

GENESIS

The Book of Foundations

Sin Leads to Death: Cain's Descent

Genesis 4

Cain's wicked heart is revealed in his response to God and the murder of his brother. Sin has quickly taken hold in the human heart and has given birth to death. In the face of human depravity, God still acts with mercy to preserve life and punish sin.

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 contrary to 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. **Genesis 4:1-8 (ESV)**

A. Sin Intensifies (4:1-8)

- Ritualism versus true worship (vv. 2-5)** – The offering of Cain was unacceptable ("no regard" v. 5) to the LORD because he was merely going through the motions of thanking God for his harvest. The problem was his heart not the offering itself. Abel offered his first and best to the LORD but Cain offered what was ordinary. Cain lacked honor for God and his heart was corrupt. (cf. Heb 11:4; 1 John 3:12)
- Struggle against sin (vv. 6-7)** – The impulse to sin seems natural to the fallen person. However, you can fight against the urge to act according to the evil desires of your heart. For Cain, his heart felt shame and he lashed out in hate towards his brother. The LORD's question (v. 6) is meant to help Cain reflect on the state of his heart. What we all need is a new heart (Ezek 36:25-27) but struggling against the urge to sin does prevent further sin-hardening.
- Fruit of an evil heart (v. 8)** – Cain kills his brother in retaliation for the shame caused by the LORD accepting Abel's offering but not his own. Cain's depth of spiritual depravity is evident. Sin had its way in Cain's heart leading to the murder of his younger brother. **Evil heart > Shame revealed > Hate > Murder**

Fall of Adam & Eve Compared to Cain's Sin

| Theme | Adam/Eve | Cain |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|
| God's command/warning | "Do not eat" (2:16) | "Rule over sin" (4:6) |
| Sin | Forbidden fruit (3:6-7) | Murder (4:8) |
| God's question | "Where are you?" (3:9) | "Where is Abel?" (4:9a) |
| Human response | "I was afraid/hid?" (3:10) | "bros keeper?" (4:9b) |
| Curse | Birth/desire/ground/exile/DEATH (3:16-19) | Ground/wandering (4:10-12) |
| Provision/protection | Skin garments (3:21) | Sign (4:15) |
| Driven out | "east of Eden" (3:23-24) | "east of Eden" (4:14 & 16) |

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. **Genesis 4:9-16 (ESV)**

B. Hardened Heart (4:9-10, 19-24)

1. **No remorse, no repentance (vv. 9-10)** – Cain’s response to the LORD puts his lack of love for his brother on full display. We also learn that Cain has no understanding of God’s nature (there is no secret sin!) and that he has no intention of confessing and repenting for Abel’s murder. When the LORD confronted Adam, the man shifted blame but still acknowledged his sin. Cain appears to be sin-hardened and unresponsive to conviction from God.
2. **First family’s descent into dysfunction (vv. 19-24)** – The effects of sin quickly spoiled the quality of the family. Cain chose sin and his descendants continue the downwards spiral of sin. The pride and violence of Lamech is greater than his ancestral father, Cain.

C. The LORD’s Response to Murder (4:11-16)

1. **Punish sin (vv. 11-13)** – The LORD pronounces a curse upon Cain for committing murder. The ground that “swallowed” Abel’s blood will not yield to Cain’s efforts. He will be an exile wandering the earth, cut-off from family, fields and the face of God. (cf. Heb 12:24)
2. **Preserve life (v. 15)** – Cain protests against the punishment that God assigned him because he fears for his life. The murderer fears death at the hands of another. The LORD preserves Cain’s life by marking him in some way. The sign that Cain bore would serve as a reminder of his sin and God’s gracious preservation.
3. **Presence taken (v. 16)** – Though Adam and Eve were driven from the garden of Eden, after their disobedience, the presence of the LORD was not taken away like we see with Cain. The murder of Abel and Cain’s lack of repentance has alienated him from God’s presence. He is alive but it is an existence that is cut-off from the Source of life.

Who would kill Cain? Whom does he marry?

In Genesis 5:4 we read, “[Adam] had other sons and daughters” (ESV). This text leads us to the conclusion that Cain feared someone from his own family avenging Abel’s death. Also, his wife would have come from among his family as well.

(For more info see Hard Sayings of the Bible)

Discussion Questions:

1. How are you prone to count on outward ritual instead of true-hearted faith?
2. What is one area that the LORD has confronted sin in your life (past or present)?
3. Ultimately, what is our only hope to escape sin and death?