

Genesis 4:1-26! The story of Cain and his heinous sin; yet, God remembered and cared for Cain!

The book of Genesis is one big story book! It was written by Moses in order to serve as an introduction toward helping his ancient readers and modern readers alike, understand and appreciate the call of God to Israel to be **His special covenant people**. It is a foundational book! By calling it a foundational book, I am asserting that this seemingly benign book of “nice stories” contains key ideas regarding God, God’s relationship to Israel as a people, and God’s purposes for Israel and humanity. This sometimes neglected chapter is not any different. It is not only conveys to the reader a wonderfully told story; but the complete story (main story plus supplements) offers key insights into God and how He relates to fallen sinners like Cain and to sinners like you and me that needs to be heeded and not forgotten.

Chapter 4 picks up the story regarding the devastating failure of the first pair of humanity. Recall, the first couple’s failure to listen to, trust the LORD, and obey Him in the garden. Recall, how chapter 3 concluded our epic tale to this point with the lingering impression that this first couple -Adam and Eve- have been kicked out of the garden. However, even though they have been kicked out of the garden, they are still in Eden. Furthermore, God has not abandoned them. They are still under his mandate to work the ground and fulfill the purposes for which God created them. The alert reader wants to know: “So what happens next to Adam and Eve”?

Chapter 4 does not help answer our thirst for answers to this question. Chapter 4 does help the narrator of the mega story being told in this book of Genesis, to be able to advance his story by his focus upon one of the first couple’s children-Cain. The mega story now is focused on Cain. It provides a brief narration of his life, his heinous sin, and God’s judgment and punishment of that sin. Overall, I see that a careful examination of this story contributes to the unfolding complex picture of God that the narrator wants us to see. This chapter seeks to portray **God as being gracious, caring, and unexpectedly merciful** to humans, even to those who err against him. Let us see how the narrator impresses us with this key idea through this story about Cain and his sin

I. Two brothers, two offerings, and one brother’s major sin. (vs. 1-5) The first five verses introduce us to the main characters of the story. This first section provides the essential background needed by readers in order for us to appreciate the unfolding drama to follow. This chapter is linked to chapter 3. Most of us who are reading the unfolding story begun earlier, want to know what happens next. We are told that A & E had two children-two sons-**named Cain and Abel**. One was a shepherd. The other son is a farmer like his dad. The author does not in fact tell us any more about A & E except that Eve names the oldest son-Cain for she acknowledges that “**with the help of the LORD, I have brought forth a man.**” **Significance:** A & E who previously were banished from the

garden by the LORD, were not completely abandoned by him from his care and blessing. They still look to and depend upon the LORD for help and his blessing as evidenced by them acknowledging God's help in giving birth to their sons.

Now, taking up the story in verse 3, we are told that at some point significantly later both young men bring an offering to God. Both offerings are described in the same way. Both offerings are viewed as a *minhah*¹. Only Abel's offering is accepted. Specifically, the text states twice, that God did not regard or accept Cain's offering. Result: **Cain is upset!** The text does not say with whom Cain was upset. He was angry! "*His face fallen*". Was Cain upset with God? Yes. Was Cain upset with Abel? Yes! You could say that God's non acceptance of his offering made him **very angry** with both Abel and God. What happens next in the story?

II. Cain's heinous act: Cain murders his brother Abel. (vs. 6-8) This very short section is the second episode in the bigger story involving the life of Cain. It takes the narrator only one verse to narrate the tragic and heinous act of Cain murdering his brother. One verse! "Cain spoke to Abel his brother" What did he say? We are not told anything except: "*when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother and killed him.*" That is it! We are all left imagining what happened. Did Cain kill Abel by his bare hands? Or did he use a stone! What did he do with the body? Those details the narrator chose not to include. The narrator thought that the core story was all that was necessary in order to make his point strong concerning the heinous act.

Instead of a detailed description of the murderous act, the account shifts its focus onto something more important for the reader to recognize just prior to Cain's heinous act. For prior to the act we are provided with two verses **that convey God's awareness of Cain's intended heinous act** and **God's intervention** into Cain's life for the purpose of seeking to influence Cain to do "**the right thing**"! Commentators are quick to acknowledge that verse 7 is a particularly difficult verse to understand. Briefly, I want us to see three things from this first confrontation by God to Cain. First, **God cares about Cain**. God confronts Cain with the knowledge that He as his Creator knows about what is going on in Cain's mind and heart. "This is evidenced by God's statements to Cain. "*Why are you angry and your face fallen?*" This indicates that God knows what is going on in his head. God knows that Cain is upset. **Point:** God wants Cain to think about the basis of his anger. Second, God wants and gives incentive to Cain **to do what is right**. "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" (ESV). Third, God warns Cain that his anger poses a danger to him to be tempted to do not only what is not right, but an action that would end in disaster. "*And if you do not do well, (what is right) sin is crouching at the door: its desire is for you.*" **Point:** Cain must not give into his anger. Cain should not let his anger rule over him causing him to do what is wrong. Verse 8,

¹ See Lev. 2 for appreciating this offering. It is an offering made to acknowledge God's help and blessing.

unfortunately informs us on the consequence of Cain failing to heed God's counsel. Cain gave in! Cain let sin-his anger- over come him.

III. God confronts Cain for a second time. (vs. 9-12) God does not allow Cain to get away with his wrongdoing.) The heinous unspeakable act against his brother has been done. Cain killed Abel. Now in the next four verses, the story continues, detailing God's merciful dealings with Cain. In these four verses, God confronts Cain with his guilt and the consequences for killing his brother and failing to do what was right.

A. God confronts Cain indirectly about his guilt. Following Abel's murder, God says to Cain "*where is your brother?*" vs. 9 This is a tender question by God. This question is amazing to me! God does not initially confront Cain with his act of murder by saying: "**what have you done**"? Instead God confronts Cain for the second time with this indirect question. Why does God do this? I think it gives Cain an opportunity for Cain to acknowledge that he has done something wrong – to confess his guilt and to experience remorse. This is a demonstration of **God's mercy to Cain**. Yet, Cain does not respond to God's question that should have prompted remorse and guilt! Instead, Cain evasively responds to God's question by saying: "*Am I my brother's keeper?*"

B. God responds to Cain's evasiveness! After God's unsuccessful attempt to get Cain to open up concerning his deed, God's continues to confront Cain with his wrongdoing, yet this time God is more direct with Cain than before. This seems reasonable, since Cain tried to evade or minimize the wrong done. God confronts Cain with what he has done! In verse 10, God spells out to Cain "**what Cain has done**" by saying in effect: 1) You are guilty. 2) You are responsible for Abel's death. 3) You will be judged for the wrong done against your brother. The first two ideas are conveyed to us by the statement: "*the voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.*" This is God response to God's own question "what have you done (Cain?) **The answer you have spilled your brother's blood!** You are responsible for his death. And even more importantly is the implication that "Abel cries out from the ground by his death to God **for justice. Abel cries out to God to make things right!** This last unstated idea must be inferred from the story by the reader.

C. God punishes Cain for what he has done.(vs.11-12) The next two verses spell out the consequences that stem from what Cain has done. God not only recognizes that a wrong doing has been done; but, God acknowledges that Cain needs to be punished for the wrong that is done against his brother in the following two ways: **1) God punishes Cain by making his work harder and less productive**. Remember Cain's occupation was being a farmer. "*A tiller of the soil*". His work now becomes a lot harder, since God curses or removes his blessing from Cain. God says: "*when you work the ground, it will no longer yield its strength.*" **2) God punishes Cain by making Cain become a wanderer and fugitive on the run**. Implication: Cain is being banished from the community that Adam and Eve had

established in Eden even as Adam and Eve earlier had been banished from the garden.

IV. Cain's response to God's recognition of his sin and God's punishment! The following four verses (vs.13-16) form a fitting and striking conclusion to the account centered upon Cain's calculated cold act toward his brother and God's measured response. The following four verses conclude by addressing one question? Was God being **mean and harsh in his response and punishment to Cain?** Cain himself certainly thinks so! What does the writer of this story want us to think? Let us take a closer look!

A. Cain complains to God that his punishment is too severe. (vs.13-14) A careful reading of these two verses in response to hearing God's punishment inflicted upon Cain for killing his brother is surprising! Far from admitting that he deserved the punishment, Cain complains to God. Cain complaint is focused primarily upon God's punishment to him. Cain complains that his banishment from Eden to wander and finally settle in an area away from his parents is too harsh! Observe from Cain's comments that he understands the nature of his punishment: Notice verse 14: "You have driven me away (banished me) from the ground (the ground being the ground of Eden) and from your presence." How? God's decision to banish him from Eden as a wanderer resulted in his leaving Eden. This has the consequence that he will be uprooted from his family and the community that he had previously been involved with his entire life. This also (in Cain's mind) involves being banished from the Presence of God in Eden as well. Furthermore Cain fees very threatened since he sees that others will seek to hunt him down and attempt to kill him. Was this too harsh a punishment?

B. God's response to Cain's complaint. (vs.15-16) Two verses complete this final episode. It basically involves God's merciful and kind response to Cain's complaint that God's punishment was too harsh- to bear. God response has two aspects. **First**, No one is going to kill Cain. God will make sure of that. God will put a mark upon him ensuring that no one would kill him. **Second**, I do think from Cain's statements concerning being driven from God Presence in verse 14 that this must be understood in an absolute sense. "You have driven me from the ground from your face I shall be hidden." Cain gets God's punishment right. He will be banished from God's Presence **in Eden**. This is true. Cain will no longer see God's Presence **in Eden**. God does not correct him on this. But, my understanding of being driven from God's presence and being driven from the ground –are not to be understood in an absolute way, since the two expressions being driven from God and the land could and should be understood as relative statements. Cain will continue farming the ground. Cain will continue to experience God's Presence and Care; but **not in Eden**. This is God answer to Abel's blood crying to God for justice! Is this a harsh punishment! You make the call!

C. God's punishment to Cain for the death of Abel is a demonstration of God's Mercy. A brief reflection upon what Cain did to his brother and what God did to Cain

should upon reflection cause the reader **to recognize God's mercy to him**. Cain should have been punished by death for act of willfully killing his brother. This is what the Law given by Moses demanded² as punishment for murder for latter generations of the people of God. The original intended audience of Genesis would know this. Yet, God did not do this for Cain. Cain did not die immediately. Cain was not raked over the coals. His murder destroyed the community that God had sought to establish in this first family. The punishment for his wrong doing was that he himself would suffer a loss of community by his banishment from Eden. While Cain did suffer **banishment from God's Presence in Eden**, Cain did for the rest of his life continue to experience the Presence of God as both a wanderer and as someone who settled in the land of Nod- east of Eden. How can I say that? The conclusion to Cain's story indicates that God was still with Cain in spite of his sin. The following verses which I name the postscript of the "Cain & Abel story indicate that God helped Cain-blessed Cain with a wife, family, and enabled him to build a city and to enjoy living in a city that Cain or his son Enoch built.

V. Postscript on Cain: a glimpse of his descendants. (vs. 17-23) These verses make up significantly one third of the overall story regarding Cain. These verses are focused upon giving us a glimpse of what happened to Cain after he was banished from Eden. This final concluding section rounds off and substantiates my previous claim that while God did punish Cain for his heinous crime against his brother, God nevertheless maintained his care for Cain and his family. Far from hiding his face or Presence from Cain, God did bless Cain and his household.

This conclusion can be seen from the narrator quickly picking up the story in verse 17 of the final section of chapter four which fills out the previously given expression that *"Cain went out of the LORD's Presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden."* This section helps the curious reader discover what happened to Cain. Remember Cain's occupation was a farmer *"a tiller of the soil"*. His work now becomes a lot harder, since God curses or removes his blessing from Cain. Now God says: "when you work the ground, it will no longer yield its strength." Yet, Cain prospers in Nod. God blesses him with a wife and family. A city is built by him or his son. Moreover, after five generations, some of Cain's descendants are acknowledged as possessing or being given by God the skills, capacity, and creative expertise necessary to become originators/inventors of musical instruments (Jubal son of Lamech) and (Tubal-Cain)of those who invented tools being made from bronze and iron. Bottom line: These individuals who are from the lineage of Cain were **blessed by God**.

² Deut. 19:1-5, 11-12. Text is clear that a person who kills another person intentionally deserves death.