

GENESIS 4-5 NOTES

CAIN & ABEL AND EARLY HUMANITY

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Cain & Abel (Genesis 4:1-15)

Naming of Cain & Abel

Naming things is important. And particularly in the culture surrounding the Bible, names were seen as expressing essence (*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*). In the Bible, you'll often see names given to people based on characteristics, circumstances, or how God has acted. We've seen this somewhat already in the naming of Eve (Genesis 3:20), and it occurs again for people like Abraham (Genesis 17:5) and even Jesus (Matthew 1:21). But with the birth of Cain, we see the first real instance of this concept being applied to the naming of children.

Cain or "qayin" (<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/7014.htm>) is similar to the word "qanah" (<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/7069.htm>) meaning "get" or "acquire", hence Eve mentioning that she has "gotten a man with the help of the LORD."

No such explicit meaning is given in connection to Abel's name. However, it is interesting to note that his name is similar to the word "hebel" (<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/1892.htm>), which can mean "vapor", "breath", or "vanity".

Note that connections of these names to other words is not definitive - they certainly make things more interesting from a literary perspective, but there's also possibilities of them having connections to words from other Semitic languages (*Lexham Bible Guide: Genesis 1-11*).

Regardless, Eve was likely aware of the prophecy from God in Genesis 3:15 about an "offspring" or "seed" coming through the woman to provide a fatal head blow to the serpent. While all of the specifics of this prophecy (referring to Jesus) were likely not fully understood, the hope that such an offspring could bring may account for the name Cain (if he was her first male child) and more generally could be a cause of joy/excitement for births from future women.

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Offerings

When we get to Genesis 4:3-4, we see that Cain & Abel both bring offerings to God. But Abel and his offering are “accepted” (verse 4) while Cain and his offering are not (verse 5). The word for “regard” here (<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/8159.htm>) also has connotations of “gazing toward” or “paying attention to”, hence the common interpretation of this indicating “acceptance” of an offering.

A common question asked of this section is...Why was one offering accepted but not the other?

Some have theorized the following specific reasons for why Abel’s offering was accepted but Cain’s was rejected:

- Nature of the offerings
 - Both Cain and Abel bring offerings related to their vocations, and various possibilities have been attached to each side.
 - For example, Cain brings a sacrifice of the fruit of the ground, which was cursed in Genesis 3:17, whereas Abel brought a blood sacrifice (which may have connections to the clothing made from animal skins in Genesis 3:21 or the connection to blood required for the forgiveness of sins as mentioned in Hebrews 9:22). However, other types of non-blood offerings (fruit, grain, etc.) are later accepted as part of Israelite Law (Exodus 23:19, Leviticus 2:1, Deuteronomy 26:2).
 - Another argument is that Abel brought the “best” or “highest quality” from what he had (hence the mentioning of the “first” or “fat” portions in Genesis 4:4). No such words are attached to the description of Cain’s offering (Genesis 4:3).
 - It’s possible that some of this was revealed by God more explicitly to Cain/Abel (or indirectly from their parents), but we don’t have an explicit record of this.
- God’s choice
 - This idea is based on God having free will and the ability to choose (for example, God graciously choosing the Israelites - Deuteronomy 7:7-8; or the more general principle described in Exodus 33:19).
 - When contemplating this idea, two questions to possibly consider:
 - Did God have to accept *any* offerings?
 - If there was an internal issue with Cain, what if God’s rejection of the offering (and then later questioning) an attempt to push Cain toward righteousness?
- Something about the internal heart state of the Cain/Abel
 - Specifics on this vary by commentator, but we’ll touch on some related ideas next.

*See the following for some additional commentary on these offerings:

- *Lexham Bible Guide: Genesis 1-11*
- *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*
- *The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation*
- *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1-11*

However, the text doesn’t say much to give us a clear answer to such a question (at least at the level of specificity that people often want). But it does give us at least a little hint in verse 7:

*If you **do what is right**, will you not be accepted? But if you **do not do what is right**, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it. - Genesis 4:7 (NIV)*

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The Hebrew word here for “right” or “well” is “yatab” (<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/3190.htm>). So in what God is saying here, there’s some indication that something in what Cain was doing (either related to this direct offering or something else) was not being done in an upright manner.

If we turn over to Hebrews 11:4, we read:

***By faith** Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. - Hebrews 11:4 (ESV)*

Here we learn that Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice *by faith* (and presumably, Cain’s offering was not by faith or lacking in some similar way, although this specific text doesn’t explicitly say that). Now, what might the author of Hebrews have in mind when writing about “faith” here?

If we look at Hebrews 11:1, we see a connection to *things unseen* (with confidence, assurance, conviction). And if we go a little further to Hebrews 11:6, we see that faith is *necessary to please God*, pointing out that there must obviously be some belief that God exists *and* He rewards those who *earnestly seek Him*.

So it’s possible there may have been some issue in the faith in which Cain made his offering, even though we may not know the specifics. It’s also possible that some aspects of other theories may have played a part.

Regardless of the nature of the acceptance/rejection of the offerings, there’s something important we can learn from Cain’s response...

Cain’s Response

After Cain’s offering is rejected, Cain becomes angry and downcast (Genesis 4:5). God confronts him (Genesis 4:6-7), and Cain ends up killing his brother out in a field (Genesis 4:8).

Why did Cain kill Abel?

*“We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? **Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.**”*
- 1 John 3:12 (ESV)

If you look at the surrounding context (1 John 3:8-13), you can see the influence and nature of the devil being described. And in verse 13, we see that we are told to not be surprised when “the world” (being sinful and fallen) hates those who now get their nature from Christ. We have further confirmation from elsewhere in Scripture that those who live in darkness tend to love the darkness and hate the Light (John 3:19-21; Romans 1:18-32). So we see a natural tendency for evil to want to eliminate or suppress good.

See John 8:31-47 (specifically around verse 44) for more on the idea of being “of the evil one.”

Logically, what’s problematic about Cain’s response?

- Killing Abel doesn’t solve Cain’s problem.
- *If* we assume that Cain wanted his offering to be accepted by God, killing Abel does nothing to make Cain and his offering acceptable.

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NOTE: Note the beauty in how this is hinted at in God's question to Cain in verse 7 - it has nothing to do with Abel, only Cain.

NOTE: There is an assumption here that what Cain truly wants is to be accepted by God. That's reasonable based on a basic reading of the text. It's possible that Cain actually wanted something else (like looking better than Abel), but that isn't clearly indicated in the text. Still, it can be a useful question to consider...what do you actually want deep-down?

These problems reveal a lie that may be too common of a problem in our society regarding jealousy/envy:

A lie - Tearing someone down would automatically elevate you.

NOTE: This lie may be self-evident in many circumstances. However, there's at least one case where it may not be quite as obvious. For example, consider two businesses in competition. Wouldn't one business causing the other to go out of business potentially elevate the surviving business to greater profits, etc.? That can be a likely outcome. But take note of the perspective here and how it relates to the idea of one being elevated. If we attempt to take a more objective perspective, the destruction of one business doesn't change the state of the surviving business - on its own, it is still "equal" to its previous state and has the same inherent "quality". To actually elevate the business, it would need to do something else like create higher-quality products, etc.

How does sin bring out death in this situation? *Also see Romans 6:23

*"Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."
- James 1:15 (ESV)*

In addition to the eventual death of humans anyway from the fall (Genesis 3), there are 2 other ways that Cain's sinful response brings forth death:

- Death of Abel
- Fear of death for Cain (Genesis 4:14-15)

God's Response

We've covered much of Cain's response, but let's look at how God responds and interacts with Cain in this situation.

Note that God initially asks Cain questions multiple times (Genesis 4:6-7 and Genesis 4:9-10). This isn't something new - after sinning, God initially started by asking Adam and Eve questions (Genesis 3:9-13).

Why might God have initially started these interactions with questions?

We don't know for sure, but from reflecting on personal experiences, there's something that questions can do that other forms of communication or interaction might not do as well:

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- *Slow down reactionary impulses* - Questions invite reflection, which can slow down reactionary, rash decision making (which often doesn't play out well).
- *Open up deeper thought on reality of a situation* - Questions tend to be less threatening and thus may be more likely to prompt someone to re-evaluate a situation. This initiation of deeper reflection may require some time for another person to process things, which may lead them toward the truth and help point out flaws in certain thoughts or responses.

While opening with questions in every problematic situation may not be appropriate, there are certain situations where asking questions (and genuinely listening to responses) may be a useful tool.

Repercussions on Cain

Genesis 4:11-15

Cain chooses poorly (v. 3, 8-9)

God responds (v. 5a, 10-12)

Cain complains (v. 5b, 13-14)

God comforts (v. 6-7, 15)

x2

Cain doesn't relate well to God. God makes the issue clear to Cain and advises him on dealing with sin. He despises his brother because his own offering is below expectation.

He criticizes God's punishment for his murdering of his brother.

God ensures Cain's life but there is no appreciation for it from Cain given.

Cain is continuing in a pattern of disobedience, disrespect, and arrogance.

Cain is so broken that he cares not about being sent from God's presence but about the preservation of his life.

What is life without seeking the presence of God?

Cain sets a precedence for vengeance in his family that is held in high honor and ensure that dealings with this family will be deadly (v24). This is the 7th generation being listed. We see the family holding something so dear that is in direct defiance of Jesus's teaching later on (Matt 18:22, forgiveness, 77 times). Interesting consideration: Exodus 34:7 discusses the generational curse for 3-4 generation. Cain's lineage: Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methusael. Lamech would be the fifth generation and *if* the family was suffering in a generational curse (Possibility? Maybe. Lamech has three sons, one of whom becomes the father of the nomadic herdsman when in reality, Cain was the first nomadic herdsman because of the curse. The other two sons also become "fathers" to metal workers and musicians. Apparently, no one is returning to Cain's original work- tending the land as his father [Adam] did.) This is intensely interesting because God had cursed Adam in a similar way. With each response to man, and each generation, God's response seems to intensify.

Adam- The ground is cursed and he will have to work hard for his bread. (Genesis 3:17-19)

Cain- The ground will never again give you yield. (Genesis 4:11-12)

Mankind- His Spirit will not remain with mankind forever. (Genesis 6:2)

Mankind- He will wipe everyone from the earth. (Genesis 6:7)

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God marked Cain to protect Cain from others seeking revenge. Was this a likely possibility? We don't know. We do know that Cain thought in this way given how he killed his brother so it makes sense he would expect this of his brother. Whether God thought Cain's concern was reasonable or not, He still addressed Cain's concern. He asks for nothing more from Cain. He doesn't ask for a relationship. He simply allows Cain to live away from His sight. God also marks in protection in Revelations the 144,000, tells the Jews in the Exodus of Egypt that the redemption of the firstborn sons was like a symbol on their foreheads, and tells the Jews in Deuteronomy to mark their heads with his commands.

Descendants from Cain (Genesis 4:16-24)

Cain leaves and goes to the land of Nod (of which the root word means "wandering" - <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/5110.htm>). From here, he starts a family.

Where did Cain's wife come from? Thus far, we've only really heard of 4 specific humans - Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel. We aren't told exactly. However, there are some other hints in the text as to where his wife came from. From Cain's concern about being killed by other people (Genesis 4:14), it seems clear that other people existed on the earth. And if we turn to Genesis 5:4, we clearly see that Adam had other sons and daughters. Given that Cain & Abel must have been old enough to work in their occupations and for Cain to kill Abel, there would be ample time for Adam & Eve to have other children old enough to become a wife for Cain. This would mean that Cain's wife was one of Adam's other descendants.

We also see that Cain starts a city (Genesis 4:17). And from this and his other descendants, we can start to see some specifics of early human civilization and diversity in different pursuits.

Finally, before moving on, note the progression of sin thus far. We've gone from disobedience in eating some fruit (Genesis 3) to murder (Genesis 4:8) to polygamy (Genesis 4:19) to seemingly "bragging" for murder and vowing vengeance (Genesis 4:23-24) (and all without any explicit reference to temptation from Satan). Keep this in mind as we get to the flood in Genesis 6.

Calling Upon the Name of the LORD (Genesis 4:25-26)

After some time, we see that Adam and Eve have a son named Seth. He is seen as a replacement for Abel, and his name is similar to a word that can mean "appoint" (<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/7896.htm>).

Seth has a son, and it is described that people began to "call upon the name of the LORD" at that time (a similar phrase is used in places like Genesis 12:8, 13:4, 21:33, 26:25). This is typically understood as being indicative of worship and/or prayer, and while that certainly may be true, it's not necessarily an indication of a formal beginning of those things (we've seen communication with God plenty of times, and offerings as part of worship we just saw with Cain/Abel).

So why might the Bible be mentioning this here?

[Discussion Question: Why might people call on the name of the LORD?]

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It might serve as an indication that some people recognized a need and desire for God (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*), perhaps in a way not recognized and acted upon previously. Looking at the context of where this verse is placed within the narrative of Genesis, this could be a reasonable possibility.

Genealogy from Adam to Noah (Genesis 5)

We've seen a bit of genealogy in the second half of chapter 4, but now that we get to chapter 5, we see an even longer genealogy. Before getting into details of this specific genealogy, we'll briefly cover a few basic concepts.

For more information on genealogies in general and this specific genealogy in Genesis 5, see the following sources:

- *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*
- *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*
- *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*
- *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*
- *Lexham Bible Guide: Genesis 1-11*

Different Types of Genealogies

There are two primary aspects by which we can start to classify genealogies in the Bible. The first has to do with the “diversity” of the family tree. A *segmented* genealogy is one that covers more than one branch in a family tree - in other words, it has more “horizontal breadth” by covering a wider number of relatives. A *linear* genealogy is more straightforward and narrow - rather than covering multiple branches in a family tree, it covers ancestry down through a specific line from an ancestor to a descendant, without branching out to other relatives.

The second way we can classify a genealogy is whether it is “open” or “closed”. An *open* genealogy is one that has gaps in it or is otherwise incomplete in some way. A *closed* genealogy is one without any gaps in it - in other words, no descendants are missing (at least in the direct line; siblings may be omitted) from start to finish. In some cases with open genealogies, the gaps may be due to a particular name referring to a group of people with a common ancestor, or phrases like “son of” may more generically indicate “descendant of”.

Cultural Importance of Genealogies

In cultures like Israel, genealogies could serve several important purposes, often organizational, relational, or political. For example, genealogies were useful for ensuring appropriate land allocation among the 12 tribes of Israel, and genealogies can help validate the legitimacy of someone in a particular role (such as Jesus being descended from the earthly line of David).

Genealogies Serving a Narrative Purpose

Finally, genealogies presented in the Bible typically have a particular narrative focus or purpose, which means they may not always need to aim at presenting a 100% complete historical record of every person included in a family line. It's important to look for the particular narrative purpose as it may help us understand the message

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the Bible is trying to communicate. The particular narrative role a genealogy is intended to perform may have led to it being presented in a particular way.

Looking at the Genesis 5 Genealogy

So...looking at Genesis 5, what can we learn about and from this genealogy?

First, it seems to be quite linear - it starts with Adam, created by God, and then goes straight down to Noah. While “other sons and daughters” are mentioned, the specific names of those additional children aren’t mentioned. Only after we reach Noah at the end do we see a mention of the names of his 3 specific sons.

Second, a question that may come up with respect to this genealogy is that it may seem odd to see so many people for living so long - the concept is foreign to us in experience, where the oldest known people in recent history only have lived a little over 100 years. This concept (along with the other debate about the exact age of the earth) has led to debate over whether this genealogy is “open” (incomplete) or “closed” (complete). The common points for this genealogy being either open or closed are summarized in the table below:

Closed	Open
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mentioning of specific people, sons, and ages.• Precedence for longer lifespans in the Sumerian King List.• There’s suggestion/record later in Genesis that the typical lifespans of people were shortened, and theories (i.e. “canopy theory” related to the flood) have been proposed to regarding how this might work.• If you tried to add in additional people, the lifespans of certain people mentioned in the genealogy would suggest they survived the flood (Genesis 6-9) despite not being on the ark (i.e. using the Masoretic Text numbers, Methuselah, the last surviving person before Noah, dies within the same year of the flood).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other genealogies in the Bible are known to have gaps (i.e. Matthew 1’s genealogy has some gaps, largely due to numerical purpose/features in number of people/placement, and the Genesis 5 genealogy may have certain similar numeric features).• Long lifespans would be unexpected when compared with current lifespans, suggesting the lifespans may reflect multiple actual people.• The total number of years from Adam (creation of man) would support an earth younger than typical dating from other sources (typical young vs. old earth creation debate).

Also, note that the Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Samaritan Pentateuch offer some slightly different numbers for the years/ages of these people (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genealogies_of_Genesis#Genesis_numbers).

Regardless of whether this particular genealogy in Genesis 5 is open or closed, it’s inserted here for some purpose. What might that purpose be?

Primarily, from a narrative perspective, it serves to bridge the gap from Cain/Abel/Seth (or even back to Adam) to Noah. This connects two major stories in Genesis - Adam/Eve and their children to the next major story of Noah and the flood. It shows clearly that people did exist in-between these stories and that their lives mattered.

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A secondary purpose this genealogy might serve is to show that one of the effects of sin - death - still held sway (Romans 5:14) over people. This is hinted at by the repetition of “and he died” for everyone listed (except for Enoch). The final victory hinted at in Genesis 3:15 had not yet come.

Enoch

Enoch, mentioned in verse 21-24, is a unique exception to the pattern of death described in the Genesis 5 genealogy. Enoch is described as *walking with God*, and then “he was not, for God took him”. We see this described again in Hebrews 11:5 - Enoch was taken up to heaven such that he would not see death, and even before this he pleased God.

The idea of “walking with God” denotes a close relationship of man with God. Other phrases are used at other times in the Bible to describe close relationships with God, but this specific phrase is only applied to Enoch and Noah.

The concept of walking with God is echoed elsewhere in the Bible - we are exhorted to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8) and walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

Some parting questions to ponder:

- Would you be known as one who “walks with God”?
- Do you truly desire to walk with God out of love and joy, valuing the relationship and seeking to know Him more and more?