

After the initial fall of man in chapter 3, the sinful nature of mankind becomes more evident with the first murder as Adam and Eve's oldest son kills his younger brother. Our need of a Savior becomes obvious when we consider that we all have the potential to commit all manner of sin as fallen human beings.

¹ And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. ² And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain [acquired; possession]” – The word “knew” in this context is a euphemism of the intimacy between a man and his wife during sexual intercourse. This resulted in the conception and birth of Cain. **“and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD”** – Since this was the first human pregnancy, Eve recognizes that the child was a gift from God. It is also possible that she saw Cain as the fulfillment of the promise God made while pronouncing the curse on the serpent: *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”* (Gen. 3:15). It had not yet been revealed that the “seed” that would bruise the serpent’s (Satan’s) head would be Jesus Christ, so perhaps Eve’s hope was that her son Cain would be the fulfillment of the promise.

“And she again bare his brother Abel” – We do not know how much time transpired between Cain and Abel’s births. Some commentators even believe that Cain and Abel could have been twins but that seems unlikely because of the phrase “she again bare” implying a separate pregnancy.

“And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground” – As the brother grew up their interests guided their occupations. Since God had not yet given permission for men to eat meat (not until after the flood – Gen. 9:3 *“Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.”*), Abel’s keeping of sheep was apparently not for food but for their wool and skin and likely also for sacrifice to God. Cain, on the other hand, became a farmer and grew food for himself and his family.

³ And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. ⁴ And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: ⁵ But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

“And in process of time it came to pass” – No specific time is given, but this incident apparently occurs when the time came for the brothers to bring an offering to the LORD. The narrative obviously skips ahead from the brother’s birth to adulthood.

“that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD” – Cain brings some of the things that he grew to the LORD as an offering. Unlike Abel, Cain does not bring the first or the best that his garden produced. Instead he just brings “of” his produce, implying that he may not have brought the first fruits or the best. He likely kept his best produce for himself, an indication that he loved himself more than he loved the LORD and did not trust God to bless his garden.

“And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” – The word “fat” can refer to the best of the flock. It seems Abel wanted to show his love for God by bringing not only the first lambs that each sheep bore but he also picked out the best of the flock to bring as an offering.

“And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect” – The writer of Hebrews gives us the reason why God preferred Abel’s offering: *“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”* (Heb. 11:4). Some commentators believe that Abel understood something about the meaning behind a sacrifice (the sacrificing of a lamb in the OT was a foreshadowing of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross) but it’s unclear how much of this had been revealed at this time. Likely Abel, like other OT saints, operated on the amount of revelation he had at the time and responded in faith. Perhaps all he understood was that all his blessings came from God and he wanted to show his appreciation and love by giving back his best. Cain, on the other hand, probably just brought what he thought he could spare and may have begrudged having to give even that to God.

“And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell” – Cain may not have acknowledged that it was God that enabled the harvest by providing the rain and must have thought that God ought to be satisfied with whatever he brought as an offering (even if it wasn’t his best) considering how hard he had to work to grow it. Therefore he became angry that God did not respect his offering and began to pout.

⁶ And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? ⁷ If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

God confronts Cain about his attitude and asks a rhetorical question: “Wouldn’t your offering be accepted if you were doing the right thing?” Then God warns Cain about the danger of disobedience because his sin nature “lieth at the door” and was ready and willing to overwhelm him (“unto thee shall be his desire”). One sin always makes it easier to do the next and our sin nature is ready to take advantage of it. God advises Cain (and us) that he must exercise control over sin (“thou shalt rule over him”) lest it lead to worse things. Obviously Cain does not heed the LORD’s advice because his anger leads to the greater sin of murder.

⁸ And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

“And Cain talked with Abel his brother” – Presumably Cain lured Abel out into the seclusion of the field by speaking peaceful words to him. Doing so implies premeditation – that Cain planned on killing Abel once they were alone in the field.

“and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him” – **1 John 3:11-12** gives us Cain’s motive for murdering Cain: ¹¹ *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* ¹² *Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.* Once they were hidden from any witnesses, Cain allows the jealousy of his heart to give way to murder. **James 1:14-15** ¹⁴ *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* ¹⁵ *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* Cain’s jealousy led to a desire (lust) to be rid of his brother and that desire led him to the action of murdering Abel.

⁹ And the LORD said unto Cain, Where *is* Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: *Am* I my brother's keeper?

“And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?” - As He often does, God asks a question for which He already knows the answer, not because He is seeking information, but in order to confront Cain’s sin.

“And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?” - Cain initially attempts to cover his sin by feigning ignorance of his brother’s whereabouts. His disrespectful attitude toward the LORD is evident as He makes the sarcastic remark “Am I my brother’s keeper?” He may be saying “Does this keeper of sheep need to be kept by me?” The ironic truth is that we are all to love others enough to be their keeper. **Phil. 2:4** *“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”*

¹⁰ And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. ¹¹ And now *art* thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; ¹² When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

“And he said, What hast thou done?” – The LORD asks the question to invite Cain to come clean about what he’s done.

“the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground” – The LORD wants Cain to know that He knows exactly what Cain has done. Abel’s blood crying out to God “from the ground” implies that Cain had buried the body to hide it, a tactic that was in vain because God saw the whole thing.

“And now art thou cursed from the earth...” - In a bit of poetic justice, the LORD proclaims that because the earth soaked up the blood that Cain had shed it will no longer produce crops for him, thus ending Cain’s career as a farmer. He would be forced to be an outcast and a wanderer on the earth, never again able to grow his own food.

¹³ And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment *is* greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, *that* every one that findeth me shall slay me.

“And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear” – Cain seems to show no remorse for killing his brother. Rather than confess his sin and ask forgiveness, Cain instead complains that the punishment is too severe. However, the LORD is actually being merciful since the punishment for murder would soon be death. **Gen. 9:6** *“Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”*

“Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid” – Cain will be driven from his home and where his family had traditionally come to worship God. He will have to leave behind everything he has known and he will no longer be welcome in God’s presence.

“and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth” – He will have to live the life of a nomad, unable to settle down anywhere.

“and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me” – This statement indicates that there were other people around besides Adam, Eve and Cain. Abel may have had children (and perhaps grandchildren and great-grandchildren considering the longevity of people in that day) who might seek revenge against Cain. It’s ironic that the first murderer is now concerned that someone will kill him.

¹⁵ And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

“And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold” – The LORD shows additional grace toward Cain by protecting him with a decree that if anyone should kill Cain then that person would suffer a “sevenfold” vengeance. Since seven in the Bible is the number of completion the intent is apparently that the punishment for killing Cain would be complete or to the fullest degree. It may be that the LORD was taking steps to minimize death since the human population at that time was small and killing would make it more difficult for humans to populate the earth.

“And the LORD set a mark [sign; token; reminder] upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him” – The LORD placed a “sign” upon Cain to remind anyone who encountered him that he was under the protection of God. We don’t know what this mark/sign was. It could have been a physical characteristic given to Cain, or the Hebrew word for “mark” is sometimes used for a miraculous sign elsewhere in the OT. Whatever the nature of the mark, it served as a reminder and a warning to anyone who would want to kill Cain.