

Forgotten Lives

Cain

Genesis 4:1-16

June 7, 2026 am

HDBC

Last week we started a new series called ***Forgotten Lives***. In it we will consider Bible people who are not frontline players. The ones on this list are second-tier at best, when it comes to name-recognition and in some cases are almost completely unknown. Onesiphorus, whom we considered last week falls into that latter category. Today's person is well-known but would not be found on a list of first-tier individuals. I'm speaking of ***Cain***, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve. In fact he has the distinction of being the first person to be the product of physical conception and birth.

He was evidence that Adam and Eve took seriously the command to ***multiply and fill the earth***.

I know Cain is not forgotten, but he is often overshadowed by his younger brother, Abel. Rightly so. However, I think I have often ignored Cain because I wanted to focus on Abel. So, today, let's give Cain his due, even though the ultimate assessment will be negative, not positive. We will look at the example of Cain not to be like him but to learn from him. The story is found in **Genesis 4:1-16**. We'll read it in a moment.

Chapter three ends with Adam and Eve being driven from the Garden of Eden and banished from the tree of life. The first era of their lives has come to an end because of their sin. But God was merciful and demonstrated from the early pages of Scripture that He is a God of fresh starts and new beginnings.

Genesis 4 opens with a new beginning for the couple. Yet even here we quickly see the devastating effects of the sin we read about in chapter 3. Though they were able to start fresh, they would experience the heartache and pain that their sin brought into creation. **Read the text.** Gen. 4:1-16

General Observations: Before we get to the outline

First, this is a **chapter of first things**.

First human births. First family. First family squabble. First worship wars. First case of the wicked persecuting the righteous. The first murder.

Second, the **focus of the narrative is on Cain and God**. Abel never even speaks. The only recorded words come from God and Cain.

Third, **Cain is only mentioned three other times in Scripture**. Each time it is in a negative context. In fact the New Testament presents Cain as the picture of a wicked person. Jude wrote of ungodly false teachers that they **walked the way of Cain**. So, in Cain we can learn some things about the characteristics of the wicked and the road that they take.

Now, let's work through the story under three headings.

1. The response of God to worshippers (1-5)

Cain was the firstborn son of Adam and Eve. Abel soon followed. Other children came later. One wonders how it was when these two brothers were growing up. Did they get along? We're not told.

Picture times of instruction around the fire at night. Stories told by parents of what it was like to walk with God. Of the terrible decision that they had made. Eventually the boys they grew to manhood. As with Jesus we know almost nothing about their childhood.

Cain became a farmer, like his dad. He worked the land. Grew crops. Was a man of the fields. Abel became a shepherd. They chose different career choices, but both boys had been well-taught. They knew about God, and that in order to come to God you brought an offering. **It was in the process of bringing an offering to the Lord that the story took a tragic turn.**

In very simple terms we learn that God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's. The text does not tell us why God accepted one and rejected the other. So, we have to look for clues in other parts of the Bible. Here are some possibilities based on those clues:

1) The nature of their offerings

Cain brought a fruit offering. Abel brought an animal sacrifice. Both were sacrificial gifts but only Abel's required a death. The Bible makes it clear that blood sacrifices were a key part of the process of pointing his people to the need for a savior who would come. That savior was Jesus. However, it is not clear whether or not the requirement was for an animal sacrifice at this time.

2) The quality of their offerings

Text indicates that Abel brought the *of **the firstborn***, which indicates that it was the good stuff. No mention of this made concerning Cain's.

3) The heart behind the offerings

The New Testament adds comment on this scene. Hebrews 11:4. *By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and **through faith**, though he is dead, he still speaks.*

Hebrews highlights the fact that Abel's offering was brought in faith. I think this was the primary difference. Cain was either going through the motions with no real heart, or he was trying to impress God with what he could do. Key was in the difference in their faith.

What do we learn at this point?

We come to God on His terms, not our terms.

God deserves our first and our best.

Acceptable worship must be grounded in genuine faith.

2. The aggressive nature of sin (5-8)

Notice God's warning in verse 7. He reveals an important truth about the **aggressive, destructive, predatory** nature of sin. He offered this warning because of Cain's unwise response to God's rejection of his offering. Note Cain's response. It went in two directions.

1) He was mad at God. (5-7)

When God refused to accept his offering, Cain responded in anger. He was embarrassed. So, he got angry! How could God do this?

He needed an attitude check, and God told him about it. God even gave Cain instructions for how to correct the situation. This can be corrected! There is a way out of this situation. I will guide you to that which pleases me.

You have a choice to make, Cain. If you make the right choice, things will be wonderful. But God warned Cain that sin was like an enemy crouching just outside the door waiting for an opportunity to spring in and bring disastrous results.

God personifies sin as an aggressive, predatory animal that seeks to devour its prey. **Crouching at the door** pictures a dangerous criminal hiding behind the door or a silent, yet deadly animal hiding in the bushes, ready to spring and kill.

2) He attacked and killed his brother. (8)

Interesting phrase. Cain told Abel. No record of Abel's response. Next thing we see is a murder. I suppose Abel reinforced what God had revealed to Cain, and he did not like it. He could not get to God, but Abel was flesh and blood. He was vulnerable. He was within reach.

So, Cain's anger toward God was vented in violence toward his brother. His anger led to jealousy, which led to murder.

John wrote of this murder. I John 3:10-12

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, {who} was of the evil one, and slew his

brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brothers' were righteous.

When God gives counsel, advice, direction, you have a choice. If you choose to reject God's plan you start down a road that makes you progressively more vulnerable to sin. Cain made a bad choice, and it led to bad action.

What do we learn at this point?

Unresolved sin against God . . .

. . . leads to anger and bitterness.

. . . leads to sin against others.

. . . removes the restraints that keep us from evil acts.

. . . results in an escalation of sin. Starts small, but grows big.

3. The grace and justice of God (9-16)

In God's response to the sin of Cain we see both the grace and justice of God. We see grace in God's gentle appeal to Cain. We see justice in God's ultimate punishment on Cain.

God is a God of justice and holiness. Sin must be dealt with. But rather than bring immediate judgment on Cain, God gave Cain an opportunity for confession and repentance.

1) Confrontation (9-10)

Second time we find God asking where someone is. *First, Adam.* Now God asked Cain where his brother is. *Again God seeking a confession.* Like Adam, Cain tried to dodge responsibility. He tried to hide the truth. To cover his sin. Note 3 things:

He lied (9) *I do not know.* This trait didn't take long to become a prominent part of sinful human nature.

He rejected responsibility (9) *Am I my brother's keeper?*

There is a little bit of Cain in many of us. We refuse to care about others.

He underestimated God's omniscience (10)

The voice of your brother's blood is crying out . . .

He thought he could fool God. No one can. It was time to confess. You can't hide. *The very ground* that you are cultivating, is crying out with Abel's blood. You cannot hide your sin.

2) Judgment (11-12)

He was *cursed from the ground*. Cain would no longer be able to effectively till and cultivate the ground. Therefore he would not be able to stay settled in one place. He would become a vagabond.

3) Mercy (13-15)

Even though Cain has murdered his brother and tried to cover his sin, God still offered an element of mercy. Cain expressed his fear that other people would learn of his crime and would take his life. So, the Lord put a protection on Cain; a sign. **We are not told what that sign was.** No need to speculate.

The important thing to note here is that Cain was banished from the presence of God. Note verse 16. The word **presence** is the Hebrew word for **face**. To be in the presence of one's face meant you were in a good relationship with that person. Nothing was coming between the two. But to be banished from God's face meant Cain would remain outside of God's favor and thus his salvation. I wish the story had a better ending. But it does not. And not because God failed, but because Cain refused to confess his sin and receive the mercy of God.

[What do we learn at this point?](#)

When God confronts us with our sin, it is best to confess.

When God offers mercy and forgiveness, it is best to accept them.

Reminders:

1. **We come to God on His terms, not ours.**

When it comes to worship that means with the right heart, with the right motive and with a genuine faith. No pride. No selfishness. No holding back. Giving Him our best.

When it comes to salvation that means coming only through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

2. **Unconfessed sin is dangerous and deadly.**

Unresolved sins fester and grow. If you ignore them, it will only get worse. Roach problem in kitchen or mole problem in back yard. If you allow sin to remain, it will grow larger and more deadly.

A man was camping in Colorado and watched an eagle hunting for prey, sweeping and soaring. Then, suddenly, the bird swooped down, grabbed an animal in its claws, and took off into the sky. As the man watched the eagle soaring higher toward its nest something surprising happened.

The eagle's wings suddenly flopped down and the eagle fell into a tailspin all the way to the ground. The man was so curious that he made his way toward the spot and found the dead eagle. Only then did he learn what had happened.

The eagle had snatched up a weasel for dinner. But in mid-flight the weasel found a vulnerable spot and bit into an artery on the eagle's neck. The eagle bled out and fell to its death. But it also took the weasel to its own death. What a picture this is of sin. We made welcome it in, assuming it is harmless, but it is deadly. To hang onto it will cost us dearly.

3. **When God offers grace, we should receive it immediately.**

Cain had opportunities. But he chose to reject them and walk his own road. And it was a road that led him away from the presence of God.