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# GENESIS: IT ALL STARTS HERE

## *THE AWFUL DEPTHS OF SIN*

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### **GENESIS 4:1-16**

4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." 2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. 6 The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 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 for you, but you must rule over it."

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." 13 Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 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." 15 Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. 16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden."

### INTRODUCTION

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In Genesis 4 we are confronted by the painful and heartbreaking reality of human nature. While our first parents (Adam and Eve) were created without sin, their children were born into a world that had been scarred by their actions. That first sin's fallout was more awful than they could have imagined, and humans have continued to see those effects through the ages. In the depths of sin's nastiness, we may still see the bright light of God's promise to save those who trust in Him. It may be difficult to admit that we are no better than our sinful ancestors, but we may find great hope in the same promise they heard from the Word of God – there is a Savior!

## SETTING THE STAGE

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Blaise Pascal once said, “The knowledge of God without that of man’s misery causes pride. The knowledge of man’s misery without that of God causes despair. The knowledge of Jesus Christ constitutes the middle course, because **in Him we find both God and our misery.**”<sup>1</sup>

## MESSAGE OUTLINE:

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- (1) A GRACIOUS REJECTION OF EMPTY WORSHIP**
- (2) A BRUTAL PLUNGE INTO THE DEPTHS OF SIN**
- (3) AN OVERWHELMING BELIEF IN THE PROMISE OF GOD**

## EXPOSITION:

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### **(1) A GRACIOUS REJECTION OF EMPTY WORSHIP**

- **CAIN’S SACRIFICE WAS EMPTY AND SUPERFICIAL**
  - Now, some have suggested that the reason for God’s rejection of Cain’s “*offering*” or “tribute” (Hebrew: *minha*) was because it was *bloodless*. However, both Cain and Abel were said to have brought “*minha*,” and this type of offering or tribute was usually *bloodless* throughout the OT. Therefore, it seems less than compelling that Cain’s bloodless sacrifice was unacceptable for this singular reason.
  - **The more probable reason**, as I am arguing here, is that God “*had no regard for*” Cain’s offering because he merely brought “*the fruit of the ground.*”
    - Notice the contrast between Cain’s superficial offering and Abel’s faith-filled tribute. Abel brought the “*firstborn*” from among the “*fat portions*” (v4).
      - The author of Hebrews alludes to this very thing when he says, “*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous...*” (Heb. 11:4).

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<sup>1</sup>Ritzema, E. (2013). 300 Quotations for Preachers from the Reformation. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- **Therefore**, it seems appropriate to see Cain as having offered only a superficial tribute to God, trusting in himself and not the Lord of the Harvest.
  - Waltke says, “Cain’s sin is tokenism. He looks religious, but in his heart he is not totally dependent on God, childlike, or grateful.”<sup>2</sup>
  
- THE FAITHLESS SACRIFICE WAS REJECTED BY GOD
  - Of course, this point is beyond dispute, and it is certainly not speculation. Moses, writing the words of Genesis, tells us, “*the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard*” (v4–5).
    - Cain and his offering were not *regarded* by God.
      - The word (šā-ā) translated “*regard*” means to *look upon* or *gaze at*. The idea is that God did not acknowledge the false worship offered by Cain.
  
- GOD’S REJECTION OF THE FAITHLESS “WORSHIPER” WAS GRACIOUS
  - While Cain certainly did not react in such a way as to imply that he understood it this way, **God was gracious in His reprimand**.
    - Notice: God approaches Cain (much like God came to Adam), and He asks, “*Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?*” (v6).
    - God then says, “*If you do well, will you not be accepted?*” (v7).
      - There is much that can be said about this question in its context, but let’s point out the following:
        - First, the question more than implies that **Cain knows** what is right (“*do well*”).
          - As the Scripture tells us in Romans 1, man’s problem is not that he does not know what is right. Man’s problem is that he does not want to do right. *More on this below*.
        - Second, the question also indicates that it was meant to be **remedial** (corrective) for Cain.

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<sup>2</sup>Waltke, 97

- God seems to be telling Cain that he may yet be “*accepted*” if he will simply “*do well*” (do what he knows he should).
  - Once again, we should note, **Cain did not see God’s rejection in this positive light...** Cain was “*very angry*” (v5).
- WE SHOULD LEARN FROM THIS
  - We will do well to consider **what kind of offering we make to God.**
    - Are we offering God our left-overs?
    - Or, are we offering God the very best of who we are and what we have?
    - Do we approach God in whatever way we please at the moment?
    - Or, do we approach God with reverence, humility, and trust as He deserves?
  - We ought not shy away from admitting that **God rejects superficial and faithless offerings.**
    - If we, or anyone else, offer God our left-overs, then we should in no way be surprised to learn that God is hostile and unaccepting to these.
    - If we, or anyone else, approach God with haphazard presumption, then we should not be shocked when His reply is “depart from Me, for I do not know you.”
  - By God’s grace, we will understand that God’s reprimand is gracious today. Unlike Cain, **we may recognize our foolish ways and plead for God’s help** to correct them.

## (2) A BRUTAL PLUNGE INTO THE DEPTHS OF SIN

- CAIN EAGERLY EMBRACED SIN
  - While Cain is not recorded as having said anything in reply to God’s reprimand, his immediate **actions demonstrate his sinful heart.**
    - Cain “*spoke to his brother*” (v8).

- This tells us little, but it indicates that there must have been some **forethought** on the part of Cain. “I’ll get my brother out in the open, and then I’ll carry out my murderous plans.”
  - Cain **refused to heed** God’s warning.
    - God had warned Cain, “[sin’s] desire is for you, but you must rule over it” (v7)
      - Lindsay: “in this we see sin's further progression. In Eve's case, **she had to be talked into sinning. In Cain's case, he would not be talked out of it.**”<sup>3</sup>
- CAIN NEVER ONCE SHOWED REMORSE FOR SIN
  - “*I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?*” (v9).
    - Like Adam, Cain does not admit his responsibility for sin.
      - Cain’s response is ever-so-much-more arrogant than Adam’s.
  - “*My punishment is greater than I can bear*” (v13).
    - Cain does not lament his sin! He laments only his punishment!
      - Lindsay: “And here, as one writer says, is the difference between the repentant and the unrepentant heart, isn't it? The unrepentant heart sees only that its punishment is great and complains about how unfair it all is. The repentant heart sees that its sin is great and that its punishment is deserved, and it is surprised and amazed at the grace shown to it.”<sup>4</sup>
  - “*I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer... and whoever finds me will kill me*” (v14).
    - The ironic arrogance here is that Cain had just murdered his brother. Now he whines about having to be a wanderer, and he fears that someone will do to him what he has already done to another.
      - Waltke: “Cain responds with self-pity instead of repentance. He fears physical and social exposure but not the invisible God made him.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>[http://reformedperspectives.org/newfiles/sco\\_lindsay/ot.sco\\_lindsay.gen.4.1-16.html](http://reformedperspectives.org/newfiles/sco_lindsay/ot.sco_lindsay.gen.4.1-16.html)

<sup>4</sup>[http://reformedperspectives.org/newfiles/sco\\_lindsay/ot.sco\\_lindsay.gen.4.1-16.html](http://reformedperspectives.org/newfiles/sco_lindsay/ot.sco_lindsay.gen.4.1-16.html)

<sup>5</sup>Waltke, 98

- **CAIN HATED GOD**
    - “*Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD*” (v16).
      - **God had made provision** for Cain so that he could stay.
        - God “marked” Cain, and promised to protect his life (v15).
          - Special note: *Some have seen a reference to skin color (i.e. a variant of human ‘race’), but the notion simply does not hold. If others wore the same “mark” as Cain (i.e. any or all of his descendants), then Cain would not have the special and protective identifier.*
      - Yet, **Cain would not stay** near God.
    - Cain also **built a city** away from “*the presence of the LORD,*” and **named it after his own son** (v17).
      - This is a directly **defiant** action **against God**.
        - God told Cain that he should stay and trust the LORD, but Cain went away.
        - God promised to provide an offspring who would reign victorious, but Cain lifted up his own son (offspring).
        - Cain’s settling place was “*away from the presence of the LORD,*” and yet this is where he “*built a city.*”
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- **THE NEW HUMANITY (THAT’S US) GENERALLY FOLLOWS CAIN, AND IT IS B...A...D**
  - We may **see ourselves and others** here.
    - Do we now, or have we ever **embraced sin with the same zeal**?
      - Have we not knowingly run straight towards those things we know are out of bounds?
    - When we are caught in our sin, are we **more sorrowful over our own consequences** than we are mindful of the pain and offense we have caused?
      - How many times have we railed against those who were simply administering justice upon us?
    - Whether we like it or not, the Bible describes **natural humanity** as “*haters of God*” (Rom. 1:30).

- Haven't we ever sought to redefine God so as to suit our own lifestyle, instead of worshiping and honoring the God who is?

### (3) AN OVERWHELMING BELIEF IN THE PROMISE OF GOD

- **CAIN'S DESCENDANTS GROW INCREASINGLY MORE BARBAROUS**
  - Cain's great, great, great grandson (**Lamech**) was the first recorded polygamist and a murderous barbarian (v19-24).
- **IN STARK CONTRAST, SETH'S DESCENDANTS DEMONSTRATE TRUST IN GOD**
  - During Seth's son's (**Enosh**) day, people began to "*call on the name of the LORD*" (v26).
    - Seth's great, great, great grandson (Enoch) was only one of two people in the Bible who are not said to have died.
      - Enoch "walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (5:24).
      - Elijah was taken from this mortal life by a supernatural "whirlwind" (2 Kings 2:11).
- **GOD'S PROMISE WAS AN "OFFSPRING," AND HE DID DELIVER.**
  - During the days of Seth's son and Adam's grandson, Enosh, people "*began to call on the name of the LORD*" (v26).
    - This indicates at least two things:
      - First, that Adam and Eve were passing down the promise of the LORD God.
        - They must have told their sons, and their son's sons, that God was "*the LORD*" – the God who promised salvation.
      - Second, that at least some people believed the promise of the LORD God.
        - At least some people were trusting in "*the LORD*"!

- Not only should we gain instruction from this contrast – *people are to trust God's promise* – the New Testament also picks up on imagery here.
  - Hebrews 12:24 – “***Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.***”
    - Abel's blood cried out to God for justice; it spoke of darkness, doom, and judgment.
      - Cain spilled Abel's blood, and God cursed him for it.
    - BUT Christ's blood cries out to God in intercession for all those who love and trust Him!
      - Sinners spilled Christ's blood, and God placed their curse upon Christ!
        - Jesus Christ offers God the supreme offering on behalf of all who will love and trust Him!
        - God renews all those who hear and believe the Gospel of Christ!
        - God reshapes the desires of the sinner to trusts in Him, and God gives the sinner new affections so that he may humbly live to glorify his King.

## MY PRAYERS

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- May God forgive us for our arrogant sinfulness.
- May God rescue us from our foolish self-focus.
- May God put in us a renewed desire to trust His promise and embrace the Savior.

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