

## The Way of Cain

Genesis 4:9 – 16, 24, 25

**Proposition:** There are two paths we can follow in life: the way of Cain which leads to death or the way of Seth which leads to life.

**Application:** Be transferred from the way of Cain to the way of Seth by calling on the Lord Jesus.

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A few decades ago, California was threatened with an infestation of fruit flies, called the Medfly. The insect likely entered California with someone who lied about not having any fruit when they crossed the state border. It took a speedy and very costly effort to save the state's fruit industry. The larvae of fruit flies do not eat their way into fruit from the outside, rather the insect lays eggs in the blossom. The fruit grows around the eggs and sometime later a worm hatches inside the fruit and eats its way out. That is how sin works. It begins in the heart and if left unchecked works its way into our thoughts, our speech, and our actions. Last week, we explored the origin of sin. Today we learn about the progress of sin. Before we delve into the text let's get some context. The Lord accepted Abel and his offering but rejected Cain and his offering. Cain was angry that Abel received God's favour. Unable to master his anger, Cain killed his brother Abel.

There are two paths we can follow in life – the way of Cain which leads to death or the way of Seth which leads to life.

### I. The Lord Punishes (4:9 – 14)

*Approaching Cain (4:9):* In a jealous rage, Cain attacked Abel. Abel was the first person to go to the grave (Shoel). The Lord approached Cain with a question to awaken his conscience and draw out a confession. Adam confessed. Eve confessed. But not Cain. Did Cain think God did not know? Was he convinced he could hide his sin from the Lord? Did Cain believe he could deceive God? His *I do not know* is the first human lie in Scripture. Why did Cain think he had to lie to God about killing his brother? Because he knew what he did was evil. Even though the 10 commandments had not yet been written Cain knew murder was wrong. Cain's response proves humans were designed with a conscience. Our conscience is the "*organ*" of moral discernment. God gave us a conscience so we might know good from evil so we might make right moral choices. But conscience alone is not enough for good to prevail in the world? For instance, a person can commit awful deeds with a clear conscience. Why? Because like a compass, our conscience can be broken. By perpetual wrongdoing our conscience can lose the power to discern right from wrong, and we become calloused toward God and toward others

– even toward family members (1 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:15). Because our conscience fails, God gave us the 10 commandments. In Christ Jesus, God also gave us His Spirit to restore our seared and defiled conscience.

Cain knew he had done wrong. Yet no confession was forthcoming. God will not wait indefinitely for a confession. He was aware of Cain's crime, so He declared Cain's judgment.

*Announcing the Curse* (4:10 – 12): Cain may have denied his crime, but Abel's blood bore witness against him. In Hebrew the word *blood* is plural – *bloods*. God is not only speaking about Abel's blood He is speaking about the blood of Abel's potential offspring. Abel's potential offspring were denied the opportunity to love, to learn, to laugh, and to leave their mark on this world.

In Scripture, the *blood of Abel* is a type of persecution and martyrdom of believers (Matt 23:35)

Cain's confession was not forthcoming, so God pronounced judgement. Here is the first direct curse on a man. In Genesis 3, God cursed the serpent. God cursed the ground, now in Genesis 4 He cursed a man. To curse is to invoke misfortune. The curse that God pronounced on Cain has three features to it. First, when Cain worked the ground, the earth would not respond to his efforts. Cain would be plagued with a lifetime of failure (Hag 1:7 – 11). The second feature of Cain's punishment was that he would be a wanderer. Since the land will not give its strength, Cain will be forced to wander from field to field in search of new and more fertile land. Yet no matter where he went, the ground would resist his efforts. Augustine once said: "*our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.*"

It is worth noting that Cain later built a city (4:17). Since the ground resisted his efforts, he set out to build a city rather than farm land. Perhaps he built a city so he could cease from wandering. The word *city* does not mean a city like London, Toronto or Edmonton. The Hebrew word might be better translated as an enclosed space with buildings, like a settlement. The verb *built* suggests he spent his whole life building the city because his efforts were hindered. His son Enoch may have finished the project since the city was named after him. Cain may not have finished the project because he may have wandered looking for new ventures that would bring success.

The curse God pronounced on Cain had three features. First, the earth would not respond to his efforts. Second, Cain would be a wanderer. And the third feature of Cain's punishment was a loss of God's presence and blessing.

*Adverse About the Curse* (4:13, 14): There are two ways we can respond to God's judgement. One is to repent, and the other is to regret. Repentance is to be sorry for our sin followed by a

return to the Lord. Regret means we are sorry we lost the blessings because of our sin. But we are not sorry for our sin. Regret refuses to repent and return to the Lord (2 Cor 7:9, 10). The way of Cain is to regret the punishment we deserve but refuse to repent of our sin. Cain deplored his punishment because it was too much for him to bear. What Cain said is true. He confessed he was powerless to save himself from God's judgement. None of us can bear God's judgment for sin. Nothing we can do will remove our guilt. But there is One who has borne our sin, and His name is Jesus. If we do not cast our sin upon the Lord Jesus, then we will have to bear the consequences of our sin ourselves. Like Cain, we will find God's punishment will be too much for us to bear. So let us not go the way of Cain, rather let us repent of our sin and return to the Lord who bore our sin on the tree when He cried out "*My God My God why have You forsaken Me.*" Jesus was forsaken by God so that we don't have to be (1 Chron 21:8).

Devoid of God's presence and protection, Cain will be easy prey for someone to harm him. As a fugitive and wanderer Cain had no house to live in, no place of refuge and so could not protect himself. Cain feared the beasts of the field would maul him or that his siblings would seek revenge for Abel's life. The question we may have is where did all the people come from? Scripture teaches that all people came from one couple – Adam and Eve (5:4; Acts 17:26). Adam's sons married Adam's daughters. At that time, the genetic code was pure – meaning there were very few, if any, genetic mutations. As a result, marrying within the family posed zero risk of genetically deformed offspring. Twenty-five centuries later, God outlawed marriage within the family. After 25 centuries, the mutation load reached a level such that marrying within the family involved a high risk of genetically defective offspring. So, for the good of the human race, He outlawed marriage within the family (Deut 27:22)

The Lord punishes sin. Yet even in judgement He extends mercy.

## **II. The Lord Protects (4:15, 16)**

*Awarding Protection (4:15):* Many who oppose the death penalty, use this verse as the basis for contesting capital punishment. In Scripture, and in most of western society, capital punishment is only for premeditated murder (Ex 21:12, 13). Why was Cain not executed for his crime of murder? Perhaps killing Abel was not premeditated. Cain may have been overcome with intense anger that he killed his brother in the heat of the moment. Since no human had yet died, Cain may not have anticipated that hitting him so hard would lead to his brother's death. Because of mercy God choose to protect guilty Cain. He gave Cain a sign to assure him that he would be safe from any who would avenge Abel's blood. Was this sign a precursor to the city of refuge? Cities of refuge were places where a manslayer could find refuge from the avenger of blood – until his guilt or innocence was proven. If the killing was premeditated, then the avenger of blood would stone him. If the killing was not premeditated the manslayer would not be stoned. You can read about cities of refuge in Numbers 35.

Cain could have confessed his sin and return to the Lord instead he chose to turn his back on God.

*Abandoning God (4:16)*: Nowhere does the Lord threaten to cast Cain out of His presence. Cain withdrew from the Lord out of his own free will so that he could live his life estranged from God. The worst choice any one of us could ever make is to turn our back on the Lord. Life without God is to be in harm's way.

God punishes unrepentant people according to their sin. Yet the Lord offers protection even to those who turn their back on Him. Adam was 130 years old when Seth was born. This suggests there were quite a few people on earth by the time Seth arrived on the scene (5:3).

### III. **The Lord Provides (4:25, 26)**

*Abel Replaced (4:25)*: Since Abel left no offspring, since his seed was cut off, Seth became the appointed *seed son* to continue the seed of the woman (Seth – Noah – Shem – Abraham – Jesus cf., Luke 3). Cain will not become part of the seed genealogy. Now some may dispute what I am about to say – but it is my belief as well as the belief of many other Bible teachers, that the Sethites, the offspring of Seth came to be known as the *sons of God* – which will become important to keep in mind when we get to Genesis 6.

*Approaching God (4:26)*: The name *Enosh* means frail man (Ps 103:15, 16). The offspring of Seth were aware of their weakness; they knew their own mortality. As a result, they recognized their need for God and a spiritual revival broke out. The phrase *call upon the name of the Lord* suggests public worship. For the first time, godly people gathered to call on the name of the Lord and to proclaim the name of the Lord.

There are two paths we can follow in life – the way of Cain or the way of Seth. The way of Cain is the way of pride – refusing to repent. The way of Cain is to turn our back on God. Sadly, our world is filled with those who walk in the way of Cain. Do not be one of them. Choose to follow the other path, the way of Seth – which is the way of humility. Recognize your weakness. Be quick to repent. Call on the name of the Lord Jesus. If you have never called on the Lord as your Saviour, you are walking in the way of Cain and you are in harm's way. You need to get back into the safe way – the way of Seth – by admitting you are a sinner in need of a Saviour; by believing that Jesus died for your sin and rose again on the third day; and then call on Him and be transferred from the way of Cain to the way of Seth.