

Genesis 4: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 4 But for Cain and his offering, he had no regard.

So Cain was very angry and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? And why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?

And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it. Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? He said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? And the Lord said, What have you done?

The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength.

[1 : 26] You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. Cain said to the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden.

I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me. Then the Lord said to him, Not so. If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.

The Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Erad, and Erad fathered Mahujael, and Mahujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech.

And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Ada, and the name of the other Zillah. Ada begot Jubel. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock.

[2 : 36] His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-Cain. He was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.

The sister of Tubal-Cain was Neymar. Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zillah, hear my voice. You wives of Lamech, listen to what I say. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.

If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold. And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth.

For she said, God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him. To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

In Genesis 4, Cain being born is new life in a world under the shadow of death following the fall. Eve's statement, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord, may suggest that she believes that this one might be the seed that crushes the serpent's head.

[3 : 43] One way or another, she sees in this a continuation of God's creative grace. God has not given up on the world, and in the birth of a child, in new life, there's a sign that life is going to continue, that God is going to still work with his creation, and he's going to show grace to it.

There are two narratives dealing with creation, and now there is a second narrative dealing with the first advent of sin. So we have two creation narratives and two fall narratives.

Adam and Eve bring sin in the garden by rebelling against their divine father, and Cain sins in the land by murdering his brother. There's a sin against the father, and it's followed by a sin against the brother, the nearest neighbour.

There's a vertical sin followed by a horizontal sin, a sin against the first tablet of the law, followed by a sin against the second tablet of the law. Sin has also spread, so it's like a drop of ink, or a blot of ink, that flows out and spreads from the garden, now to the wider world.

There's a sin involving a husband-wife pairing, and now it's followed by a sin involving a brother-brother pairing. And the narratives should be read alongside each other. There are parallels that are immediately obvious to anyone without tin ears, for instance, between verse 16 of chapter 3 and verse 7 of chapter 4.

[5 : 00] Both that speak of the desire of something for someone else, and the fact that that person should rule over them. Thomas Brody has listed a number of the parallels.

So first of all, we see in the setting that they, the man and his wife, and then in the second one, the man knew his wife. There's the serpent of the field, and then there's the sin crouching into the field. There's the fruit forbidden by God, and then there's the fruit of Cain that is not regarded by God. There's the problem of relationship to God, and then there's the problem of relationship through God to Abel.

There's the drama seen on the face with the eyes opening, the delight of the eyes, the desire, all these sorts of things. And in the case of Cain, the distress of his face, his face falls.

There's crime and punishment. After eating, they know that they are naked. After killing, God asks, where is Abel? They hear the voice. And in the case of Cain, God says, the voice is crying to me.

[6 : 07] The response of Adam, I hid when I heard the sound of God coming near. In the case of Cain, he must hide, he must be concealed, lest he be killed. There's an avoidance of responsibility.

It was the woman, it was the serpent. And in the case of Cain, a similar thing. Am I my brother's keeper? Because you have done this, cursed are you. Cursed is the ground because of you.

And in the same case of Cain, what have you done? Now you are cursed from the ground. And there's consequences that are very similar. God protects and clothes them.

And God puts a sign on Cain. God casts them out of Eden. And Cain goes out from God's presence. There are cherubim placed in the east of Eden. Cain dwells to the east of Eden.

Cain is associated with the service of the ground. And his name may be suggesting some sort of association with the forge. Abel, on the other hand, keeps sheep.

[7 : 05] And his name associates him with breath. Perhaps we should see a bifurcation of Adam's own identity and vocation here. So on the one hand, Adam serves the ground.

He tills the ground. He acts within the world to bring fruit from the ground. But he also rules over and names the animals. So on the one hand, he's defined by the breath that he's given, the breath from heaven.

And on the other hand, he's defined by his bodily relationship with the world and the earth and the way he's going to serve that earth. And in the case of Cain and Abel, we see a sort of bifurcation of that.

Cain expressing the earthward relationship of Adam and Abel relating to the heavenward relationship of Adam. That Abel is the one who uses his breath, he uses his power of rule to keep the sheep.

In Cain, his relationship with the ground and the earth and he operates on that level. Animal sacrifice has already begun at this point and it seems to be a way that the offerer offers themselves to God.

[8 : 08] And God's reception of the sacrifice is in part his acceptance of the worshipper that offers themselves in the symbol of the sacrifice. Now, why is Cain rejected? Some have suggested it's the fact that he does not bring an animal sacrifice and the blood of atonement that requires.

Perhaps it's also that he doesn't bring the first fruits, he's just bringing average produce. Whereas Abel offers not just fruit of his works but a symbol of his person, a recognition of the necessity of death and also of the first fruits of his flock, the very best.

Perhaps Abel should have been the one that led, the younger brother as the priest and the elder brother as the powerful king who rules and gains power from the earth. Now, why is Cain angry? His sacrifice is rejected but Abel's is accepted. And think of the times when we've given a gift and our gift is thrown back to us, it's rejected. And in the rejection of the gift we feel that we ourselves are not seen, we're not accepted.

And he feels that he's been cut out of the loop of relationship with God and he feels threatened by that fact and so his anger is exercised against the one who was accepted.

[9 : 25] There's envy there but also a resistance to God who has cut him out it seems. God challenges him at this point and he challenges him before he has come to any action.

Sin resides in the heart before it is expressed in the actions and in Jesus' teaching particularly in the Sermon on the Mount he draws attention to this that sin must be dealt with at its root.

It must be dealt with at the very basic point of the heart and the entrance of sin the weak point is found within us. The temptation takes place first there.

This is where the garden is. This is where our garden is as Adam and Eve found themselves in the garden and they were tempted at that point. The true garden in Cain is within his heart.

Is he going to guard that garden? And this is where the beast crouching at the door finds access like the serpent who is the wildest of the beasts He finds access to the garden so there's a beast crouching at the door of Cain's heart of his garden and we must guard the gardens of our hearts lest we give access to the beast of sin and once that beast has access the actions so often follow.

[10 : 37] This is why Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount is so important. It's how to deal with that problem at the heart how to get below just regulating actions in a futile way that often proves unsuccessful and dealing with the problem where it really resides.

Now what does it mean that sin's desire is for Cain? Well I think it means that it wants to gain his strength by capturing his heart. Cain's strength is desired by sin.

Sin wants Cain to act on its behalf. It wants to capture the citadel of Cain's heart so that Cain would be its willing agent.

And what we see in what follows is an unfolding of the city of man as there is this first foundation of a city named after Cain's son. Cain is trying to form a civilization in part because he's been cut out the cycle of gift.

He's been exiled and now he's trying to make a name for himself almost in rebellion against God or as an alternative to the city of God and fellowship with God we have this alternative city being developed.

[11 : 47] There are characters that arise from Cain's line that provide other interesting lights on what's happened before. So we have the children of Ada and Zillah the wives of Lamech.

Ada is the mother of Jubal who's associated with those who live in tents and keep livestock and of Jubal players of the lyre and of the pipe.

Now looking at those names you should immediately recognize some sort of resonance with the name of Abel. Jubal, Abel Jubal, Abel these are the same sorts of names and it seems that there's a sort of progression and building out and unpacking and unfolding some sort of refracting of the identity of Abel here.

So we have two sets of brothers those associated with Ada and those associated with Zillah and in the case of Ada you have Jubal and Jubal associated with tents and livestock as Abel was associated with keeping of sheep and with breath and so the player of the lyre and hype of pipe making music is associated with Abel.

It's an unpacking of his identity. On the other hand we have the son of Zillah is Tubal-Cain. Again there's an association with Cain's name and Cain is associated with the earth.

[13 : 06] Tubal-Cain is the smith and thinking about those connections I think can be helpful to see that contrast between these two characters and the way that they are unpacking the fundamental vocation of Adam.

It might be interesting to think about that. Some questions. Cain says am I my brother's keeper? Think about the relationship between Adam's sin in relationship to Eve and Cain's sin in relationship to Abel.

There is a parallel to be observed there. Second question. Lamech speaks of himself being avenged seventy times seven. This is not the only time in scripture we see this number.

Where else do we see the number and how might the comparison and the contrast prove significant? The comparison and the contrast prove significant. The comparison and the contrast