

Session 1

October 13, 2024

CAIN AND ABEL: FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

Genesis 4:1-12

Here's an age-old question murmured by parents everywhere: How can the same family, with the same parents, the same habits, the same values, the same upbringing, the same "everything" produce such different children? That's one of life's greatest mysteries, greatest delights, and greatest disappointments...all wrapped up in one. I could no more answer that question as to explain how the same Jordan River feeds both the Sea of Galilee—which teems with life—as well as the Dead Sea—which has none.

In my mind, Genesis 3 is probably the saddest chapter in the Bible. And it wasn't long before the death of man spiritually expressed itself in the death of man physically. Is it not tragic that the very first murder was committed within the very first family? In this week's lesson, we see the peculiar (yet familiar) dynamics of a family making its way in a sin-stained world. The focus is on the two brothers.

Different interests (vv. 1-2). Cain and Abel had the privilege of being the first human offspring. Unfortunately, both had the misfortune of being born with a sin nature. Nevertheless, the boys apparently grew up under the tutelage of their God-fearing parents in relative peace, at least for a while. One of the pleasures of parenting is watching your children find their own path. Abel became a shepherd. This was a new profession, as up until then, Adam and Eve tended the garden without the raising of livestock. This choice of vocation is particularly interesting because the climate had not yet changed, which might result in the need for wool, nor were they eating meat. Both of those events came later as results of the flood (see Gen. 9) Could it be that the sheep were raised specifically for sacrifice? (Keep that thought in mind). Cain, like his father, tended the ground. But Cain, unlike his father, had to work the ground for food (see Gen. 3:17ff). Notice that neither profession is said to be better than the other. They are simply different paths, chosen by different people, with different interests and different desires. For reflection: *Thus far in the story, what applications can you make for your own family?*

Different attitudes (vv. 3-7). This part of the story is filled with important details yet is often misunderstood. From the narrative, we can see that worship was a part of their lives (v. 3). This means that Adam and Eve had taught their children well. Both young men knew what God required when it came to offerings (v. 7). It's very likely that Adam and Eve had settled very near the garden paradise they had been forced from. The boys would certainly have known that. Perhaps the garments of animal skins the Lord had provided (see Gen 3:21) were hung in the home as a reminder of both their sin against God and the need for sacrifice to atone for it. No doubt, both Cain and Abel brought the best they had produced. But only Abel's offering was accepted. Unfortunately, many believe Cain's offering of fruits and vegetables was rejected because of his poor attitude. But notice that his poor attitude came only *after* the offering was rejected! No, the reason for the rejection was because of the offering itself, not the one who made it. Only Abel's offering was the result of a blood sacrifice, and the boys knew, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin" (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22). For reflection: *Genesis is the book of firsts. In the first chapters, we see the first sin, the first sacrifice, the first*

act of worship, and the first murder...all in the same family. Do you see how the family is so central to God's purpose?

Different outcomes (vv. 10-12). The correct answer to Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a resounding "YES!" It's ironic that the first act of worship ended in the first shedding of human blood. And religious wars have flourished ever since! Notice the consequences of Cain's actions. Eight times in these two verses, the words "you" or "yours" punctuate the Lord's condemnation. Cain would never again cultivate the ground that produced his faulty, bloodless offering, while Abel's blood cried out to the Lord, and, according to Hebrews 11:4, even now bears witness of his faith. For reflection: *Read Hebrews 12:24. How does the blood of Christ compare to that of Abel?*