage; later, Moses would regulate family marriages. Using conservative estimates, in the first 800 years of human civilization the earth would have had a population of 120,000. In the sixteen hundred or so years from Creation to the Flood, there would have been 7 billion people on the planet! It has been proven that the increased environmental pressure

that the earth's vapor or ice canopy would have created is conducive to greater longevity in human life.

In defiance to God's judgment upon him, Cain settled down and began to build a city. This Enoch is not the same Enoch we will encounter in chapter 5, who was a descendant of Adam and Eve's third son, Seth. This ungodly Enoch will provide an interesting contrast to the Enoch of the godly line of Seth. Here we have, then, the first civilization. Its architects and builders seek to construct their own paradise east of Eden and in mockery of Eden. Much human civilization is mankind's attempt to replace Eden with his own efforts!

Genesis 4:19 Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah.

Genesis 4:20 And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock.

Genesis 4:21 His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute.

Genesis 4:22 And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron. And the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah.

Genesis 4:23 Then Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me.

Genesis 4:24 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

When the flesh is master - - pleasure, prosperity, and power characterize your life.

- - Pleasure

God had given sex as pleasure in marriage; it is corrupted by lust as Lamech takes two wives.

One of his sons, Jubal, provides the diversion of music. We were created to bring pleasure to God, and one of the ways Scripture says we do so is through praise. Jubal corrupts this pleasure by creating music that has nothing to do with praise.

- - Prosperity

Jabal had livestock. The indication is that he had great wealth of livestock, great prosperity. Material prosperity blinds us to spiritual need.

- - Power

Tubal-Cain's craftsmanship in bronze and iron brought the family power, as evidenced by Lamech's boast, called by some "The Song of the Sword." They had the weapons to control others.

As was Abel, Cain is spoken of in the New Testament:

1 John 3:12 ... Cain ... was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

Jude 1:11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain...

Cain was "of the wicked one," meaning he was without spiritual life; he remained as he was born - - dead in trespasses and sins. The "way of Cain" is to walk in the flesh rather than by faith, to be mastered by inherited sin. The evidence is the wickedness of life produced by him.

Flesh is the key principle of Cain's life. It is the key principle of all who refuse the blood of the Lamb. While not everyone always gives full expression to their inherited sin nature, there is none that can offer any good works that are appropriate to salvation. All are stillborn and all are to some greater or lesser extent mastered by their sin nature apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

The flesh doesn't just characterize unbelievers, unfortunately. In 1Corinthians 3, Paul describes fleshly Christians - - those who are saved but whose lives are nevertheless dominated by their sin nature. In fact, the whole epistle to the Corinthians deals with various fleshly behaviors they are engaging in: divisions, divorces, sexual perversions, and spiritual pride.

Conclusion

We see little of Abel's daily life, but what we do see is helpful. As a shepherd, he would have had a love for his sheep. Yet he was called upon to provide others with sheep to kill for their sacrifice, and to himself kill a dear lamb for his own sacrifice! As painful as this was, he offered only the very best of his flock to God, and even more than what was required - - "the firstborn...*and* their fat."

Give God the first and the fat! Whether its time or talent, money or ministry - - giving God the first and the fat is a good indication that you are walking in faith, denying the lusts of your flesh.