

# LIFE BIBLE STUDY

## SESSION OBJECTIVE: GENESIS 4:1-24

To understand how quickly sin infected humanity and its ramifications.

## Further Down the Spiral

Genesis chapter 4 begins immediately with another tragic event: fratricide. The Cain and Abel story is often chalked up to jealousy, and used to serve as a warning against letting jealousy control your emotions. While it is intuitive to read jealousy into the story, it is interesting that it never actually says anything about it. We are



not told for sure why Cain kills his brother Abel, but we assume jealousy played a role since God regarded Abel's sacrifice as worthy to be received, but rejected Cain's. If anything *anger*, not jealousy, is the thing we are being warned against (Gen. 4:5).

While the perils of anger and jealousy are certainly lessons that we can learn from this chapter, it is perhaps better to view chapter 4 at large as a testimony to just how quickly things changed in a world that now includes sin. Chapter 3 ends after the fall, and suddenly we are thrust into a

post-Eden world where the first thing that we read about is a brother murdering his brother. The idea of a progressive fall is clearly not compatible with the biblical narrative. Things got bad, and they got bad right away.

## Cain and Abel

We immediately find that, despite the rebellion of woman and man and its subsequent effects, they are still attempting to live out the command that God gave them to, "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Verse 1 says that, "the man knew his wife Eve." The Old Testament regularly uses the Hebrew verb, "yāda," a word that means, "to know," to describe the act of sexual intercourse, and there is intentionality in the usage of this verb. The biblical view of sex is one that transcends the physical realm. To engage in sexual intercourse is to know someone at the most intimate level, and to be known. The result of this act, unsurprisingly, is procreation.

**CAIN**

The wording in verse 1 is fairly clunky, but with reason. After giving birth, Eve says, “I have acquired a man with the help of the Lord.” There are some differing thoughts on the meaning and significance of the wording here. It is odd that Eve says she has, “gotten a man,” and not a son or a child. However, the Hebrew shows more wordplay that cannot be missed. If you recall, the word for ground, “’aḏāmāh,” is very similar to the word for man, “’āḏām.” There is wordplay in chapter 2; Adam is formed from the “’aḏāmāh.” Here, again, we see a similar play on words. As it turns out, there is another word for man, “’iyš,” which means, “a man in contrast to a woman.” Eve is the woman, “’išāh,” (meaning, ‘a woman in contrast to a man’). From the, “’išāh” comes forth, “’iyš.”

Ground = ’aḏāmāh > Man = āḏām

Woman = išāh > Man = iyš

Cain’s actual name has some significance later as well. It means, “metal worker.” We will find out at the end of this chapter that his lineage includes a man named Tubal-cain, who was in fact, “a forger of all instruments of bronze and iron” (Gen. 4:22).

There is yet another interpretative question that arises from the original language in verse 1, and it has to do with the preposition, “with.” Eve says, “I have acquired a man with the help of the Lord.” The issue is that the preposition *with* in the Hebrew is the same as the word that marks a direct object. The verse could also be translated, “I have acquired a man, the Lord.” The reformer, Martin Luther, translated this verse this way, and took it to mean that Eve actually expected her son Cain to be the Lord, the promised seed that would crush the serpent’s head just a chapter before this in Genesis 3:15. It is not the majority opinion, but it does provide a level of humanity to Eve. It would make sense for her to expect the seed promised to be her actual offspring, and not the seed of another woman generations later. However, to her dismay, she will discover that Cain is not the Redeemer, but a murderer. Cain, like his father Adam, was a worker of the ground (Gen. 4:2).

**ABEL**

Very little is known about Abel, other than that he was born after Cain and was, “a keeper of the sheep” (Gen. 4:2). There is almost certainly some wordplay with Abel’s name as well. His name means, “morning mist.” At first it seems as if there is no real significance here until one considers the New Testament passage, James 4:14. It reads, “Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” Speaking of the brevity of life, James likens it to something like the morning mist. Abel plays such a short role in the biblical narrative; he appears for a little time and then vanishes.

## The Offerings

The drama heightens around the offerings of the two brothers. It is an interesting detail that sacrifice is implied in Abel’s offering without any sort of qualification. Of course, Genesis is written presumably by Moses and was read by his contemporaries in a time where there was an already robust sacrificial system, so no description or qualification was needed. But when was sacrifice instituted? It’s a good question that is never officially answered. Whenever it was instituted, it must have been before chapter 4 because Abel seems to understand what to do without any direction given. Cain’s sacrifice was, “the fruit of the ground,” while Abel’s was, “the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions” (Gen. 4:3-4). Once again, without qualification, God rejects Cain’s offering but receives Abel’s. A lot of speculation has been given to why, but the text itself does not yield a reason. Perhaps it was because Abel selected from the first fruits of his flock, while Cain seemingly

didn't. Perhaps it was simply the aroma of the fat burning that appealed to God, a detail that is specified later in Genesis and the Torah (Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18; Lev. 1:9).

## Sin Is Crouching

The result of God's rejection is anger and/or sadness. The Hebrew construction that is translated, "face fell," is accurate. It imagines the dropping of one's face because of sadness or even depression. The Lord, aware of Cain's emotional response, responds to him: "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 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 contrary to you, but you must rule over it." Sin, here, is presented as a lion waiting to strike its prey, but notice under what conditions this is true: "If you do not do well." This statement by God is revealing in many ways. For one, it implies why Cain's offering was not received. God says, "If you do well, will you (meaning, 'your offering') not be accepted?" The early church writer Ephrem the Syrian (AD 306-373) wrote in his commentary on Genesis, "God said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why is your face gloomy?' Instead of being filled with anger, you ought to be filled with distress. Instead of your face being gloomy, tears ought to be flowing from your eyes. 'If you do well, I will accept it.' Notice then that it was not because of the small size of Cain's offering that it was rejected. It was not accepted because of his spitefulness and his lack of good will." In other words, it was not the quality of the offering, but the quality of the heart that led to God's rejection of it.

There is a question that arises in what God says to Cain, regarding the phrase, "you must rule over it (sin)." Can a man rule over sin? From the New Testament perspective, we understand that sin is something that is not able to be mastered prior to salvation in Christ. We are, "dead in trespasses and sin" (Eph. 2:1). For, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). So the question arises, could Cain have actually ruled over the sin crouching the door waiting to master him? There are two ways of thinking about this. Perhaps the fall was a progressive fall, meaning that it took time over generations for its full effects to take place. If this is the case, it might actually be worse news. Cain, having an opportunity to master sin, still chose to give in to it. The other way of thinking about this, and in my opinion the correct way, is to consider that there is still a personal responsibility for our sin regardless of whether or not we have the ability to rule over it. The New Testament routinely tells us that we are responsible and accountable for our sin, even unto death (Rom. 6:23). The point of this detail is to make clear that already in the first generation after Adam and Eve, humanity is enslaved to sin. Cain must rule over sin, but he can't, and he doesn't.

## Unexpected Grace

The climax of the story is in verse 8. Cain goes to the field with Abel and murders his own brother. Immediately, God comes to the scene and asks a question of Cain in verse 9 that is very similar to what he asked Cain's father Adam in just the chapter before: "Where is Abel your brother?" (God asked Adam in Genesis 3:9, "Where are you?") Cain's response is both dishonest and over-exaggerated. The first thing he says is, "I do not know," which is clearly a lie. He follows that by asking God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer to that question is actually no. Nowhere in Scripture are we ever commanded to be the keeper of our brother (or sister). The Hebrew word for, "keeper" is one that means, "a person entrusted with the custody and care of an object," which would mean Cain would receive legal responsibility for Abel. Really, the only person who can be considered a keeper of another person is God, and further Old Testament study reveals this to be true. Psalm 121:5-8 reads, "The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your

soul. The LORD will guard you going out and you coming in from this time forth and forever.” Cain’s response is almost a sarcastic knock towards God: “I’m not my brother’s keeper, YOU are! Why are you asking me?”

God’s punishment for Cain is heavy. He will have to work extra hard for food because the ground will no longer yield its strength to him, and he will be a fugitive, always wandering and rootless with no community or permanent connection (Gen. 4:12). He is specifically, “cursed from the ground,” on the grounds (pun intended) that the ground has, “opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand” (Gen. 4:11). Cain becomes afraid of his fate, crying out, “whoever finds me will kill me” (Gen. 4:14). God’s response is shocking, and once again an act of grace: “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold” (Gen. 4:15). The Lord marks Cain to make sure that no one acts harshly against him. This is a striking turn of events. For one, there is irony in Cain’s fear. The man who killed his family member now laments over the reality that another family member will likely try and kill him. Remember, everyone is family at this point, since everyone living would be the offspring of Adam and Eve (Gen. 5:4). Secondly, you would expect God to be ok with the potential of Cain being killed by someone else because it is the rightful punishment for murder (Gen. 9:6). For God to protect Cain is nothing more than His grace upon him.

## The Lineage Continues

In verse 17 through 24 we find a genealogy of Cain. There are a few significant details about Cain’s lineage. For one, the fact that Cain even has a lineage is further proof of God’s grace to protect him. Surely, Cain lived and had children. Secondly, we see the first example of non-monogamous marriage in Lamech (Gen. 4:19). This is the first departure from Genesis 2:24-25. This isn’t Lamech’s only trouble either; he is also murders two people and does not fear the consequences, but embraces them (Gen. 4:23-24). Third, and maybe most significant to the developing biblical theology of Genesis, are the three names of Lamech’s children: Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain. Each of their names are tied to an important cultural accomplishment. Jabal, husbandry; Jubal, music; and Tubal-cain, metal forging or weapon making. The idea here is that through one of the most flawed characters of early creation comes some of the most significant cultural contributions. God’s grace did not stop at protecting Cain; God’s grace continued and flourished in his offspring.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Genesis 4:1-5. Who are Cain and Abel? What are their occupations? What kind of offerings do they bring to God, and how does He receive them?

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2. Read Genesis 4:6-7. What does God say to Cain in response to his unacceptable offering and subsequent anger? Can Cain truly master the sin that desires to destroy him? (Hint: See above) Why or why not?

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### Day Two

1. Read Genesis 4:8-10. What did Cain end up doing? What did God ask Cain regarding Abel, and what was the significance of Cain’s response?

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2. Read Genesis 4:11-16. What were the consequences for Cain? Did God only deliver punishment or was there some grace as well? If so, what was it?
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### Day Three

1. Read Genesis 4:17-18. Who was Cain's wife (Hint: Gen. 5:4)? What were the names of their offspring?
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2. Read Genesis 4:19-22. What two things is Lamech guilty of? What is the significance of 3 of the 4 names of the children of Lamech? How does this display God's grace (Hint: See above)?
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### Day Four

1. Read Genesis 4:23-24. What is the mindset of Lamech? Does there seem to be remorse for his actions or fear for his consequences?
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2. In your own words, describe the sense you get about the condition of the world after reading Genesis 4. Is it a good sense or a bad sense? Why?
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## Week 4 Discussion: Anger

Genesis 4 depicts the tragic outcome of allowing anger to fully drive the actions of an individual. Anger is a complex subject in the Bible. It leads to murder in Genesis 4. However, we are told to, "be angry and do not sin" (Eph. 4:26). But also, we are told that anger is evidence of works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-20). What role, if any, does anger play in the life of a believer? Discuss as a group the damage done when anger is unbridled, but also the times when it is appropriate to be angry.

1. Icebreaker: Do you struggle with anger? What are things that make you angry on a regular basis?
2. What makes anger righteous? What things should make us angry? Give modern and biblical examples.
3. How does anger become unrighteous? Read Galatians 5:19-21 again. What is the significance of the phrase, "fits of anger," and how is that different than anger itself?
4. What does it mean to, "not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph. 4:26)? How can you practice this? What are some potential consequences of disobedience to this command?
5. In your opinion, do you find that anger and depression are related? Why or why not?
6. In your opinion, is there a difference between rage and anger? Why or why not?

## Takeaways:

1. Cain was driven by anger over his rejected offering to murder his brother.
2. Sin immediately affected creation, and God immediately began demonstrating grace.

### PRAYER REQUESTS: