

Lesson 5

Genesis Chapter 4 & 5

Eve and Mary

- Eve's conversation with a fallen angel leads to the loss of God's likeness in human flesh; Mary's conversation with an angel leads to the Incarnation, God taking on human flesh.
- Eve, left exposed by her husband, talks herself out of being embarrassingly gullible in believing God's Word about the forbidden fruit; Mary, full of grace through the work of her Son, chooses God's will for her life, knowing the potential for embarrassment over her unusual pregnancy.
- Eve, having broken the covenant she and Adam had with God, hears God's curse on her life, which will be pain in childbearing; Mary, having accepted God's plan, hears a voice of blessing on her and her childbearing.
- Eve, Adam's helper, assists him in entering the devil's bondage; Mary, at the wedding in Cana, assists Jesus in showing Himself to be the Messiah Who had come to free Israel.
- Eve becomes the mother of the dying; Mary, the mother of the living.
- Eve is expelled from Paradise; Mary appears as the Queen of heaven.

Cain & Abel

Read Genesis chapters 4 & 5. Read the passage all the way through at least once as it can get tedious reading lists in chapter 5. Try looking for extra details and highlighting them.

Look at Eve's comment after the birth of Cain (vs. 1). What do you think prompts her to say it? Why is it a hopeful sign in this new life outside Eden?

Eve's conception and birth of a son is something she recognizes as a gift from God. It is clear that although she lost the supernatural grace she was created with, she is still capable of recognizing God and His provision for her life. This might surprise us. It should cheer us considerably. Although man is weakened by sin, he is not in total darkness. It appears that in Eve, the harsh punishment from God may have had a restorative effect. Was she humbled by being expelled from the Garden? Adam and Eve proceed with married life outside Eden, even if they are not the people they once were. Perhaps Eve's comment about the birth of "a man" reflects her understanding of the promise God made in Gen. 3:15. Did she carry with her a high expectation for one of her male offspring?

2. What is the difference between Abel and Cain as reflected in their offerings? Why do you suppose God had no regard for "Cain and for his offering"?

Although both men are aware that offerings to God are important, Abel gives the best portions of the best animals of his flock. His offering must be a reflection of who he believes God to be and what he thinks would be an appropriate offering to Him. If we wonder how Abel could have this response to God, if men are so blind and disordered because of sin, we will have to speculate. Perhaps the details of the Fall, which Adam and Eve surely would have given to their children, moved Abel to humility. Although he was born with a nature that cannot correctly perceive God, his encounter with the truth about God and man may have converted his soul. Cain's offering doesn't seem to be as impressive. It must have represented Cain's attitude towards God. Perhaps it was given in a perfunctory manner. Perhaps it was given grudgingly.

Perhaps Cain consciously withheld the best of his harvest for himself and gave some of the less desirous or useful fruit in offering to God. It is important to recognize that God isn't arbitrarily picking one offering over another. He sees first the condition of the man's heart, then his offering. Abel worshipped God appropriately, so God had regard for him and his offering. Something was wrong in Cain, so God rejected his offering

3. Cain was very angry over God's response to him and to his offering. What does this suggest to you about the kind of man Cain was?

For a man to get angry with God because God does not accept his inadequate or inappropriate worship reveals him to be a man whose perspective is seriously flawed. That man stands in the center of his world, overshadowing God Himself. Cain is firmly in the grip of intense spiritual blindness

4. What choice does God give to Cain? If Cain refuses God's offer, what problem will he face? What does this suggest is the most dangerous consequence of disobeying God's Word (read also Rom. 6:16)?

God gives Cain a choice to worship Him the right way. He opens wide the door to forgiveness and restoration. Nothing will be lost if Cain will simply right the wrong he has done. If, however, Cain chooses not to do the right thing, he faces danger. If he gives in to sin, then he will be weakened to continue giving into sin. Sin will want to master him. Not only will it cause a break in his relationship with God, it will also weaken him so that the next sin is easier to commit. The Church refers to this as the "double consequence" of sin—one is eternal (a break in communion with God) and one is temporal (a weakened will, making it easier to sin again). See CCC 1472. Sin is subtle. That was St. Paul's concern when he wrote to the Christians in Rome. He didn't want them to make the mistake of taking sin lightly, of underestimating its power to control those who yield to it. This is precisely the warning God gives Cain.

5. Cain and Abel were born to the same parents and presumably had the same upbringing. What do you suppose explains the difference between them?

The difference between Cain and Abel is the mystery of human freedom. Surely both men knew the story of Creation and of the expulsion from a beautiful garden. They both shared Adam and Eve's inheritance of a sinful nature. They were well aware of God and themselves. Yet one chose to serve God and one chose to serve himself. They were free to make their own decisions. This is the freedom God granted man in Eden, so that if man loved God, it would be genuine and not programmed. Abel chose God; Cain chose himself.

6. See the details of Abel's murder in vs. 8. What more about Cain do we understand from them?

Instead of choosing to accept God's offer to put things right, Cain chooses to plot the murder of his brother. Rather than putting to death in himself the jealousy and anger that are raging here, he refuses to suffer that way. Instead, he allows hate to grow into murder. This is what we call "cold-blooded premeditation." It's not that Cain lost his head in a fit of anger. He calmly laid a trap for Abel, inviting him to join him in the field, in the way a brother would. A brotherly gesture was the beginning of his betrayal (just as the kiss of a close friend would one day betray Jesus). This episode reveals to us how hard Cain's heart had grown. Even though God had made a profound offer of grace to him, he became more resolved to do evil rather than good. This characteristic of sinful human nature constantly appears throughout the rest of Scripture. When God's grace comes near to some men, their hearts melt and become malleable. For others, however, the nearness of God's grace causes a hardening like clay in a kiln. Such was the case with Cain.

Why do you think God asked Cain where Abel was? Didn't He already know?

God gave Cain an opportunity to confess his sin and be accountable for it, just as He had done with Cain's parents in Eden. A Father's love always wants to hear an explanation of how things went wrong. But Cain lies to God, and then he becomes sarcastic. He disavows any responsibility for his brother's welfare, throwing off any constraints on his autonomy. In his pride, Cain has chosen separation from God and from men.

In vs. 10 is the first mention of the word "blood" in Scripture. What power does blood seem to have?

Abel's blood cries out. It is alive. Although Abel has been murdered, somehow his life has not been completely snuffed out. Throughout the rest of Scripture, blood will have potent meaning for man's life, both natural and supernatural. It will come to represent the life of man, and, liturgically, the means of atonement for man's sin ("the life of the flesh is in the blood. it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life" Lev.17:11). Finally, in the Eucharist, it will become the presence of Christ in man.

Sometimes we think that Abel's blood must be crying out for justice, which is a reasonable deduction. Yet, because Abel was a righteous man who had faith in God, is it possible that he was crying out for mercy for his brother? The reference in Heb. 12:24 to the blood of Abel compares it to the blood of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews says that the blood of the New Covenant speaks "more graciously" than the blood of Abel. The possible implication is that Abel's blood spoke graciously-that is, it gave more than what was deserved. But the blood of Jesus speaks "more graciously" because He was a willing victim of murder, whereas Abel was an unwilling victim, since had been accosted and killed, without any opportunity to choose life or death.

This is an idea worth pondering. If Cain and Abel represent fallen mankind, making their way through life outside of Eden, their story suggests that among the descendants of Adam and Eve, throughout all the ages of human history, there will be some who respond to God and others who don't. Those whose lives are touched by God are willing to offer their suffering to obtain mercy for those who harden themselves. Think of Jesus on the Cross: "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do."

What is completely lacking in Cain's response to God? What is his primary concern? In this, who does he remind you of?

Cain doesn't show any remorse or even regret. His primary concern is that he will suffer under his punishment and that someone will kill him. In this, he reminds us of Adam and Eve, who also showed no regret in Eden.

Cain's original problem with God was that he was unwilling to give Him the best of himself or his harvest. Look at the curse God places on him. How is this curse a reflection of Cain himself? What does it suggest about the choices we make in life?

Cain will experience from the ground exactly what God experienced from him. The hardness of his heart will be extended now to the ground. It will be unyielding, just as Cain was in the offer of grace God extended to him. In addition, his desire to be autonomous and not responsible for his brother will have its fulfillment in his life as a "fugitive and a wanderer on earth." His covenant-breaking act will result in him being away from his home and family, God's covenant-keeping community. **Cain's punishment suggests that the worst that can happen to us in life, when we are in rebellion against God, is for Him to give us exactly what we want. If we insist on having life on our own terms, God will give it to us. We will make our own misery.**

Why do you think God marked Cain so no one would kill him?

Perhaps it was Abel's blood crying out for mercy for Cain that spared his life. Perhaps it was God's desire that Cain have an opportunity to repent and return to God's presence. It may have been God's purpose to re-affirm the sacred nature of human life, even when it strays far from God's design. No matter what caused it, God's preservation of Cain's life is an expression of His goodness and mercy, especially for sinners

After the fall in Eden, we saw signs of God's continued tender care of His creatures. During this second episode of human rebellion, do you see similar signs of God's love for humans?

In the previous question, we recognized God's desire for Cain's life to be spared, even though he was a murderer. In this chapter we have seen many other signs of His love for humans:

- God expects the best from Cain, since giving the best to God is what men were designed and created for; anything less than the best in man's relationship with God will mean that man is less than fully human.

God's high standard for Cain is a sign of His love for him.

- God extends to Cain a gracious offer to do the right thing and blot out the wrong that had gone before.
- God gives Cain clear warning about the subtle danger of giving in to sin.
- God gives Cain an opportunity to confess his sin and ask for forgiveness.
- To punish Cain, God gives him what he wants; thus Cain will have an opportunity to experience the choices he has made, which ought to prove to him that he has not chosen wisely; this could perhaps lead to repentance and restoration.
- In preserving Cain's life, God indicates that He has not entirely given up on this rebellious son.

Extra Questions for Chapter 4

Did Cain think that he could talk to God on his own terms?

Do you think that Cain's punishment was too harsh?

Does the story of Cain and Abel have any bearing on today's debate on capital punishment?

Chapter 5

Lamech was the seventh in line from Adam through Cain (see Gen. 4:19-24). In this chapter, see that the **seventh in line from Adam through Seth is a man named Enoch** (vss. 18-24). In the New Testament, read also Jude 14-15 and Heb. 11:5-6. **What is the difference between the two men, Lamech and Enoch? What do you think is the significance of that difference?**

In 5:24-31 that there is also a Lamech in the line of Seth (which can be confusing). What hope does this Lamech express for his son, Noah? How does this hope perfectly summarize the first four chapters of Genesis?

In the Toledoth's of Seth and Cain the names are quite similar, is there a connection?

How could you best describe the lifestyles of Seth's and Cain's descendants?

Conclusion

This first lesson on life outside of Eden packs quite a punch. So much of what characterizes human life through all the centuries of our history appears in embryonic form in Genesis 4 and 5. There is the repetition of a mother announcing the birth of a son, as a gift from the Lord (4:1, 25). The icon of Mother and Son begins to take shape. We see men worshipping God with offerings and that their offerings represent what is in their hearts towards God. There is the clear, loving choice God gives to man to choose to live righteously, keeping the covenant he has with God, which will require self-denial and obedience. There is the warning that sin begets sin and that resisting it will mean a battle. We see that Cain becomes a living example of how sins like jealousy and hatred, if not mortified, give birth to betrayal, murder, lying, and arrogance. Those sins, once committed, harden the soul's soil, leaving it callous and impervious to God's approach. We see that physical death doesn't mean the end of a life; Abel is still able to speak through his blood. Perhaps his voice is one that cries out for mercy for his brother, true evidence of the righteousness that characterized his life and the offering that so enraged his brother. We observe God as the loving Father Who seeks explanations, Who punishes in order to reform, and Who holds open the possibility of reconciliation. We recognize the disastrous consequences for human life and development when men live away from the presence of the Lord. We are cheered by the evidence that sinful men are still loved deeply by God and that they can, in spite of everything, walk in friendship with Him.

The final scene from Genesis 5, in which Lamech expresses hope for his son, Noah, prints indelibly in our minds this picture of the very beginnings of the community of faith. Even among men who acknowledge God, calling upon His Name and responding to His grace, sometimes heroically, there is still the clear understanding that deliverance from God's curse is necessary, that things are not as they should be, either in the earth or in the heart of man. They are waiting patiently for God to act within human history, accomplishing His purposes through human beings. These chapters perfectly set the stage for the rest of the story of redemption.