

Two Brothers

<i>Text</i>	Genesis 4
<i>Readings</i>	1 John 3:11-24, Hebrews 11:1-6
<i>Theme and purpose</i>	To explain the far-reaching consequences of the sin of Cain and his descendants and contrast this with God's grace in his people.

Sometimes in a family you will notice a remarkable similarity between two brothers, or two sisters. They may be different ages but they look the same, so much so that people often get them mixed up.

Or, two brothers or sisters may not look the same but they are alike in a number of other ways - in their personality, mannerisms or their attitude to life. We can all think of examples of that.

Today, however, we will be considering two brothers who were not at all alike. We don't know what they looked like but we do know they thought and acted and behaved in very different ways.

We will see that they represented two kinds of people, the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman, unbelievers and believers, those who followed Satan and those who followed the Lord. These two groups have continued all through history and are present today. Every one of us belongs to one of these two categories of people.

Genesis 4 tells us about these two brothers.

One was named Cain. He was the firstborn son of Adam and Eve. His name means "brought forth". Eve was glad about his birth; maybe she wondered if he was to be the deliverer God had promised.

Later on she gave birth to another son whom she named Abel. Here are two sons, two brothers, in this first family of the world.

They took up different occupations.

Cain worked the ground and grew plants and vegetables. He was a market gardener.

Abel kept flocks. He was a shepherd, looking after his sheep.

These two men knew about the Lord from their parents and they knew they ought to honour God their Creator. So they brought offerings to him.

Cain brought to God some of what he had grown in the soil. (vs 3).

"Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock." (vs 4).

God responded to these offerings in two different ways. "The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour." (vs 4-5).

Why was that? What was the difference between these two offerings? Scholars have made all sorts of suggestions. Some have suggested that God only wanted the blood sacrifice of animals and not the bloodless

sacrifice of plants or grains. But there is no suggestion of that in the text, and later on God commanded both types of sacrifices, animals and grains.

The difference, rather, lies in the attitude behind these sacrifices, and we know that from the New Testament commentaries on this chapter.

Jesus told the Jews of his day that Abel was a “righteous man” (Matt 23:35), and in Hebrews we read; “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings” (11:4). Abel’s offering arose out of faith. He was a righteous man who loved God and believed in him, and he expressed this in his offering. The way this is written suggests he offered God the best of what he had.

By contrast the New Testament tells us that Cain “belonged to the evil one” and that “his actions were evil” (1 John 3:11). His offering did not arise out of faith; it did not come from a believing heart. Proverbs 21:27 tells us; “The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable - how much more so when brought with evil intent.”

When the Lord refused his offering “Cain was very angry and his face was downcast” (vs 5b). He was bitter and resentful and this showed in his appearance.

His anger was closely related to the sins of jealousy and envy. Many people make light of what have been called “the seven deadly sins” and treat all these as a joke. But this is to make light of matters that are deep-seated and serious. Envy is destructive and harmful; it eats away at you; it gnaws at you from the inside and poisons your mind and heart. Cain was jealous of his brother.

There is jealousy in each one of us. It sits deep in our hearts. Every one of us compares ourselves with others, usually with those close to us and similar to us, and we hate it if we come off second best. That could be in abilities, gifts, looks, money, success, position in the company, marks at school, or your place in class. Look out for signs of this in your own heart. Guard against it.

The Lord spoke to Cain and encouraged him; “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?” (vs 7a). That reminds us of Paul’s words in Romans 13; “For rulers hold no terror for those who do right...do what is right and he will commend you.” (Rom 13:3).

But the Lord also warned him; “But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you; but you must master it.” (vs 7b). For Cain temptation was like a wild animal crouching by a doorway ready to pounce on him. He was nursing anger, jealousy, bitterness and resentment - a lethal cocktail of sins. The Lord warned him of his danger and his responsibility.

In a similar way Jesus warned Judas just before he went out to betray him.

Or think of how parents warn their children when they see temptation and danger approaching, or how a judge will warn a young man or woman when he sees them taking up a life of crime or drugs.

Is the Lord warning you today?

Are you nursing anger in your heart, or resentment, or bitterness, or envy?

Are there sins crouching at the door desiring to have you?

Are you going to master them or will you let them master you?

Don't ignore the warning of the Holy Spirit.

Tragically, Cain did just that. He ignored God's warning. He gave way to temptation and let sin master him. He hardened his heart and squashed his conscience. Envy and anger led him to the sin of murder. He planned this in his mind and deceived his brother - "Let's go out to the field". This was pre-meditated, calculated, thought out.

This was the first murder in the world, the first time one man had taken the life of another. Cain killed a good and righteous man, who was his own brother, a member of his own family!

This is the path of sin. It gets hold of you and leads you rapidly downward.

John used Cain as a warning in his letter; "Do not be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother." (1 John 3:11).

He also used this example to make a positive application: that is, "We should love one another", following the example of the Lord Jesus who laid down his life for us.

It's not enough just to avoid what is wrong; you must positively do what is right and be kind and considerate and thoughtful to each other. Are you doing that in your life and speech and actions? In your family, and in the church, at school or in your workplace?

The Lord came to speak to Cain; "Where is your brother Abel?" This reminds us of his question to Adam; "Where are you?" (3:9) The Lord will often come searching for you, looking for you, seeking you out. He will give you an opportunity to confess your sins, to repent, to come clean.

But Cain refused that. His reply was callous and indifferent; "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper!?" He lied. He knew where his brother was - his body was lying out there in the field. His attitude was insolent and arrogant.

That is true of many in our society who have deadened their conscience and given way to temptation. They sin easily, carelessly and without regret.

God's response to Cain was strong; "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." (vs 10). It is as though the blood of Abel called out for justice.

That picture comes back in the last book of the Bible. The souls of the martyrs call out to God in a loud voice; "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood" (Rev 6:10). They were assured that God would bring about justice and that God would come in judgement, as he did on Cain.

God's punishment on Cain was much stronger than that on Adam because God cursed Cain directly; "Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground... You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." (vs 10-12).

Sadly, Cain's response showed the hardness of his heart. He did not react with a confession of sin or sorrow, but with self-pity. He was only concerned about himself. He was worried that the people who found him would kill him.

The Lord assured him that he would put a sign on him to prevent that from happening, but even God's mercy did not draw him any closer to the Lord.

So we read those tragic words; “So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod” (vs 16). The word Nod means wandering.

Here is another striking contrast between these two brothers.

Abel lived in the presence of the Lord; he died with a clear conscience; and he entered into eternal life.

Cain went away from the presence of God; he lived with the guilt of his sin; and eventually he entered into eternal punishment.

These two brothers **illustrate the two races or families of all humanity**. These families are described and contrasted in the rest of this chapter.

We are told what happened to *Cain and his descendants*. They built a city (vs 17), made musical instruments (v 21), and invented tools made out of iron and bronze (vs 22).

They did not trust in God and they did not obey his commands. But God, in his common grace, allowed them to use their God-given gifts to fulfil the creation mandate of exercising dominion over the world. They were able to develop culture and technology.

But even though they could develop a civilisation they could not change the nature of their hearts; they could not improve themselves morally. They could handle their environment but they could not handle themselves (D. Kidner, *Genesis*).

We see this demonstrated most clearly in the life of Lamech. He took two wives, so beginning the practice of polygamy, with all the difficulties and problems associated with that.

And when a young man wounded him he retaliated with violence and killed him, and then boasted about it. He even blasphemed God in his boast. He said; “If Cain is avenged seven times, the Lamech seventy-seven times” (vs 24). In other words, “If God promised a seven fold vengeance on anyone killing Cain, I will avenge myself seventy-seven times on anyone who harms me!”

Here is the arrogance of a man in rebellion against God.

And in this we see the sins of the fathers visited on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate God. Sin continued in a downward spiral among the descendants of Cain.

We can see evidence of this today. We live in an advanced Western civilisation with tall buildings like the Sky Tower and engineering marvels like the Harbour Bridge. Think of developments in communications with cell phones and email and plane travel. And then there are the marvels of computers and digital photography. In his grace God allows unbelievers to use their gifts and develop these technologies.

But none of this will make people better; it will not draw them closer to God; it will not save them.

Today we see unbelievers advancing in technology but declining in morality, just as happened among the descendants of Cain. And that is because they are the “people of Cain”, they are the offspring of the serpent (Gen 3:15), they are rebels against God.

However, the closing verses of this chapter describe God’s grace expressed in *another line of people - a godly people* (vs 25).

Eve gave birth to another son and she named him Seth, whose name means granted or appointed. God granted her another son in place of Abel.

In the Bible Cain's line disappears from view and isn't mentioned any more. The focus goes to Seth because his birth picks up the promise of Genesis 3:15, where God spoke of the offspring of the woman. God, in his grace, gave Adam and Eve another son. The Lord would work out his plan through him.

And we read: "At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord" (vs 26). Adam and Eve and Seth and his family began to worship the Lord. This was the beginning of the public worship of the people of God, the start of the church of God in the Old Testament, of a godly community who wanted to praise and honour the Lord. Today we have the privilege of being part of this community.

Seth and Abel were brothers. Unlike Cain and Abel, Seth and Abel were similar to each other in that both were righteous men. Seth continued the line of godly men who would go on to Noah, and then to Abraham, and to David - the line of faith described in Hebrews 11.

This line continued until it was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. Abel pointed forward to Jesus. The writer of Hebrews tells us that we have come "to God, the judge of all men... to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." (Hebrew 12:23-24).

Abel's blood was shed as the result of sin; it cried out from the ground for justice, but it could not deal with sin.

This is why Jesus came; he shed his blood which did deal with sin. It speaks a better word than the blood of Abel - a word of hope, of forgiveness, of life.

Today we have considered two brothers who were very different.

They represent two races, two different groups of people.

The people of Cain are those who may be very clever with their hands, and brilliant in their minds, but who live in unbelief and rebellion against God.

The people of Abel are all those who believe in God, live by faith in the Lord Jesus, trust in his saving blood, and express that in a righteous and godly life.

Which group are you in?

Amen