

GNITN

It's Okay to Ask: Big Questions, Biblical Answers

Week Three

Falling, Failing, and the Father's Faithfulness

X Marks The Spot

One of the questions was about the mark of Cain. It refers to this portion of the book of **Genesis**: *Cain replied to the Lord, "My punishment[d] is too great for me to bear! 14 You have banished me from the land and from your presence; you have made me a homeless wanderer. Anyone who finds me will kill me!" 15 The Lord replied, "No, for I will give a sevenfold punishment to anyone who kills you." Then the Lord put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him.*

(Gen 4:13-15, NLT)

Quite a few views of Cain's mark isn't specifically given to us but some very poor views of it have led to very bad actions. Here is how an [article](#) from [gotquestions.org](#) explains Cain's mark: *In the past, many believed the mark on Cain to be dark skin—that God changed the color of Cain's skin to black in order to identify him. Since Cain also received a curse, the belief that the mark was black skin caused many to believe that people of dark skin were cursed. Many used the "mark of Cain" teaching as a justification for the African slave trade and discrimination against people with black/dark skin. This interpretation of the mark of Cain is completely unbiblical. Nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures is 'owth used to refer to skin color. The curse on Cain in Genesis chapter 4 was on Cain himself. Nothing is said of Cain's curse being passed on to his descendants. There is absolutely no biblical basis to claim that Cain's descendants had dark skin. Further, unless one of Noah's sons' wives was a descendant of Cain (possible but unlikely), Cain's line was terminated by the Flood.*

In another [article](#), this one from [carm.org](#), we get more information about this mark:

The Bible does not specifically tell us what the mark of Cain was. Scripture gives no description of its form or nature. Because of this, we cannot say for certain whether it was physical, visible, or symbolic. The Hebrew word used for "mark" in Genesis 4:15 is תָּחָה ('ōth), which generally means token, mark, banner, or pledge (Strong, James. 1995. In Enhanced Strong's Lexicon. Woodside Bible Fellowship.) It does not necessarily refer to a literal marking on the skin, though it can. For example, the same word is used in Exodus 12:13 to describe the blood of the Passover lamb placed on the doorposts as a "sign" ('ōth). In Numbers 2:2, it refers to "banners of their fathers' households." In Isaiah 44:25, it is about "the omens of boasters." So, it has a wide semantic domain (range of meanings).

The Main Thing

This article tells us to not miss the main reason for the mark. As I've heard from many a wise teacher, context is king:

In Cain's case, the mark was given so that others would not kill him (Gen. 4:15). This is significant because it shows the mark was not a curse, but rather an act of divine protection in the midst of judgment. Was this mark visible to all? We do not know. But God had pronounced punishment of banishment and wandering on Cain for murdering his brother Abel. Yet He also promised to guard Cain's life from vengeance. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that this

“mark” was some form of outward sign recognizable to others, deterring them from harming him. However, the exact nature of that sign remains unknown.

So if you can see it which is highly likely, the reason is more of a sign and evidence of God’s divine protection:

Another biblical passage that uses similar imagery is Ezekiel 9:4, where the Lord commands a man to place a mark on the foreheads of those grieving over Jerusalem’s abominations. In both instances, the mark signifies God’s recognition and protection. This is very interesting. Why would God want to protect Cain from being killed? The Bible doesn’t say.

Overall, here are some of the ideas given for what the mark actually was:

Proposed ideas regarding the Mark of Cain

Cain’s mark was black skin

Cain’s mark was a horn

Cain’s mark was a blockage or tattoo-type thing on the skin

Cain’s mark was demonic possession

These theories have been proposed, but none of them can be demonstrated to be biblically true.

Here’s what we know. The mark was used to protect Cain from being killed like he did to his brother Abel. God must have wanted Cain to live for some purpose and it worked. What it was isn’t known but what is known is that it somehow worked. But we also know that it was used by bad people who had bad intentions as we read this from the gotquestions.org article:

What was the mark that God put on Cain? The Bible does not say. The meaning of the mark, that Cain was not to be killed, was more important than the nature of the mark itself. Whatever the mark was, it had no connection to skin color or a generational curse on the descendants of Cain. To use the mark on Cain as an excuse for racism or discrimination is absolutely unbiblical.

God’s Will

A few questions came up that can be addressed by the differences between predestination and free will. One question asked this:

If God knows our lives before we’re born and knows we will reject Him, why does He allow us to be born since He doesn’t want anyone to perish?

Another one asked this:

Billions of people have died without hearing the gospel. How are they judged? Conscience? Creation?

And another one asked this:

Can we change God’s mind through prayer?

All three of them actually can be answered by understanding God’s desire for mankind and our part in it playing out. We need to understand some basics first. God created man to love Him. But He also didn’t want that love to be commanded or programmed so it had to happen. I like how an [article](#) from *Bible Hub* explains free will:

Free will refers to the God-given ability for individuals to make genuine choices, rather than responding solely to external compulsion or predetermined necessity. Within the Scriptures, humanity’s capacity to choose emerges early. After forming human beings in His image ([Genesis 1:26-27](#)), God grants them moral responsibility in the Garden of Eden:

“Then the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die.’”

([Genesis 2:16-17](#))

This foundational passage exhibits the opening scenario in which free will operates: the ability to obey God freely-or disobey-carries both moral depth and potential consequences.

The Bible And Free Will

While these verses don’t specifically spell out that we have free will they do strongly imply it as we got back to the *Bible Hub* article:

Throughout Scripture, numerous verses affirm that people actively choose their path, underscoring moral agency:

- [Joshua 24:15](#): *“But if it is displeasing in your sight to serve the LORD, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*

- [Deuteronomy 30:19](#): *“I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, so that you and your descendants may live.”*

Such appeals reveal that individuals are not mere puppets but active decision-makers, granting weight to moral commands and the love-based relationship God extends.

And God wants us to love Him freely:

Free will also fosters authentic worship. If worship were forced or inevitable, it would be robbed of sincerity. Instead, Scripture presents devotion as a conscious, volitional act. The call to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”

([Deuteronomy 6:5](#)) presupposes a genuine decision, a supreme love that cannot be merely programmed. Likewise, love itself requires an openness of choice. Jesus summarizes the greatest commandments as love for God and neighbor ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)). Enforced loyalty yields no true love; only by affording individuals a genuine choice can there be authentic devotion and relationship. First [John 4:19](#) eventually explains that “We love because He first loved us,” suggesting a responsive affection rather than reflex compliance.

Free Will And Accountability

Even though God knows ahead of time what we will do with that free will, He still gives it to us. But we will be held accountable for what we do with it:

Another key reason for granting free will is the formation of moral responsibility. One cannot speak of wrongdoing or righteousness if no alternate path exists:

- [Romans 3:23](#) states, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

- [Romans 14:12](#) adds, *“So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”*

While God foreknows all choices ([Isaiah 46:9-10](#)), the biblical record remains consistent in portraying human accountability for those choices. Judgment, reward, discipline, repentance-these biblical themes all assume an underlying capacity to choose, an independence that demands both moral and spiritual responsibility.

So the question “If God knows our lives before we’re born and knows we will reject Him, why does He allow us to be born since He doesn’t want anyone to perish?” can be addressed by allowing people to have children by using their free will that He knows by foreknowledge will

result in a child that will not love Him and serve Him, but that's ok. He'd rather give the free will overall than for people to not choose to love Him in the bigger scheme of things.

A Tricky Question

Going back to the question of “*Billions of people have died without hearing the gospel. How are they judged? Conscience? Creation?*” we can't make the presumption that they actually died without knowing the gospel. And the last part of the question actually helps answer the how of the preaching of the gospel. Conscience and creation are ways that people know the gospel because he put eternity in our hearts to drive us to find out why we feel there is a God as we see in this [gotquestions.org article](#):

A better possibility, and the one that is the typical interpretation, is that olam refers to God's placing an eternal longing or sense of eternity in the human heart. Taking this understanding to be the correct one, [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#) affirms the idea that humans operate in a different way than other forms of life. We have a sense of eternity in our lives; we possess an innate knowledge that there is something more to life than what we can see and experience in the here and now.

The process then is this eternity longing causes us to use our conscience which affirms there is a God. The proof can come from the preaching of the salvation or it can come from creation as Paul tells us in [Romans 1:20](#) this:

For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. (NLT)

God's desire is that no one perish as we see in this verse:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ([2 Peter 3:9, NIV](#))

So putting it all together the answer is He does give everyone at least one clear chance to be saved before they die.

And About Praying

The last question, “*Can we change God's mind through prayer?*” can be difficult to understand, but not impossible. Free will allows us to pray and we are encouraged to pray. But if He already knows how it will turn out long before we were born then why go through the process, right?

While He knows how things will turn out the simplest answer is that prayer changes us, not God. And praying shows that we trust God to work within the confines of time which He of course is outside of and created. Add in that free will thing and you can easily see that even though the answer will be the same, the process is just as important. An [article](#) from [compellingtruth.org](#) puts it this way:

Prayer is how we communicate with God. Through prayer God reveals His character to us. We learn that He loves us and wants what is best for us. He knows our needs and our wants and already has a plan to fulfill them. He imparts wisdom to us and speaks truth to us. Little by little He transforms our hearts so that our will becomes His will. Prayer does change things. God is omniscient and sovereign. His mind does not change. But God does use prayer as part of carrying out His will. He uses it to change us, and He uses it to draw our attention to His participation in circumstances. Prayer is mysterious in many ways, but it is a privilege gifted to us by God, through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, so that we can communicate with Him and participate in His work in the world.