

Genesis. :- Cain and Abel – chapter 4

Here in the Book of Genesis it is not long before we see the effect of sin on human relationships. There is a breakdown in the relationship with the Lord God. There is jealousy, anger and murder. There is a lack of repentance and even an instance of revenge killing. The chapter does end however on a positive note, with the establishment of a Godly line to replace that of the lost sons – one through death, the other through exile.

The two sons, chapter 4, verses 1 – 2:- The verb “to know” is used in the Bible to describe the intimacy of sexual relationships. The man and woman remain two individuals but through their sexual union become in some way “one flesh”. (Genesis 2, verse 24 and Mark 10, verses 7 – 9). The names of the two boys seem to be a play on words. Cain from *qana* meaning “to get” and Abel (*Hebel*) probably from *aplu* meaning “son”. They were both farmers but followed different methods. Cain being a “*tiller of the ground*” and Abel a “*keeper of sheep*”. There is the possibility of rivalry from the beginning! The tension between those who want to free-range their flocks and herds and those who need to enclose the land for cultivation has been the source of conflict down the ages.

Offerings accepted and rejected, chapter 4, verses 3 – 7:- we do not know what prompted Cain and Abel to bring their offerings. Thanks-giving for a good harvest and a good lambing? Whatever it was they both came and laid their offerings in front of the Lord. Also we do not know why Cain’s offering was “not regarded”. We do know that later sacrifices to the Lord God involved the shedding of blood as in Genesis 8, verses 20 – 22. (see Hebrews 9, verse 22). The comment from the Lord God himself in verses 6 – 7 implies that Cain had come to present his offering in the wrong frame of mind. See Matthew 5, verses 21 – 24 for the words of our Lord Jesus Christ on the subject. The disregard of the Lord God for the offering stirs up the resentment and anger in Cain towards his brother. Sin is already present, crouching like a savage beast in the doorway ready to leap in and take over the personality of the sinner. It must be met and rejected by an effort of will.

The killing and the sentence laid on the guilty, chapter 4, verses 8 – 14:- Cain waited until “*they were in the field*” to ensure that there were no witnesses! Was it deliberately planned as the words “*Let us go out into the field*” implies? – note that these words are not in the Masoretic Text. Or did they meet up, argue and Cain lost his temper? When confronted by the Lord God he denies all knowledge of the event! The cry “*am I my brother’s keeper?*” has been used as an excuse down the ages. There is no hiding from the Lord God! As a commentary on this it is worth spending a short time reading Hebrews chapter 12, verses 12 – 28. The curse pronounced involved banishment from food producing soil to the unproductive desert. The ground which Cain had contaminated with his brother’s blood was now put beyond his reach. The word for fugitive carries the idea of a staggering, stumbling search for satisfaction. Cain appears to be far more concerned about the consequences of his punishment than with the sin which caused it. He cries out “how can I bear this exile, everyone will know what I have done and will want to kill me!” He felt that he would be banished away from the influence and care of the Lord God and killed by anyone seeking revenge for the killing of Abel.

Cain’s banishment, chapter 4, verses 15 – 16:- The “Mark of Cain” is not that he was designated a murderer but rather the mark of God’s protection. He was not to be harmed and was still a recipient of the love and care of the Lord God. Cain himself seems to have made the move to go “*away from the presence of the Lord*”. He became a wanderer dwelling in the land of Nod. “Nod” translates as “wandering”.

The descendants of Cain, chapter 4, verses 17 – 24:- There is no Biblical record of the marriage of Abel. The only son of Cain recorded here is Enoch (not to be confused with the Enoch of Genesis 5, verses 18 – 24 and Jude verse 11). The population was large enough at the time of Enoch to support a “city” - maybe a fortified hill-top. In verse 20 we have the founder of the Bedouin race (Jabal). The outcome of the sin of Cain is one of dissent, murder and revenge killing – verses 23 – 24.

The Godly line restored, chapter 4, verses 25 – 26:- The name “Seth” is similar to the Hebrew word for “appointed” or “set”. He was the one set or appointed to take up the work and mission of Abel. Cain had forfeited his role and Seth was to take up the responsibility and privilege. The chapter ends on a positive note - “*At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord*”!

From the Godly line of Seth came our Lord Jesus Christ – see Luke chapter 3, verses 37 – 38.
See also 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 20 – 22 and verses 45 – 49.

*Praise to the Holiest in the height,
and in the depth be praise:
in all his words most wonderful,
most sure in all his ways.*

*O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
a second Adam to the fight
and to the rescue came.*

John Henry Newman 1865