

Two lines of worship

Scripture: Gen 4:1-26

Cain in Genesis 4 had a bad temper to start with, but he didn't deal with it. Eventually, it turned him into this other person...an evil person. However, Cain's problem was not an anger problem; his problem was a worship problem! The expression of inappropriate anger was a sin that was symptomatic of a greater problem. In Genesis 4:1-26, we will learn from the account of Cain how to worship God on His terms.

1. THE BIRTH OF THE TWO SONS (4:1-2).

Cain means "Got." Eve understood from the prophecy of 3:15 that one of her offspring would bring about her redemption. In her naming Cain there is an implicit declaration of faith and gratitude. Eve acknowledges that God has enabled her to bear a child, a child through whom her deliverance may soon come. In 4:2a, Moses records, "Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel" (4:2a). Unlike Cain's name, Abel's name is not explained by Eve. However, the Hebrew word "Abel" is the word "vanity" or "breath," appearing throughout Ecclesiastes. Traditionally understood, his name reflects on the temporary nature of his existence. In these opening verses, Moses is trying to prepare us for what is to come.

[After giving a brief account of the birth of the two sons, the narrative focuses on the worship of these two brothers. The primary purpose of this account is to reveal what kind of worship is pleasing to God.]

2. THE WORSHIP OF THE TWO BROTHERS (4:2B-5). In 4:2b, Moses writes, "And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground." Abel is a shepherd and Cain is a farmer. Both of these vocations are noble; one is not better than the other. This leads into an exercise in worship in 4:3-5a: Both brothers bring offerings to the Lord suitable to their vocations (4:3). Yet, God regarded Abel and his offering and not Cain and his offering (4:4b). Some insist that the reason for this is Abel offered a blood sacrifice while Cain did not. However, there does not appear to be anything wrong with Cain offering fruit as opposed to animal sacrifice.

Later in Israel's history, grain offerings and harvest offerings are legitimate expressions of worship that God accepts and even commands. So if it is not a failure to bring a blood sacrifice, why does God reject Cain and his offering?

The New Testament authors inform us that God regarded Abel because he had **faith** (Heb 11:4) while Cain did not (Jude 11-13 and 1 John 3:11-12). Therefore, it seems clear that Abel was in relationship with God and Cain was separated from God. A very important principle is this: "God always accepts the worshipper before He accepts the worship." This means it is critical that you are in relationship with God before you seek to worship or serve Him. Otherwise, your worship is unacceptable.

There is also an interesting clue in the Genesis account that tells us about Cain and Abel and their offerings. In 4:4, Moses records that Abel offers "the firstlings of his flock" (cf. Exod 34:19; Deut 12:6; 14:23) and the "fat portions" (cf. Num 18:17) for his offering. The word that is translated "fat portions" means "choicest, best part, or abundance."¹⁵ Abel gave what cost him most—the firstborn! On the other hand, Cain merely offers "the fruit," not the first fruit, of the ground (4:3). **Abel brought the best parts of his flocks and Cain was not so particular.** Abel went out of his way to worship God by giving his best. Cain merely discharged a duty. One of the key themes throughout Scripture is God seeks worship that is perfect and costly (Lev 22:20-22; 2 Sam 24:24). He will not be satisfied with second best (Mal 1:6-14; Rom 12:1). Sin first shows itself in what you give God.

Motives matter to God. God is not impressed with those who do the right thing for the wrong reason. This truth is taught throughout the Bible. In Matthew 15:8, Jesus looks at the Pharisees and quotes Isaiah, "These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me". Sometimes people can have very bad motives for doing good things. Every so often we need to do a motive checkup and ask ourselves: Why am I doing what I am doing?

3. THE RESPONSE OF THE OLDEST BROTHER (4:5B-8). When Cain learned that God had "no regard" for his offering, "[he] became very angry and his countenance fell" (4:5b). Cain became angry with God! Rather than being concerned about remedying the situation and pleasing God, he became very angry. We must stop here and ask these questions of ourselves: How do we respond when God says no? When God convicts us and deals with the sin in our lives, how do we respond? Do we seek to make things right? Do we come before the Lord in worship and confession with a humble and contrite heart? Or do we get angry? The Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, said it best, "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isa 66:2b).

Do you have a problem with your temper? One lady said, "I occasionally lose my temper, but it's over quickly." Her pastor replied, "So is an atom bomb explosion, but think of the damage it causes. So is a cyclone, but think of the destruction it leaves. So is a bullet fired, but think of the death it can cause." We must not assume that unrighteous anger is ever justified or appropriate.

In customary fashion, in 4:6, the Lord pursues Cain with three consecutive questions: "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?" God was not pleased with Cain or his offering. These first two questions demonstrate that He was even more displeased by Cain's response. Yet, many of us have been told by other well-meaning Christians that it is perfectly acceptable to get mad at God. We like to justify our anger by saying, "He's a big God. He has broad shoulders. He can handle my cussing and complaining." Well, sure He can, but is this the appropriate response to the almighty Creator of heaven and earth? I don't think so. He is a sovereign God that is to be feared. He wants us to trust Him, even when things don't make sense. Unfortunately, many Christians have a small view of God that allows them to have temper tantrums with Him.

In 4:7, the Lord says, "And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." This clearly implies that Cain knew what was right. He knew the quality of offering to bring and chose not to bring it. He knew his heart was not right, but he chose not to address it. Yet, this verse also shows God's grace, for Cain was still invited to bring the correct offering. God warned Cain and He wanted Cain to "do well," but Cain hardened his heart. Sin is like a wild animal ready to pounce and devour its victim. What a graphic picture the Lord paints! What a reminder that we do indeed have a choice whether or not to sin. It is wrong when we say, "The Devil made me do it." On the contrary, when we sin, we sin because of our refusal to rely on God's power to "master it."

Unfortunately, instead of heeding God's warning, Cain ignored God's words and allowed himself to be mastered by sin. This resulted in the very first murder. Moses writes of the tragic event in 4:8: "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." In his anger, Cain took the life of another human being...and his victim was his very own brother.

A lesson we learn from the murder of Abel is that anger and jealousy can be very destructive. It is certainly not Abel's fault that Cain's sacrifice is not pleasing to God. But when God accepts Abel's offering and rejects Cain's, Cain directs his anger, jealousy, and hatred toward his brother. The history of crime shows that when given the opportunity, hatred often leads to murder. That is what Jesus was pointing to in Matthew 5 where He says hating your brother is really the same as murder.

You may be angry today. It might have been something, which happened this morning. Maybe you are mad at your mom and dad because they won't let you go to a friend's house after church. Or maybe something happened years ago. Perhaps a neighbor or someone in the church cheated you out of some money or took advantage of you in some way, and you still have a bitter attitude. Whatever type the anger is, you need to get control of it and get rid of it. Ephesians 4:27 says if you don't control your

anger, you give the Devil a foothold (lit. “a place”) in your life. That is what Cain did. Uncontrolled anger and jealousy resulted in Abel’s death and destroyed Cain’s life too. Don’t let it happen in your life. Acknowledge that the attitude is wrong, confess it to the Lord, and ask His help in overcoming this destructive attitude.

4. THE PURSUIT OF A GRACIOUS GOD (4:9-16). In 4:9, Cain foolishly thought he could hide his sin from God. He’s following in his father’s footsteps (3:8). Yet, God seeks Cain just like He sought Adam and Eve. God is a seeker. After Cain’s treacherous sin, the Lord does the unthinkable—he dialogues with Cain. He speaks with grace, not wrath. The Lord says to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” Cain responds by saying, “I do not know.” Cain begins on a sinful note by lying to God. Puny old Cain tells an omniscient God that he doesn’t know where his brother Abel is. Come on! The fact that Cain can dispassionately deny what he has done and show a total lack of care and concern for his brother closely parallels man’s total lack of regard for woman in 3:12, where man icily refers to his companion as “the woman” and places all the blame on her, thereby revealing a complete absence of the intimacy and companionship that earlier had characterized their relationship.

To make matters worse, Cain goes on to utter the infamous old adage, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” This was a tragic mistake on Cain’s part. Now, if I was God, I would have smoked Cain right where he stood! But not the Lord! Instead, He asks Cain a follow-up question that is the same question He asked Eve (3:13): “What have you done?” Wouldn’t you just hate to be Cain right now? The Lord then stops asking questions and says, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground” (4:10). This is a key sentence. The words “to me” demonstrate how seriously God takes first-degree murder. When another person kills a baby, a child, or an adult made in the image of God (1:26; 9:6), the blood of the victim cries out to God! Sin cannot be covered up from God. It can be hidden from people, but not from God. Secret sin on earth is open scandal in heaven!

As a consequence of Cain’s act of deliberate sin, God curses him (4:11-12), just like He cursed the serpent (3:14) and the ground (3:17-19). “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 will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.” This is the first instance in Scripture where a human is “cursed.” The ultimate penalty for a Hebrew is not death, but exile, a loss of roots.

In 4:13-14, “Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment²⁸ is too great to bear! Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.’” Cain’s complaint is peppered with the use of

seven personal pronouns. All Cain cared about was himself. There was no fear or reverence for God, no regret for the loss of innocent life, no sorrow for sin, and no thought for his parents who had lost one son tragically through murder and would be losing another through rebellion. There was only a preoccupation with himself. The killer fears being killed. He who turned on one of his relatives now must watch out for any of his relatives.

In 4:15, the Lord speaks again to Cain, “Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.’ And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him.” God continues to demonstrate His grace and compassion—even to Cain! The Lord gave Cain a sign before judgment was carried out.

The Lord’s program always seems to be mercy before judgment. How fortunate we are that this is the case. If it weren’t, we would have been snuffed out a long time ago! No matter what you’ve done, God wants a relationship with you. There is no sin that you have ever committed that is too big for God. He will accept you IF you accept His Son’s sacrifice for your sin. We do not know what the “sign” was.

In 4:16, we read these sad words: “Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod,³⁴ east of Eden.” One question that is asked is: Did Cain repent? Probably not. The New Testament Scriptures uniformly speak of Cain in the negative with phrases like “the way of Cain” (Jude 11) and one “who was of the evil one and slew his brother” (1 John 3:12). His life is contrasted with “righteous Abel” (Matt 23:35). Nevertheless, we do not know what ultimately happened to him.

5. THE TALE OF TWO LINES OF WORSHIP (4:17-26).

In 4:18-19, we read about a man by the name of “Lamech” who becomes the first bigamist. Bigamy was common in the ancient Near East, but it was never God’s desire (cf. 2:24; Matt 19:4-5). God permitted it, however, as He did many other customs of which He disapproved (e.g., divorce, marrying concubines, polygamy, etc.) but He was not pleased with this violation of the marriage covenant.

In 4:20-24, we see that Cain prospered even though he rebelled against God. Cain’s prosperity led the way in producing cities, music, weapons, and agricultural implements—in short, civilization. Even among ungodly people God allows development and progress. It is part of His kindness to the entire human race. This is another indication of God’s grace. Cain’s descendants took the lead in building cities, developing music, advancing agriculture, creating weapons, and spreading civilization.

In 4:23-24, 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.”³⁹ Lamech, who is Cain’s great-great-great-grandson, writes a piece of poetry, but what an ugly piece of poetry it is! It is a song.

One can easily see that its lines are parallel and poetical. Lamech is singing a song. But what is he singing about? He is singing about polygamy, murder, and revenge. This is a “sword song” in which Lamech wears violence as a badge of honor. God allows the makers of musical instruments to arise, but they misuse their very culture to promote violence. This is how men and women use their culture. God allows family life, music, and technology but how does man use His blessings? He perverts them! Music is wonderful. Yet, music can be used for wicked purposes also. Do you realize the influence of the media on you and your children? Think about many of the songs that are popular today. They are full of violence, sex, and self. What about the impact of television?

[Just when things seem to be beyond hope, the Lord shows forth His hand of sovereignty and promise.]

In 4:25-26, Moses writes, “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.’ To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.” Obviously, 4:25-26 should not be understood as a sequel to 4:17-24. Cain’s genealogy does not extend six generations before Adam fathers a child again. Cain’s sons prospered and founded the new world after the fall. Yet, they were not to be included in the lineage of the Messianic “seed” (cf. 3:15). The author turns another page with the birth of “another offspring in place of Abel” (4:25). This strategic birth reveals that the “seed” would continue through the line of Seth. Seth’s name, from the Hebrew verb translated “granted” and meaning “to set or place,” expresses Eve’s faith that God would continue to provide seed despite death.

After the birth of Enosh (Seth’s son), it is noted that “then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.” The phrase “call upon the name of the Lord” usually refers to proclamation rather than prayer in the Pentateuch. Here it probably refers to the beginning of public worship of Yahweh. This is the inauguration of true worship (cf. 12:8; 13:4; 16:13; 21:33; 26:25). “Enosh” means “weakness” and in his weakness he turns to God with petition and praises (Ps 149:6). Man will not pray until he recognizes his human weakness and inability and is utterly dependent upon God. So Cain’s firstborn and successors pioneer civilization, while Seth’s firstborn and successors pioneer worship.

Two lines of worship

Worshipping God in our term

Worshipping God in His terms

Using God

Used of God

Rebellion

Believing God's word

Pride

Frailty (Enosh)

Sensuality

Dependence upon the Lord

Progress for self glory

Progress in God's purposes