

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY APRIL 27, 2025
GENESIS 4:1-16

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TENSION, SADNESS, COMFORT AND HOPE



I'm learning a lot as I study and teach Genesis, and mistakes are a crucial part of my learning. And now that we are four months into Genesis I have reflected, listened and discussed with others how my sermons could be better. One of the things that I would do differently teaching Genesis the next time, would be to make a statement about Genesis up front so you know where I stand, where I am coming from regarding creation. So here it is - I do believe that Genesis is real history, and seven days are seven days - and what is described did happen. That being said, I also want us to learn from historical language perspective. This gives us insight into what the authors were intending to communicate beyond the formation of the world. It is a big, broad, beautiful story of not only that we were created, but why. Genesis was written to tell the first readers/listeners and the rest of the world about who the one true God is, that He is the Creator, that he is compassionate, merciful, loving, faithful, true and just, and savior. And this relational LORD God wants meaningful relationship with his prize creation, which is you and I. That's the main story of Genesis. My teaching from Genesis emphasizes the story of who God is and his offer of a relationship with mankind. That is the beginning, and its essential to the story. If you would like to discuss any of this further please call Pastor Dan.

Today we will be exploring the role of tension, sadness, comfort and hope in the Cain and Abel narrative. In this narrative we will explore the obvious tension between Cain and Abel, and then explore the loud tension between Cain and God. And despite what Cain does, will see that God stays near Cain, giving grace, mercy, comfort and hope.

This passage is fraught with tension - and the tension and the outcomes of the tension in this passage makes my heart hurt, I feel very sad reading this passage. I don't like tension - I am "tension avoidant" - and because "tension" often results in sadness, "tension" then often makes me anxious.

There was tension in our house between my two older brothers who were the first and second born of our family - I was the last. The 2nd oldest is the one who passed away unexpectedly last October. Because I was younger, the tension was there pretty much as long as I can remember.

The tension wasn't comfortable – my brothers were very different and their differences were glaring and strong. I, the youngest, was often the one between them. My oldest brother pursued sports and academics, history and politics. He would drill me on the late 70's Pirates starting lineup, position by position. First base -Willie "Pops" Stargel, Pitcher- John Candelaria, Right field -Dave Parker, a few names I remember to this day. My second oldest brother was into musical instruments, flying model planes, crazy bike riding and other risk taking adventures that ended in scrapes, cuts, bruises – loads of fun and often humiliation. Academics and he parted ways a long... well, maybe they were never together.

My brothers were very different, and often I was pulled between them. "Hey Duane – lets go practice pitching" – the oldest would tell me! "Hey Duane – were going to go fly planes" – the 2nd oldest would tell me. Tension. And there was tension between them and my dad too. I would watch them both have normal parent child conflict with my dad – and see that repeat over and over, and think to myself – "that's dumb!" So I learned from watching my brothers mistakes how to avoid conflict with my dad as well. As we all aged, it brought comfort to know that my brothers became good friends as adults and learned to cherish each other. Sadly, that's not the case with the two brothers in our passage today. Where my family gelled and became closer, where differences were accepted and appreciated, Adam and Eve's family blew apart.

As we step into the "tension and sadness" from this passage and search for the hope and comfort. My heart wants to jump straight to the "hope and comfort" part, but to get there we have to walk the journey of "tension and sadness". And to do that we also have to deal with the reality of sin and sin's messiness and deadly consequences. So, I invite you to step into the tension and sadness of this story with me for a time.

Genesis 4:1 though, begins with something positive – sex. Sex is part of God's brilliant design for marriage relationships and it also helps with being fruitful and multiplying – which the LORD God blessed.

Because of God's blessing, the sexual relations resulted in the birth of a baby. This birth – "new life", patterned after the new life God created in Gen one, would of course have been welcomed.

Think of what Adam and Eve experienced prior to baby Cain. Adam and Eve, because of their sin, were exiled from the garden into a "harder to survive" environment that affected their entire life. Their sin and exile affected their relationship, their crops, animals, and family. So to have a baby, "new life" that brings hope after tension and loss, and then have another new baby soon after the first - would have been a joy, and that joy comes with hope. These two gifts of babies are gifts from the LORD. The beautiful babies also came with a sin nature – they were born into a fallen world.

Let's look at **verses 1-2**. Naming of children in ancient Hebrew culture was not just giving a name, rather names also described the person. Names answered more than just "who are you" they also answered the question, "what are you?"

And so the names Eve gives her sons are informative to the story line. "Cain" – literally means "smith", as in metal worker – which is what we see later in Cain's lineage in "Tubal Cain" in **4:22** – one who forged or created tools of metal. But Cain's name also is a word play.. it sounds very similar to the Hebrew word translated as "produced" or "created" that Eve used in v2 "I have produced (created) a man".

CAIN

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ABEL

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“Abel’s name literally means “vapor/ mist” or “puff of air” implying “fleeting”. Most associate Abel’s name with his fleeting life span. “Abel” is the same Hebrew word (hevel) translated as “meaningless or vanity” in the book of Ecclesiastes. **Ecclesiastes 1:2**

Now back in **Genesis 4:2**, there is a timespan between the beginning of **verse 2** and the end of **verse 2** – it could be many, many years. Cain and Abel go from babies to adults. How many years pass? It doesn’t say. The number of years could be as long as it takes for the boys to grow up and become either a farmer or a shepherd, neither job would require full maturity. But the timespan could also longer. The text does not tell us.

Nor does the text tell us that Cain and Abel’s offerings to the LORD in (**verses 3-4**) was the first time they brought offerings to the LORD. It could be the first time, but also could be the 100th time. (This is a lesson for all of us to be careful that we don’t read things into the text that aren’t there)

In **verses 3-4** There are several interesting things to note about the offerings. First, these offerings appear to have been “offerings of thankfulness or peace offerings”. And since these were offerings, both animal and crops were acceptable as offerings according to later text in Leviticus. So the popular interpretation that Cain’s offering was rejected because it should have been an animal sacrifice, with shed blood, is incorrect because this was an offering, not a sacrifice.

Second is that the descriptive words used to describe the offerings that Cain and Abel each brought to the LORD reveal contrast each brother’s value of the offering, and therefore their value of the LORD. Of Cain’s offering of crops it simply says in **verse 3**

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“some of his crops”. Of Abel’s offering in v4 it says “the best of the firstborn”. “The best of the firstborn” delineates the value of the offering using the words “the best of” and “firstborn”. Where the text seems to imply that Cain picked any old crop as an offering, Abel brought the “best of” or “choice parts” from a “first born” of his flock. In this interpretation,

Cain's offering of "some crop" perhaps shows Cain's low regard for the LORD - while Abel's offering of "best of" and "firstborn" shows Abel's high regard for the LORD.

There is also a popular interpretation of this passage - with applications for us today - as in **Proverbs 3:9 NIV** "honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops" - if we do give a offering of mediocre or low value to us, then perhaps we need to check our hearts because it may show how one regards the LORD. That interpretation seems important here to the Cain and Abel narrative.

However as important as that is, the author seems to be much more concerned with how Cain responds to God's rejection of Cain and his offering, than he is concerned with the difference in offerings. The end of **verses 4b-5** says "The LORD accepted READ (Ouch.. that seems harsh)...This made Cain very angry..dejected".

Anger is complicated. Here's what I have learned about myself over the years, when I'm angry. (and I'm a slow learner) Anger is a secondary emotion that hides and protects my primary emotions.



My primary emotions that fuel my anger are often:

1. I'm hurting, or embarrassed, or scared, or
2. I feel powerless or out of control because I'm out of options, or
3. I'm resentful of the options in front of me because I don't like them. I wonder what Cain was feeling? Maybe his pride was hurt? Maybe Cain was embarrassed that the second born found favor with God and he didn't?

Everyone has their own set of primary emotions that fuel their anger.. it serves us well to learn to identify and resolve ours, otherwise bad things can happen. **Psalms 37:8** warns about anger, and this really reflects what happened with Cain. READ The only way to stop being angry and turn from rage is to invite the LORD to help you with what emotions are fueling the anger and face them, and deal with those.

Now back in **Genesis 4** the LORD notices Cain's anger and dejection in **verse 6** and He asks Cain questions. A few thoughts on this: God is well aware of our emotions - he is aware of both what we feel on the inside and he is aware what emotions are displayed on outside. Second, Cain's anger and dejection didn't push God away - God embraced it. Third, what we feel on the inside is often evident by how we respond or react to things. **Matthew 12:34 NIV** says "for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of". If your internal world is a hot mess, your responses to people and circumstances will be reflective of that. Cain's internal world was in chaos... chaos that is tied to evil/sin. And God was trying to help him through it.

“

“FOR THE MOUTH SPEAKS
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Matthew 12:34 NIV

So to help Cain process those emotions before they led down a hurtful, sinful, evil path, the LORD asks Cain questions. When the LORD asks someone a question – it is almost always to help the person to be more honest or forthcoming with what they are thinking and feeling. This is God wanting to partner with Cain on dealing with his emotions. In my mind I picture the LORD lovingly sitting beside Cain on a log on the edge of Cain’s fields. The LORD is wanting to help Cain deal with his emotions in a helpful way- which is a beautiful picture to me. But the bigger picture is that the LORD is sitting with Cain and his emotions after the LORD rejected Cain and his offering.

In **verse 7** the LORD, gives Cain guidance on how to move forward bringing Cain to a choice. I’ve read this passage many times mostly with the interpretation that Cain’s choice here was to go back and bring to the LORD the correct offering. I now don’t think that is the choice the LORD is referring to here (although it could have resulted in that later). I think the choice the LORD is giving Cain is for Cain to do what is right despite all the anger and dejection he is feeling, which will result in him being accepted by the LORD? Or, for Cain to do what is wrong, give in to the pride and anger inside him, described in the text as the “sin that is crouching at your door” will overpower him. Sin that will hurt and destroy others, and maybe himself.

So what does it mean “to do what is right and be accepted by the LORD?” This is a question and a tension that we can all ponder – we will come back to that.

What does it mean “to do what is right
and be accepted by the LORD?”

Let’s continue on. **Verse 8** We know Cain’s choice of how he responded to the LORD’s rejection of him and his sacrifice – and his choice of killing his brother didn’t fall under the category of “do what is right” the LORD stated in the prior verse. Even without us defining yet what “do what is right” is, we know that premeditated murder was not it.

Cain’s wrong choice began with him deceiving his brother saying “let’s go out into the fields” - perhaps something they always did together, probably nothing that Abel would have been suspicious about.

But note here the subtle connection of what happens in the field to the serpent of the field from **Genesis 3**. In **Genesis 3:1 NKJV** and in the Hebrew identifies the serpent as a “beast of the field”. And in the field is where Cain killed Abel. So now we have Cain in the field – with evil intent and actions, just like the serpent of the field who had evil intent and actions. The serpent of the field sought to destroy in the garden what God had created, blessed and called good. And that is likewise what Cain in the field did, destroy what God had created, blessed and called good. And the result of Cain acting like the serpent, is that Abel is gone. Gone like Abel’s name means – “A puff of wind”... “vapor” that dissipates.

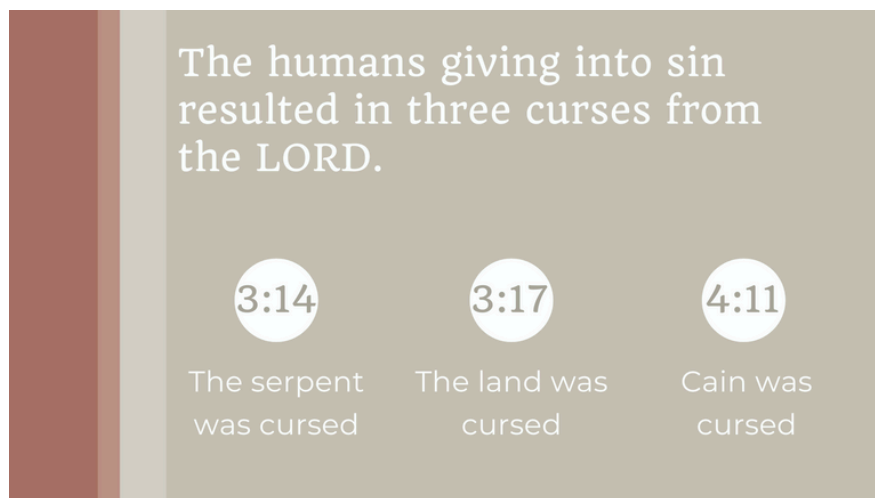
Of course God notices that Abel is gone and asks Cain (**verse 9**) “Where is your brother”? This is a similar question to what God asked Adam when he came looking for Adam in the garden in (**3:8**). Like in **Genesis 3** the question is not to find out where Abel is, but rather to express wonder and lament that Abel is not where God expected him to be. This very relational question by the LORD is an expression of grief and loss because Abel is gone.

And Cain responds with his famous line in **4:9b** - This is a lie (I don’t know) followed by an attempt to get God off his back – Am I my brother’s guardian? If you have a blood hound with a positive smell ID on something that the dog is trained to find – there is very little one can do to get the blood hound off the scent. That’s what Cain was attempting to do get the LORD off the scent that points to the truth about what Cain did. Of course it didn’t work – not for Cain, and not for us either.

In **verse 10** The LORD responds to Cain’s dishonesty with the same questions the LORD asked Eve “What have you done”? This is tense confrontation!

And note here in the phrase “his blood cries out to me from the ground”, it seems to imply that the LORD is acutely aware of bloodshed. The blood, which is the symbol of life, life that the LORD created, “calls out to him”. “Calling out” demands a response.

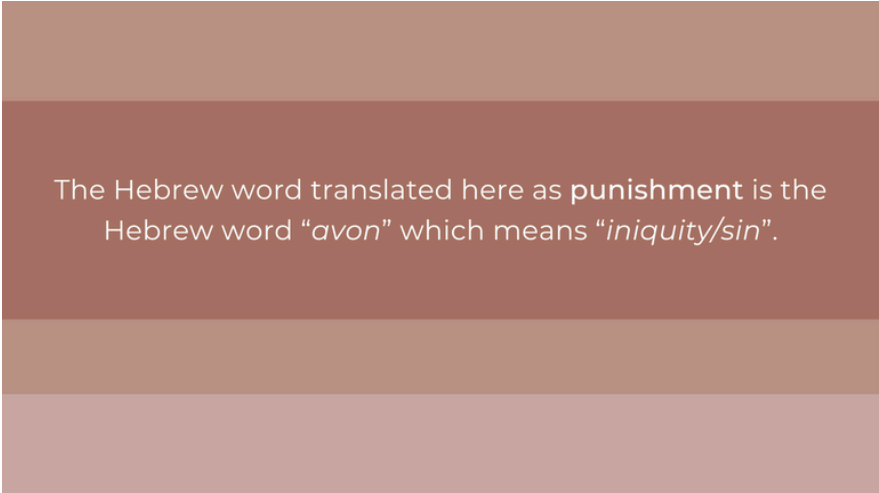
Here’s how the LORD responds to Abel’s blood calling out to him. **Verses 12-13**. How does the LORD respond? The LORD responds with mercy. So Adam and Eve and now Cain giving into sin resulted in three curses from the LORD.



The serpent was cursed (**3:14**), the land was cursed (**3:17**) and now Cain was cursed (**4:11**). And Cain’s curse involved the land being even less productive for him than the land was for him prior, and the curse resulted in Cain being a restless wanderer. That’s tough! Even though that curse was harsh, Cain killing Abel’s did not cost Cain his own life, which is what we see commanded in Old Testament law 2500 years later. That is God being merciful to Cain as God was merciful to Adam and Eve. Having consequences that are less than what you deserve is mercy.

Cain’s response to God’s punishment in **verses 13-14** appears to lack remorse and humility – and if that is true, then his pride blinded him from seeing God’s mercy, all Cain could see was loss.

There is though, another interpretation that sees Cain's response as repentant. The "Cain was repentant" interpretation has two arguments. First, the Hebrew word translated here as punishment is the Hebrew word "avon" which means "iniquity/sin". The NLT has that as a footnote. In that light, Cain's response would read, "My sin is too great for me to bear" which sounds like a repentant sinner at the foot of the cross. The second argument is that God responded to Cain with mercy by providing Cain a sevenfold protection. Why would God do that if Cain was not repentant?



The Hebrew word translated here as punishment is the Hebrew word "avon" which means "iniquity/sin".

Cain acknowledged his loss of the land, loss of the family protection, loss of blessing of relationship with God, all do to his sin, and in essence says – "Even though you did not take my life, left me without family protection, without land that produces, and without the blessing of relationship with God, I'm as good as dead". To which God responds with giving Cain a mark – an outward visible indicator of God's protection. Note: God gives Cain protection, not salvation, and Cain's lineage ends at the flood.

God's mercy and grace are evident. For Cain's Adam and Eve's parents, God shows tremendous grace and mercy despite their sin. It was mercy that they were not killed for their sin. They did not die physically in the moment, they were exiled instead, a different form of death – that was mercy. And it was in mercy and grace that God covered their nakedness representing sin, after they attempted to cover their nakedness. Yes their sin also resulted in increased pain in childbirth that was still mercy. Eve's womb was still open – they were still going to be able to have children. God could have closed her womb. But rather, he allowed them to have two baby boys, representing new life, joy, hope. – that was grace. And more, God gave them the hope of knowing that from Eve's womb would come the seed that would crush the head of the serpent. (**Genesis 3:15**) That is giving them hope and promise they didn't deserve.

And God in his faithfulness, also provided Cain, despite his horrific sin, with grace and mercy. These two stories are a foreshadowing of what the cross of Jesus offers – Mercy and Grace. In trusting in Jesus we don't receive the punishment of death for our sins we do deserve, and in trusting Jesus we receive the free salvation from the LORD we don't deserve.

Here are few more thoughts for your meditation and application.

1. In today's passage we saw that God walks with thru their emotional messiness, and God does so offering grace and mercy. Even though Cain made a huge mistake – God was still there for him – God still pursued him. God will always be there for you too. Your emotional messiness and sin does not push God away.

2nd. What does it mean "to do what is right and be accepted by the LORD?" What the LORD was looking for from Cain was humility. A humble person whose offering was rejected would ask for forgiveness, and ask the LORD what they need to do differently. Humility is the key. **James 4:6b** says "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

3rd. Cain's anger could have been resolved through a humble response to God. And with God's help – God giving his grace, Cain's anger could have disappeared quickly like vapor – what Abel's name means - vapor. Rather, Cain in his anger caused his brother Abel to disappear like vapor, gone from this world forever. Anger always takes or robs one of life in some way. With the LORDs help, I encourage you to resolve the primary emotions fueling anger you might have, and the anger, with God's grace, can soon dissipates – like vapor (Abel – hevel).

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

1. **The NET bible: NETBible.org.** This is a great study resource. The founder, Dan Wallace from Dallas Theological Seminary, is a leading textual critic. The NET bible and its study notes are his team's translation. He also has the website bible.org.

2. **In verses 1-2 we see that Eve does the child naming** – which may be surprising for some given the strong patriarchal society. There are other mom's in the Old Testament though who named their first sons as well.. Hagar named Ishmael – interesting that the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac are still in conflict to this day, with much blood poured out on the ground. However a mother naming their sons does not have to imply conflict, Rachel and Leah both named their sons, as did Hannah.

3. **Abel (Hevel) and “meaningless”.** Taking the background of what happens to Abel in **Genesis 4**, let's apply this perspective of Abel's abbreviated life to the word “meaningless” in **Ecclesiastes**. “Meaningless” could also then mean that the things that Solomon identifies as meaningless or vapor, may also shorten your life literally, or more likely, shorten your life from the abundant/plentiful life God intended you to have.

4 **Support for Cain and Abel being older.** In **verses 3 and 4** when Cain and Abel are bringing their offerings to the LORD the fact that they as sons are bringing their offering on their own, and not their father Adam bringing an offering for them, is also indicative of the boys later age. Cain and Abel each brining an offering indicates ownership of their own produce and animals which seems less likely to happen at a younger age. Also if they are older, and have children of their own, that would explain who Cain is afraid of that would be avenging Abel's death.

5 **How did Cain & Abel learn about offerings.** One of problems in the text is that is that the text doesn't tell us how Cain and Abel were instructed regarding bringing an offering to the LORD. The instructions in Leviticus were perhaps 2500 years later. Cain and Abel obviously did have instruction, we simply do not know the answer of how they were instructed.

6. **One final fun fact** here from **verse 16**.. the word “Nod” in Hebrew is the Hebrew word for “wandering” and it only occurs here in **4:16** in the whole bible. So the sentence literally says “Cain settled in the land of wandering east of Eden”.