

## *Genesis 4: Cain murders Abel*

Life in the Garden of Eden came easy. There were no taxes, no noisy neighbors and everything came up roses. In the chapter we are investigating life is being lived outside the garden. Our family was expelled from the garden and life becomes much more complicated. Complications arise within the family and there is more tension between our Creator and our family. When we leave home for the first time it can be a very trying experience.

Here in chapter four we read about sin for the first time. We read about original sin and original violence and the continuing alienation between our family with one another and their creator. Our text moves quickly from a stable family to a series of unsolved adventures.

To live in the world of God and to live on God's terms is hard enough but to live at peace with other creatures and family members is even more of a dilemma.

I soon discovered in my research that telling the story of the tension between Cain and Abel is much easier than trying to explain the story.

**PLEASE READ CHAPTER FOUR BEFORE READING MY TAKE ON THE CHAPTER!**

Genesis 4:1-2

The first two verses set the stage for a family event. Adam "knew his wife." In the Hebrew "knew" refers to knowing someone in an intimate, intellectual, sexual manner. Through this "knowing" Eve bore a son and named him, Cain meaning "spear."

Then “again” she bore another son and named him Abel. Some speculate they were twins, but this means nothing to the story.

Cain: “spear” to get, to create servant of the ground, tiller of the field. Like his father, Adam.

Abel” “futility” brevity of life, short duration, vapor, nothingness. Here I thought Dennis the menace was a bad name. KEEPER OF SHEEP. Thus begins the division of mankind.

I suggest we do not let their occupations get in the way of understanding the story. This is a story not about God preferring cowboys to farmers.

At least our story begins on a good footing. God commands they be fruitful and multiply. We have been multiplying ever since.

#### Genesis 4:3-5 Sacrifices

Now the real action begins, one brother kills the other. Brueggeman sees Cain killing his brother Abel not just as an act of murder, but seen as a failure of responsibility, a disruption of the divine order which causes humans “faces to fall.”

The “spin spiral” rupture with God in chapter three leads to the disruption of human relationships with violence, jealousy and social breakdowns.

Time to collect the offering. Cain brought the fruit of the land and Abel brought the best of his flock. They both offered the best they had, and they had no reason to believe their gifts would not be accepted. This is simply an act of family at worship.

As the story goes, life sucks. Walter reminds us that “life is not a garden party.” God accepted the offering from Abel and rejected the offering from the eldest brother, Cain. Why they brought

separate offerings to God is a mystery to me. Two offerings for me only brings trouble.

We need to remind ourselves that Divine choice reverses human expectations and social standing. So, Cain became angry and “his countenance fell,” meaning, he was a little peeved. Cain was the eldest and his offering should have been accepted. What is interesting is the fact that being the first born does not go well in Genesis.

God chose Isaac over Ishmael; Jacob over Esau, both first born loose. Life is not fair, so it seems.

#### Genesis 4:6-7 Distorted Desire

Cain stands there pouting, and our loving, forgiving God full of grace takes the time to still be attentive to Cain’s mood. Cain’s desire for superiority distorted his thinking. God reminds Cain, and us, that sin is lurking around like a lion ready to pounce. Sin is refusing to accept, to care for, to protect the lives of others.

#### Genesis 4:8-16 Murder and its Aftermath

Here we have Cain taking quick action. Cain invited his brother to the “field,” meaning the outskirts of town, the country. Here in the country his evil actions will not be observed.

Like the story in the Garden where God asks, “where are you,” God asks Cain, “where is your brother?” Cain is so full of anger he cares less about the needs or the condition of his brother.

Cain the farmer has his source of livelihood taken from him. The plants he sows will no longer flourish. Cain goes to pieces crying that his punishment is more than he can bare. Cain shows no remorse, no grief, only the fear of God.

Once again God's grace enters the story and a mark, a tattoo is placed on his body. This sign is not intended to disgrace Cain, but a sign showing he is under the protection of God.

Cain went to dwell in the land of Nod, east of Eden. This land is a land of Wandering. It is believed by some, this land was inserted by the redactor of this text. Geographically this land is unknown to us. However, in the Hebrew the name is associated with restlessness.

Genesis 4:17-24

Please remember, the Bible is about love and grace. Cain, a murderer of his brother and a pouter is blessed by God with the gift of a new life and a family. Scripture says that "Cain knew his wife," you know what that means, here comes another baby. The child was named Enoch. Enoch means, "dedicated, consecrated, trained, spiritually committed.

I find it rather interesting that Cain creates a city so soon and names the city after his son. This tells me that God created not just two people, Adam and Eve, but a civilization and Cain was showing remorse when he realized what he had done and named the city after his son, meaning "consecrated."

Verses 23-24 is a "Song of the Sword," an ancient song of revenge.

The rest of the chapter is about genealogy; I won't bother sorting it all out. The arrogance of humanity continued. What a surprise.

Genesis 4:25-26

Here we go again, “Adam knew his wife again”, and they called their son, Seth. The murder of Abel surfaces again like a plague therefore our symbolic couple have another child.

Sincerely,

Dennis Siebert

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