

Lesson 22

Cain and Abel

God knows our hearts.

Overview

Lesson Focus

God accepted Abel's offering but not Cain's because he knew what was in each of their hearts. God also knows what is in each of our hearts, and we cannot fool him.

Key Passage

Genesis 4:2–5, 4:8

Memory Verse

John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

The sin committed at the Fall of man through the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:6–7) brought corruption on the human race. Adam and Eve were cursed by God (Genesis 3:16–17) and sent out of the garden (Genesis 3:24). Eve had two sons—Cain and Abel. As they grew, Abel became a keeper of the sheep, but Cain worked the ground (Genesis 4:1–2). After some time, they each brought an offering to the Lord. Cain brought some of the “fruit of the ground,” and Abel brought “the firstborn of his flock” (Genesis 4:3–4). In Genesis we are simply told that the Lord had regard for Abel's offering but not for Cain's (Genesis 4:4–5). But why?

Various Scriptures from the New Testament help to solve this puzzle. The book of Hebrews records that Abel made his offering “by faith” and that he was righteous (Hebrews 11:4). Cain, however, was of the evil one and murdered his brother because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous (1 John 3:11–12). Cain's actions spoke loudly of the desires of his heart. Because of his jealousy, he killed his brother—who walked by faith in righteousness toward God.

God used this unlikely scenario to display his gracious mercy. God is holy and had to judge Cain's sin. But instead of requiring a life for a life as the law demanded (Exodus 21:23–24), God spared Cain, making him a fugitive and wanderer on the earth—a fugitive specially marked by God and protected from those seeking revenge for his offense (Genesis 4:14–15).

The effects of the Fall came quickly. In the first generation after Adam and Eve, we see jealousy, selfishness, murder, and hatred. And yet, God was already revealing the depths of His mercy—a mercy that has repeatedly been demonstrated as man continues to disobey God in his sinfulness.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Cain's Wife Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch (Genesis 4:16–17).

One of the most-asked questions about the book of Genesis is, “Where did Cain get his wife?” This question is often used by skeptics to discredit the historical truth of the book of Genesis because most Christians don’t know how to answer it. If Adam and Eve were the first humans, and if their first two sons were Cain and Abel, then where did Mrs. Cain come from? Some have answered this by saying that God must have created other people or races on earth who did not descend from Adam and Eve. However, Scripture is very clear that ALL people are descendants of Eve (Genesis 3:20). And since only descendants of Adam and Eve can be saved, believers need to be able to show that Cain’s wife—like all other humans—was a descendant of Adam and Eve.

The answer to this question is, in fact, quite simple: Cain married his sister or perhaps another close relative like a niece. Genesis 5:3–4 states:

When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters.

Notice that the Bible tells us that Adam had “other sons and daughters.” Exactly how many, we aren’t told, but given that Adam lived more than 900 years, it could have been a lot! One Jewish tradition states that Adam had 33 sons and 23 daughters.

Many people reject this very clear answer, citing the law against brother-sister marriages. But back then (about 6,000 years ago), close relatives could marry—they had to in order to start their own families. Even Abraham married his half-sister (Genesis 20:12). It was not until much later—2,500 years after Cain married his wife—that God commanded Moses that people were not to marry close relatives (Leviticus 18:6). We know now that this command, directed by the providence of God, protects us from many genetic deformities that could result from the marrying of close relatives. These deformities are one of the results of sin and its consequences. Cain and his wife, living near the beginning of creation, wouldn’t have had as many genetic mutations as we do today, so marrying a close relative was no problem.

God’s Word gives us answers. We need to approach all questions with biblical glasses, standing on the authority of the Scripture—knowing that the Bible is our starting point.

Animal Sacrifices

In the account of Cain and Abel, we see that God had regard for the offering of Abel (Genesis 4:4). Abel's offering was the firstborn of his flock—an animal offering presented with a pure heart. As we look at animal offerings throughout biblical history, we can see the amazing foreshadowing and significance of them.

The very first animal sacrifice was made by God Himself to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve after they had disobeyed and introduced sin to the human race (Genesis 3:20–21). Adam and Eve deserved instant death because of their sin, yet we see God displaying His glorious mercy as He killed the animal(s) to make garments as coverings for them. In hindsight, we can see how this is a foreshadowing of the substitutionary death of an animal to pay for sin. The foundational elements of God's plan of redemption are shown here on the occasion of the first sin in the Garden of Eden.

Scripture tells us of more customary animal sacrifices ordained by God. Noah sacrificed animals after the Flood (Genesis 8:20), Job sacrificed animals for the sins of his family (Job 1:5), and Abraham sacrificed the ram that God provided as a substitute for Isaac (Genesis 22:13). Clearly, God had revealed the concept of substitutionary sacrifice long before the time of Moses and the Law.

However, it was at the time of Moses that God specifically appointed a sacrificial system to cover the sins of His people. Leviticus 17:11 states, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." In this system, the life of the animal atoned for—or covered—the offenses of the sinner; the animal died as a substitute for the sinner.

We know, of course, that animal sacrifices can never cleanse us from our sin. Scripture states, ". . . in these [Old Testament] sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:3–4). The ultimate purpose of the sacrificial system was to demonstrate that the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). It was God's way of preparing us to believe in the perfect Lamb of God whose blood would finally take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Before the universe was created and man was formed, God knew that we (in Adam) would sin. He also had a predetermined plan of salvation from the penalty of our sins through the perfect sacrifice—Jesus Christ.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.

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