

Cain & Abel



Following the Fall

God had told Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and increase in number" (*Genesis 1:28*) and that is what they did. The first children mentioned are Cain and Abel (*4:1-2*). *Genesis 4* records a story about Cain and Abel – a story that reflects the consequences of "the Fall." Read *Genesis 4:1-16*.

Cain & Abel Contrasted

Both Cain and Abel brought offerings to God (*4:3-4a*). "The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor" (*4:4b-5a*).

1. Why do you think God looks favorably on Abel and his offering but does *not* look favorably on Cain and his offering?¹
2. Why do you think Cain becomes very angry and downcast? Toward whom is he angry?²

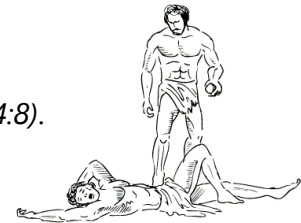
God's Invitation & Warning


Whatever Cain had done wrong before, he still has a choice. If Cain chooses to do right, he will be accepted by God. If he chooses to do wrong, sin is ready to overtake him.³ God tells Cain, "but you must rule over it" (*4:7*). Cain must not let sin overtake him.

Cain's Response

However, instead of doing what is right, Cain murders his brother Abel (*4:8*).

3. Why does Cain murder his brother Abel?



 "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you." (*1 John 3:12-13, NIV*)

God's Dialogue with Cain

God invites Cain to confess his sin, but Cain lies and refuses responsibility for his brother (*4:9*). However, Cain cannot hide his sin (*4:10*). Injustice cries out. God knows. God is the Judge, and He declares his punishment on Cain (*4:11-12*).

¹ The text does not clearly say. Various answers have been offered. The most popular are: 1) Abel brought a blood sacrifice, while Cain did not; 2) Abel brought *fat portions* from the *firstborn* of his flock, while Cain's offering was not as special; 3) Abel's attitude was right, but Cain's was not. There may be some basis for (1) or (2), especially (2), but both types of offerings (animal and produce) were valid in the Law established later (*Deut 15:19-21; 26:2*). (3) does not exclude (1) and (2) but (3) is the main problem. God looked first on the man, then his offering (note the word order in *4:4-5*). While Abel is considered 'righteous' (*Matt 23:35, 1 John 3:12*), Cain's sinful attitude becomes evident in his later words and actions. Thus most commentators favor (3) with (2) being a reflection of the problem.

² Was he angry toward himself? God? Abel? Something else?

³ Here 'sin is personified as a demon crouching like a wild beast on Cain's doorstep' (Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987], 106).

4. What are the consequences of Cain's sin (4:11-14, 16)?⁴



5. How does Cain respond? What is he sorry about? (Is he sorry about his sin?)

6. How do you think Abel's attitude was different from Cain's? What was Abel's attitude toward God?⁵

7. What can we learn about God from his interactions with Cain? (*Genesis 4:7, 11-12, 15*)

8. What do you think was the worst of the consequences that Cain suffered? Why?

9. We may not be like Cain (a murderer!), but our attitudes may be similar to his in some ways (this applies to Christians too).⁶ What attitudes of Cain could be present in us? How can our attitudes change?

Reflection/Application

- Whatever we have done in the past, God gives us the choice to respond appropriately. Doing right leads to God's acceptance. *Not* doing right puts us in danger of "sin crouching at our door." Doing right involves a right attitude toward God, including a desire to please Him. "And without faith, it is impossible to please God" (*Hebrews 11:6*).
- If you are struggling with belief in God, or faith in Jesus Christ as the way of salvation, doing right involves an earnest seeking of the truth. Keep seeking, and respond appropriately.
- As Christians, doing right involves a whole-hearted trust in God, and an earnest desire to please Him. Our "pleasing offering" is our lives (*Romans 12:1*). Identify a specific wrong attitude or behavior in your life, and "rule over it" (control it; turn from it) by God's grace.

⁴ Consequences include ground that does not produce crops, restless wandering (4:12), separation from God's presence, and fear (4:14). 'Nod' (4:16) means 'wandering.' Cain became a wanderer in the land of wandering.

⁵ Abel's attitude is not described in detail, but it is contrasted to Cain's *bad* attitude. Hebrews 11:4 says, 'By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings' (*NIV*). Abel was concerned about doing what was right, that is, pleasing God, and so he offered the best.

⁶ Allen Ross applies this principle to Christians: 'Those who worship must have as their goal always to please God so that they will not allow sin (envy and hatred) to work its ruinous ways in their lives' (Allen Ross, *Creation & Blessing* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996], 161).