

“AFTER THE FALL”

We have a tendency to read Genesis 1-3 as a unit and to consider chapter 4 separately. But there are a number of clues within the text that tell us that this chapter is to be read in conjunction with what precedes it. The most important of these clues is the presence of the phrase “These are the generations of” in chapter 2:4, introducing the account of man’s creation and fall. This phrase appears again 5:1, indicating the beginning of a new section in the narrative. In addition to this, there are a number of similarities between Genesis 3 and 4: a sin is committed; God questions the sinner; God renders his judgment; and the transgressor is cast out of God’s presence. In a sense, Genesis 4 shows the fall repeating itself all over again.

In chapter 3, we learned about the consequences of the fall of mankind, the chief of which was the rupture that sin created in man’s relationship with God. But that passage also showed us that God was not willing to give the whole human race over to sin forever. Instead, he promised Adam and Eve a deliverer, an offspring of the woman who would one day crush the serpent’s head. In chapter 4, we see the rapid spread of sin and its disastrous effects in the human family. However, running right alongside of this, God is also keeping his promise, as humanity is divided into two branches: the line of rebellion and the line of promise.

After their expulsion from Eden, Adam and Eve were fruitful and multiplied, as Eve gave birth first to Cain and then to Abel. This gift of children was itself a testimony to God’s faithfulness to his promise. In verse 1, Eve professes her faith in that promise,

crediting the Lord for Cain's birth. And then in verse 2, when Abel is introduced, we are told that the two brothers took up different vocations: Abel tended sheep while Cain worked the ground, both of which would have been respectable occupations. However, when they brought their offerings to the Lord, God accepted one but rejected the other.

This brings us to one of the main questions raised by this text: why did God accept Abel's offering but reject the offering brought by Cain? Several theories have been suggested. One says that God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice because it was a blood offering, while Cain's was merely an offering of grain. The problem with this, however, is that the later Old Testament sacrificial system included grain offerings, which makes it difficult to see how Cain's offering would have been unacceptable simply because it did not involve the sacrifice of an animal.

Another theory is that Abel's offering was accepted because it was an offering of the firstborn and of the fat portions of his flock, while Cain's offering is not specified as an offering of the firstfruits of his harvest. In other words, Abel brought his best to God, while Cain kept his best to himself. While this could be true, the text doesn't explicitly say so. It would be an inference.

For this reason, the most likely interpretation is that God accepted Abel's sacrifice because it was offered in faith, but he rejected Cain's sacrifice because it was merely an external act, an act devoid of faith. This is supported by the book of Hebrews, which says that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and was commended by God as righteous.

This difference between Cain and Abel illustrates a problem that has plagued the church from the very beginning of history: the problem of externalism. Externalism takes place whenever religious rituals are detached from a living faith. It is what the prophet Isaiah was confronting when the Lord spoke through him to the people of Israel, saying: “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me.” [Isa. 1:12-13] Now, the law of God required Israel to bring their offerings to the Lord and to offer up incense to him. These things were not sinful. But in Isaiah’s day many Israelites were simply going through the motions when it came to the offerings that they brought before the Lord. They were performing their duties, but they were not calling upon the Lord in faith. And this caused the Lord rejected their sacrifices and their worship.

As I said, this is a problem that remains with the church to this day. So many professing Christians think that they can satisfy the Lord by performing certain religious duties. Now it is true that God calls his people to perform certain duties. God wants you to attend worship every week. He wants you to read your Bible and pray on a regular basis. He wants you to give a tithe of your income to support the church’s ministry. He wants you to show love and compassion to other people in real and tangible ways. He wants you to do all of the things that he has set forth in his Word. You should do those things, but all of them are worthless if they are done without faith.

God confronted Cain for his lack of faith, urging him to fight against the sin that wanted to rule over his heart. As is the case for all of us, sin was the barrier that

separated Cain from God. Sin must be put to death if we are to find acceptance with God. We cannot allow sin to rule in our lives. If we do, it will take over and drive us to our ruin, just as it did in Cain's case. Of course, we do not have the ability in ourselves to fight sin. In our fallen nature, we are all slaves to sin. But God calls us, just as he called Cain, to look to him to deliver us from sin's power. God has provided that deliverance in Jesus Christ, a deliverance that is available to all who will look to him in faith. The only way for us to rule over sin is by abiding in the One who has crushed Satan under his feet. This is what we are asking of God every time we pray the words "deliver us from evil."

But Cain didn't want to be delivered, and he didn't listen to God. He cherished sin in his heart, and that sin found full its expression in the murder of his own brother. Here is a tragic illustration of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: the person who hates his brother has transgressed the law that prohibits murder. In Cain's case, this was literally true. His hatred caused him to commit the actual crime of murder.

After Cain commits his crime, God questions him, just as he questioned Adam and Eve after they ate of the forbidden fruit. God did not need to ask Cain where his brother was. He knew exactly what had happened. God questioned Cain because he was giving him an opportunity to confess his sin and repent. But Cain didn't do that. In fact, his response was even worse than the response of his parents when God confronted them. Adam and Eve shifted the blame and failed to be completely forthcoming, but Cain tells an outright lie.

Cain soon learns that there is no hiding from God. His brother's blood cries out from the ground upon which it was spilled, and God calls him to account. As punishment for his sin, Cain is placed under God's curse and is sent away from the chosen family. Remember that in Genesis 3 the serpent received God's curse but Adam did not, though the ground was cursed because of him. But now God's curse falls directly upon a member of the human race. Cain has come to share in the curse that God pronounced upon the serpent. He does not belong to the line of promise, but to the line of rebellion. Though Eve was his biological mother, he became the spiritual offspring of the serpent, standing as the father of lost mankind.

As Cain departs from the presence of the Lord, he produces offspring as well, and his offspring followed the path that he charted out for them, drifting even further away from the Lord. This is the same principle that we refer to in the church as covenant succession, only here it goes in the opposite direction. This is family succession along the path of rebellion. Cain produces children who are just like himself, a reality that tends to be true in most families. Our children usually become like us, for better or for worse. Of course, this is not an excuse for those whose parents do not love the Lord. Each individual is responsible for himself before God. And it is certainly true that God does at times graciously intervene and draw the children of ungodly and unbelieving parents to himself. But the genealogy of Cain stands as a warning to every parent, showing us that ungodliness or spiritual indifference in one generation tends to be passed down and intensified in the next.

Notice, however, that though the emphasis is upon the depravity of Cain's family, the writer does say that they produced wonderful cultural products. This is a good lesson for us to keep in mind as we go about our lives in this fallen world. Even though all human beings, and all of the human cultures that they produce, are fallen, they can still produce good and beautiful things.

Nevertheless, our text clearly presents Cain's genealogy as a story of decline into sin. We see this by noticing that the seventh generation of man traced through Cain's descendants is the generation of Lamech. In the Bible, and especially in these opening chapters of Genesis, seven is a highly symbolic number. It is the number of completion and fullness. And in Lamech, we have a picture of the fullness of human depravity. We will see next week that this stands in sharp contrast to the seventh generation of man traced through Seth's line of descent, the line of promise.

Lamech's wickedness is seen first in the way he subverts God's ordinance for marriage. As we read in Genesis 2, when God ordained marriage he said that man and woman should hold fast to each other and become one flesh, which is a picture of monogamy. From the beginning, God intended marriage to be between one man and one woman. And though there are numerous instances of polygamy in the Old Testament, it is easy to see that every one of these instances results in misery of one kind or another. Those who subvert the pattern that God established for marriage at creation will inevitably suffer for doing so. This explains why a great many people in our culture are so sexually restless and confused.

Lamech is also an example of self-sufficient man. While the Lord said that he would avenge Cain sevenfold if anyone harmed him, Lamech takes the role of avenger upon himself, boasting that he will exact vengeance upon others even for minor offenses against him. He is a man of violence, the paradigm example of a man who lives his life apart from God. I have met people who are like Lamech, and I imagine that you have as well. They are the kind of people who actually boast of their depravity. Not everyone who lives apart from Christ is as bad as Lamech. In fact, there are some unbelievers whose lives are more upright than the lives of some professing Christians. But Lamech stands as a warning to all men. He is a picture of the arrogance and ungodly independence that will eventually swallow up those who do not belong to Jesus Christ.

Lamech is the paradigm of fallen humanity; his line is the line of rebellion. But the other humanity, redeemed humanity, is represented in the other son given to Adam and Eve: their son Seth. Even though the wicked son killed the righteous son, God provided another son so that his promise of a Savior might be fulfilled. Seth is the father of the chosen line. This is why the announcement of his birth and line of descent is followed by the statement that “At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.” Worship originated in Seth’s family. Of course, Cain and Abel worshipped the Lord as well, and he can presume that Adam and Eve did the same, but this is talking about public worship. We know this because the phrase “call upon the name of the LORD” is used throughout Genesis to describe the worship that is connected with altars in public places. This is the origin of ordered, public worship, and it originates among Seth and his

descendants. They are the line of promise, the line out of which Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and, ultimately, Jesus Christ will be born.

What can we learn from this passage? What application can we take away from it? Among other things, it provides us with both a serious warning and a great encouragement. It warns us by showing us that sin spreads rapidly, far more rapidly than the worst cancer known to man. We know this. We can see it in countless ways. We see it in our society, a society that is presently reaping the consequences of what was touted in the 60's as the sexual revolution. We see it in our own lives, as we all know by bitter experience what James meant when he said that "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." [Jas. 1:14-15] Sin wants you, just as it wanted Cain, but you must rule over it, looking every day to the Lord Christ to deliver you from sin's bonds.

And that is the great encouragement that this passage provides for us. It assures us that, despite our sin, God has not given up on humanity. He preserves a line of promise, and if you call upon his name in faith, then you belong to that line, and you will overcome the evil one. In the words of the psalmist, "With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes." [Ps. 60:12]