

The Account of Cain, Abel and Seth: the Sons of Adam and Eve

Cain vs Abel

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GENESIS 3:14-15

Human history is a record of the battle of the ages. Typified by Cain and Abel, there have always been forces of good being opposed by forces of evil.

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Genesis 4:1-2

4 Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with *the help of the Lord*.”

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² Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel.
And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain
was a tiller of the ground.

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Cain is translated from the Hebrew word, !yq (Qayin - kah'-yin). He was the first-born of Adam and Eve. He was named “Cain” (Qayin) because he was “brought forth” or “gotten” (the root word in Hebrew, Qanah - kaw-naw, means to get) “with the help of YHWH.” Cain means “possession” or “acquisition.”

When Cain was born, Eve said that she had gotten a man from the LORD. She may have called this newborn infant a man because she saw the human race renewed, which both she and her husband had marred by their sin. Since Eve said that this man was brought forth with the help of the LORD, she may have thought that Cain was the promised seed, the Messiah. But she was sadly mistaken.

Abel is translated from the Hebrew word lbh (Hebel - heh'-bel) and means “breath.” The Hebrew word “hebel” can also mean “vapor” or can be taken figuratively meaning “vanity.” A breath or a vapor is something that is brief and fleeting. Abel may have been a prophetic name indicating that his life would be cut short.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. Genesis 4:2b

Abel was a shepherd while Cain cultivated the soil and became a farmer.

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³ So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. ⁴ Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵ but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

The phrase, “in the course of time” (marginal note: “at the end of days” or understood as the end of the week) indicates that probably it was on the Sabbath that the two brothers presented their offerings to the LORD.

Some people have suggested that Cain's offering was unacceptable because he offered plants while Abel offered animal sacrifices. Of course, without blood there is no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22). While this passage foreshadows salvation by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God and that we cannot be saved by our “works,” I don't think that necessarily this is the reason that the Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable.

Although the grain offering was a bloodless sacrifice, God not only accepted grain offerings when the sacrificial system was instituted but in some cases required them. In fact there was a time in Israel's history that because of the rebellious attitude of the people that animal sacrifices were meaningless in the eyes of the LORD.

“The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?” says the LORD. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals, I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. Isaiah 1:11

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The passage does give us some insight into what made their sacrifices pleasing to the LORD or not. It says that Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn. He not only offered the “firstfruits” of his flock, he also offered the choicest parts. Abel was clearly giving the best of what he had to God.

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Cain, on the other hand, brought some of the fruits of the soil, and not the firstfruits. The portion he offered may have been damaged or what Cain considered “leftover.” Abel's and Cain's actions were a reflection of their attitudes towards God. Was the LORD God worthy to receive their very best offering or not?

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⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?”

⁷ If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

When Cain's sacrifice was rejected by the LORD, he became angry. He looked sad, depressed and dejected. He was obsessed with self. The LORD responded by saying, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" In other words, Cain's unacceptable offering was a reflection of his unacceptable hard heart. Cain was told what was necessary to be accepted - to do what is right. Cain also was warned that if his anger was not mastered that he would be consumed by it.

Cain's heart was not right in the first place and possibly he brings this sacrifice to spite God. Maybe Cain is doing the deeds of his father (John 8:41-44).

John 8:41-44

⁴¹ You are doing the deeds of your father.”

They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

⁴³ Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Cain gave God some of his possessions but did not give God what He really wanted -- his heart. Cain did not have faith, as indicated by Heb. 11:4, which says that it was by faith that Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. In other words, Cain's heart was disposed to evil, and that evil disposition would shortly display itself with Cain's murder of his brother.

The stage is set for a war of the seed. Cain is wroth and the godly seed through Abel is about to be attacked.

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Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Genesis 4:8

The downward spiral for following one's own evil desires is explained in the letter by James:

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When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James 1:13-16

"For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of the wicked one, and slew his brother. And why did he slay him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

1 John 3:11-12

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