

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 4:1-16

“Cain & Abel”

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Whose world is it anyway? It is God’s world because He made it. The first of the three great questions which the book of Genesis answers is answered in Genesis chapters 1-3 (see the introduction to Genesis which accompanies the Exegetical Notes for Genesis 1:1-2 for a fuller explanation of the three questions which Genesis asks). In Genesis 3, the focus shifts to the second great question, “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way?” The answer is that we trust God and obey Him. But, the humans have chosen to disobey God. As a result, they have been cast out of the garden into an unbalanced world. In the world now broken and dominated by rebellion against God, the question shifts for the third time. The question becomes “How do we live in God’s world God’s way with other people, particularly the members of my own family.”

Verses 1-2

Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.

- Outside of the garden, in a world broken by their choice to disobey God, Adam and Eve give birth to two sons, Cain and Abel.
- Adam and Eve have not forgotten YHWH. They rejoiced when their sons were born, receiving the children as gifts from God.
- Cain, the older son, was a farmer who worked the soil. Abel, the younger son, watched the flocks.

Verses 3-5

³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his

offering,⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

- It was common in Adam's family to make offerings to YHWH. His sons continued this practice.
- Cain made an offering of "some of the produce of the soil." Abel made an offering from the "first born of his flocks." The words indicate that Cain's offering to YHWH was not pleasing to YHWH. Apparently, his offering was not the best he had to give, and was given after he was sure that he would be taken care of through his own efforts. Abel gave of the best he had before he himself was sure of provision.
- Cain's heart was wrong. He gave out of obligation to give and so that others would see that he gave, rather than out of gratitude to YHWH.
- How YHWH showed his approval of one offering and not of the other is left unclear. Perhaps the rejection of his offering was Cain's feeling of guilt because he did not live right. That his attitude and his heart were wrong in his own mind is clear from the text. Giving did not bring him joy. He was angry about having to give to God and depressed by the act.

Verses 6-7

⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

- YHWH attempts to reassure Cain. He tells Cain that if Cain acts to "do what is right," that is to please God, God will accept him. But if he acts against God's will and sins by rebelling against God's will, sin will "rule over him." He will be controlled by evil. YHWH tells Cain that if Cain trusts him and obeys him, YHWH will accept him. **The only way to get along in God's world God's way is to TRUST & OBEY!**

Verse 8

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

- But Cain chose not to listen to the voice of YHWH. He listened to the voice of the Evil One and acted in a way contrary to the will of God. Cain lured Abel to a private place and attacked his brother. He killed Abel. This was his

choice! He disregarded the word of the Lord. He did not trust God and obey Him.

Verses 9-12

⁹ *Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”*

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

¹⁰ *The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”*

- YHWH knows all and sees all. What Cain did was no secret from God. Abel’s blood cried out to God from the ground into which it was spilled. God’s questions are given to give Cain an opportunity to repent. God confronted Cain about what he had done exactly as he had Adam and Eve in the garden (see Genesis 3:8-12). YHWH gave Cain the chance to come clean.
- But, like his parents in the garden, Cain chose a deceptive response to YHWH’s questions. Cain knew that what he had done was wrong. So he pretends not to know that he has disregarded the word of the Lord. He knew that he should not have done what he did.
- Because he is unrepentant and refuses to acknowledge his sin, judgment is pronounced. The ground will no longer produce for him abundantly as a matter of course. Prior to his sinful behavior, Cain’s toil was richly repaid. But it will be so no longer. The ground will no longer respond to his labor. Instead of being settled in the comfort of his extended family as he was before, he will now be cast out of their circle and forced to wander.

Verses 13-16

¹³ *Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. ¹⁴ Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”*

¹⁵ *But the LORD said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. ¹⁶ So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*

- Cain’s response to YHWH’s judgment was a cry for mercy. He acknowledged that he understood the word of the Lord and accepted God’s

right to judge him. However, he says that the judgment of God is unfair. It is more than he can bear, for he will be shut out of God's presence by his sin; will lose his secure place among God's people, and that other people will seek to kill him.

- The first two statements are true. Cain will be cut off from YHWH by his sinful behavior, and Cain will be cut off from his family by his sin. The Lord will not require his life for what he did. Soon the Law of God given through Moses will declare "life for life." But, as yet, that law is not given. Instead of dying for killing his brother, Cain will live to suffer the consequences of his behavior.
- Cain is marked in some way to make it clear to others that they should not kill him. The nature of this mark is not stipulated. But word would spread through the family and they would know who Cain was even after he was cast out of the family circle.
- Cain moved away to a place where he felt outside of YHWH's presence.

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