

The First Murder

SESSION 5

Genesis 4:1-15

Memory Verse: Genesis 4:7

Dishonoring God leads to contempt for His creation.

Sin has a way of spiraling from bad to worse. Such is the story of the first murder recorded in Scripture. It's a tragic portrait of sin's escalation. God told Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit, but they chose to eat it anyway. Later, God told Cain to avoid falling prey to sin, but Cain allowed sin to take control of his life anyway. He chose to give way to his anger and kill his brother. Sin always involves a choice. The escalation of sin continued throughout the Old Testament narrative, illustrating over and over humanity's need for salvation from sin's grip and penalty.

As you study this week's focal passages, spend time in prayer, asking God to open your eyes anew to the danger of sin. Ask Him to reveal and forgive any sin in your life that has gone unchecked. Think about how you can help adults recognize the hope they can find in a Savior who has defeated sin once and for all.



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When you love someone, you will have an interest in the things that interest them, and you will respect what belongs to them. A father who loves his daughter will be enthusiastic about her dance recital though he had no interest in dance until she started dancing. People care about the things the people they love care about. However, the opposite is also true, when one disrespects others, they have contempt for what belongs to them. Cain illustrates this truth in Genesis 4. (PSG, p. 46)

Name something you're passionate about or interested in because of someone else's influence.



Understand the Context (Genesis 4:1–6:7)

The background passage for this study covers the story of two lines that descended from Adam and Eve: Cain, their firstborn son, and Seth, their third son. While a second son, Abel, was born to Adam and Eve, his line ended when he was murdered by Cain. As a result, the focus of Genesis 4:1-15 is on Cain, his attitude, and his actions. Following the murder of Abel, the lineage of Cain is outlined in Genesis 4:16-24.

Next, Moses recorded the descendants of Seth. His lineage is covered in Genesis 4:25–5:32. Comparing the family trees of Cain and Seth sets forth a sharp contrast. The story of Cain's family might be summarized by this statement in Genesis 4:16, "Cain went away from the presence of the LORD." In contrast to his parents, who were forced out of the garden of Eden, Cain willfully chose to leave the Lord's presence.

The summary statement of his offspring is found in Genesis 6:5, where humanity's sin is described as widespread and their desires were consistently evil. As an example, readers encounter the wickedness of Lamech, who was Cain's great, great, great grandson. As sin spiraled down through the human race, Lamech became the first bigamist in Scripture, taking two wives. He also committed murder just like his ancestor Cain—and bragged about it.

In contrast to the family of Cain, the legacy of Seth involved people who called on the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26). The individuals in this list are marked by prayer and worship. For example, godly Enoch "walked with God" (5:22,24) a distinction shared by only one other man, Noah (6:9). In addition, Enoch

joined Elijah as the only two men in Scripture who did not die. One day, he simply "he was not, for God took him" (5:24).

These two genealogical records are the first of many such listings. People often wonder why these family records are included in Scripture. First, the Hebrew people passed on their beliefs through oral tradition, so genealogies gave a skeletal outline that helped people remember the stories. These listings also allowed Jewish people to trace their ancestry and confirm their place among the chosen people of God.

From a spiritual and theological perspective, genealogies help establish the historicity of the biblical record. These lists confirm the existence of the various people mentioned in the Bible as they are traced through a lineage and placed in a historical setting. Finally, these listings also are important in the prophecies of the coming Messiah. For instance, Luke's genealogy follows the family line of Jesus all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38).

As you read Genesis 4:1-15, consider what our personal responsibility to God and others is. (PSG, p. 47)



PREPARE: On the board, create two columns: *The most dangerous city in the United States (2022)* and *The safest city in the United States (2022)*.

INTRODUCE: As adults arrive, provide markers and direct the group to write their guesses in each column. After everyone has responded, share these results: The most dangerous cities include: Monroe, LA; Memphis, TN; Saginaw and Detroit, MI; St. Louis, MO; Alexandria, LA; Pine Bluff and Little Rock, AR. The safest cities include: Frisco and McKinney, TX; Santa Clarita and Sunnyvale and Glendale, CA; McAllen, TX; Cary, NC; and Plano, TX.

ASK: **What makes a city safe or dangerous? Would you consider your city safe or dangerous? Why?**

REVIEW: Enlist a volunteer to read aloud the opening paragraph on page 46 of the PSG to set the context for this lesson. Talk about things people are interested in because of someone they love. Point out the summary statement for this session: *Dishonoring God leads to contempt for His creation.*

ASK: **How does dishonoring God lead to contempt for His creation?**

TRANSITION: *Today, we will examine the first murder, as recorded in the Bible.*

NOTES

Group Option Activity

Music

Provide copies of the *Baptist Hymnal* (2008) and encourage adults to turn to Hymn 329, “Grace Greater Than All Our Sin.” Enlist someone to lead the group in singing or reading the hymn aloud. Review the lyrics as you introduce the theme for this lesson. Ask: ***What does it mean that God’s grace is greater than all our sin?***

Rivalry (Genesis 4:1-7)

1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” **2** And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. **3** In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, **4** and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, **5** but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. **6** The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? **7** If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”

(v. 1) Knew: This Hebrew word carries various meanings including “to perceive,” “to understand,” “to know,” and “to discern.” In the context of this passage, the word could be rendered “Adam experienced Eve, his wife.” Thus, the word speaks of sexual intercourse, the most intimate expression of the relationship between a man and a woman. There is nothing casual about this relationship, as the wording speaks of a deep commitment to each other.

(v. 1) Eve: In the Old Testament, **Eve** is mentioned by name only here and in Genesis 3:20. Adam called his wife Eve because she would be the mother of all humanity. The name means “life” or “to be alive.”

Key Person

•Cain

The name of the first person born is derived from the Hebrew word meaning “to acquire.” Eve declared that she had acquired a son with God’s help. We can only speculate if she had a glimmer of hope that this might be the “seed” promised in Genesis 3:15 who would bruise the head of the serpent.

(v. 1) With the help of the LORD: This no doubt points to the renewed faith of Eve in the God of creation. With this statement, she acknowledged the fulfillment of her God-given role of bearing children. It also affirms the truth that God is the Author of all life and continues to create life through childbirth.

(v. 2) •Abel: Some scholars believe that Cain and **Abel** were twins, though the passage is not explicit on that. Abel’s name meant “breath,” “vapor,” or “weakness,” suggesting that he may have been born with some physical weakness. The name may also have referred to Eve’s physical and emotional condition after going through the intensity of childbirth (Gen. 3:16). Of

course, the name also could have foreshadowed the brevity of Abel’s life—as well as the general nature of human life on earth. Scripture often speaks to the temporary nature of life. (See Pss. 90:5-6; 103:15-16; Isa. 40:6-7; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Jas. 4:14.)

(v. 3) Offering: Each brother had an assigned or chosen occupation. Abel tended flocks, while Cain tended the ground. Both were necessary to sustain life. In time, the two came to worship God by bringing offerings from their respective roles. The offering was an act of worship of an inferior to a superior. Both men worshiped God the Creator.

(vv. 4-5) Had regard . . . Had no regard: Regard suggests acceptance based on motive rather than what was offered. The law of Moses called for grain offerings along with animal sacrifices. In both cases, God’s acceptance was tied to the attitude of the worshiper. The same was true here, hundreds of years before the law. Cain wasn’t rejected because of his offering. His sacrifice was rejected because his heart was not right with God (see Heb. 11:4; Jude 11).

(v. 5) Angry . . . face fell: These descriptive words point to Cain’s self-absorbed attitude. The Hebrew text literally states that God’s negative response to the offer was “burning Cain exceedingly.” His anger led to a brooding demeanor. In other words, Cain sulked over the whole thing.

(v. 7) Sin is crouching at the door: Sin is pictured as an active lion, **crouching** in the shadows and waiting to pounce. God reminded Cain that he had the option of doing what was right. If he chose the wrong response, though, sin would take advantage of the opportunity and destroy Cain. This was a challenge for Cain to repent, but his final decision led to the destruction of both Abel and Cain.

EXPLORE Genesis 4:1-7

1



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must resolve anger before it grows into sin.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Genesis 4:1-7**, as the group listens for the descriptions of Cain and Abel.

LIST: Write these two headings on the board: *Cain* and *Abel*. Guide the group to call out how these verses describe Cain and Abel. Record responses on the board. Direct the group to the information for verses 1-2 (PSG, pp. 48-49) for more.

EXPLAIN: Remind adults that God had given Adam and Eve work in Eden. Note that He now gave Cain and Abel responsibilities. Emphasize that each one played an important role in caring for their family. Point out that verse 3 reveals that they each also had a responsibility to honor God for His blessings.

ASK: **Why did God reject Cain's offering?** Highlight the role of attitude in God's choice.

DISCUSS: Talk about how Cain reacted to God's response to his offering. Highlight the statement: *God reminded Cain that He would not have rejected . . .* (PSG, p. 50). Give each adult a copy of **Pack Item 11** (Article: *Cain's Downcast Face*). Encourage the group to scan the article and to determine what it meant for Cain to be despondent or downcast.

ASK: **What are the dangers of letting jealousy and anger go unchecked?** (PSG, p. 51)



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Natural

Prior to the session, prepare a relish tray with a variety of fresh fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Provide small plates and napkins. Encourage adults to enjoy the snack items. As you study the first set of verses, point out that Cain's offering may have resembled the tray. Discuss the group's reaction to what Cain provided and why the Lord may have rejected His offering.

Sentenced (Genesis 4:8-12)

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. **9** Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” **10** And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. **11** And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. **12** When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

(v. 8) Brother: The word **brother** is used seven times in Genesis 4:1-15, including six times in verses 8-11. This emphasizes that the focus of this narrative was on Cain and his actions. Abel never speaks in this passage, nor does God ever directly speak to him. Instead, Cain is the central figure.

Cain’s words to Abel point to premeditated murder. Cain had fumed about God’s response to his offering and finally decided to destroy his brother. In some ways, this was an attempt to destroy God. However, what actually happened was the self-destruction of Cain.

(v. 8) Killed: The Hebrew word for **killed** is used most often for the killing of a human being. In fact, it is used a total of 172 times in the Old Testament to speak of destroying, murdering, or slaying. The word carries the idea of violence, most often in war or in some sort of scheming. Such is the case here as Cain plotted to murder his brother.

What began as a careless act of worship on Cain’s part led to a devastating consequence, humanity’s first homicide. Cain yielded to sin because his worship was not right in the first place. Wrong theology leads to wrong actions.

Key Doctrine

Man

Through the temptation of Satan, man transgressed the command of God and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. (See Romans 3:10-18; 5:12.)

(v. 9) Where is Abel your brother?: God’s question to Cain echoed His earlier question to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:9). Both questions were designed to lead people toward confession and repentance. While God knew the answer, He wanted Cain to admit what he had done. Accompanying

God’s question was the implication that Cain was ultimately responsible for his younger, and perhaps, weaker brother.

(v. 9) Keeper: Cain responded to the question concerning his brother with callous indifference. Cain’s answer suggested that he accepted no responsibility for the welfare of his brother. Once again, this echoes Adam who refused to take responsibility for his disobedience and cast blame elsewhere.

Adding to his indifference, Cain coupled his sin against the sanctity of life with the sin of apathy toward God’s design for community. God created humanity for relationship with Himself, but family also represented a high mark of Jewish society. Community and family were everything in the centuries to come. Yet Cain failed to see God’s design. He thought little of the family/community relationship. His disrespect for God’s structures of society (both worship and family) led to a disregard for God’s highest creation in the form of his brother.

(v. 11) Cursed: The curse of Cain was two-fold. First, as a farmer or tiller of the ground, he would find futility in that effort. The very ground that once responded to his cultivation (and accepted the blood of his brother in the field) would never again produce crops for him. The implication is not simply that the ground wouldn’t produce, but also that Cain would never again get the chance to till the ground. Fallow ground would be a constant reminder of his sin.

Second, just as God drove Adam and Eve from the garden, so Cain would become a homeless wanderer. While God cursed him, Genesis 4:16 notes that Cain went out from God’s presence. Here is a double alienation from God as Cain rejected Him completely.

EXPLORE Genesis 4:8-12

2



APPLICATION POINT: People must take responsibility for their sin.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 4:8-12, directing the group to listen for God's interaction with Cain.

RESEARCH: In the PSG, highlight the phrase: *he let his unresolved anger fester . . .* (PSG, p. 51). Discuss the anger Cain had toward Abel. Direct the group to examine the content for verses 9-10 (PSG, p. 52) to discover the importance of the two questions God asked Cain and how Cain responded.

ASK: **To what extent are we responsible for others? How does that affect our personal responsibility toward God?** (PSG, p. 52)

TRANSITION: *Cain was punished for his actions, and he cried out to God because he believed the punishment was too severe.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Gavel and Block

As you study Genesis 4:8-12, display a gavel and block. Lead the group to discuss what the items are typically used for (in a courtroom by a judge). Ask: ***What judgment did God carry out in these verses?*** Use information from pages 51-52 of the PSG to supplement the conversation. Emphasize that God had given Cain a chance to stop before things went too far (Gen. 4:3-7), but Cain chose to ignore God's warnings. Share that, as a result, he had to face God's judgment. Encourage adults to think about their own experiences, especially in areas where they may be wrestling with temptation. Challenge them to accept God's warnings so they won't have to endure God's judgment.

Pleas (Genesis 4:13-15)

13 Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. **14** Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” **15** Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

(v. 13) Greater than I can bear: The Hebrew words for both **punishment** and **bear** carry distinct meanings. “Punishment” can also mean “sin,” while “bear” has an alternate meaning of “forgive.” Thus, scholars are confronted with two possible interpretations. Cain either said his punishment was too great to bear or asked God if his sin was too great to forgive. Many of the ancient translations adopt the latter, but the context and Cain’s actions and attitude make this interpretation less likely.

Cain appeared to be issuing a complaint against God’s curse rather than begging for forgiveness. The thought of being an outcast, sent away from God’s protection was overwhelming. Cain saw this punishment as a potential death sentence.

(v. 14) Driven me today away: The exile of Cain parallels the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin when they were expelled from the garden in Genesis 3. The concept of such driving carries the force of God banishing Cain. This banishment was **from the ground**, which possibly alludes to Cain’s occupation in agriculture. He would no longer till the soil. The second part of Cain’s complaint concerned becoming a wanderer on earth, again pointing to the second part of God’s curse.

(v. 14) Will kill me: Instead of fearing God, Cain feared his fellow humans. This statement leads to two conclusions. It may point to the fact that other offspring from Adam and Eve were becoming numerous with children and grandchildren. Thus, the earth was becoming populous.

This could also be a futuristic reference to a coming day when the earth would be populated. His complaint points to the possibility that someone might seek revenge for Abel’s death.

(v. 15) Sevenfold: God’s response to Cain’s complaint indicated that He would preserve Cain’s life, even as He judged Cain for his sin. God promised to avenge Cain’s death **sevenfold** if anyone took his life. The figure seven speaks of completeness and points to the

certainty and the severity of God’s punishment on any who might retaliate against Cain.

It should be emphasized that God was not rescinding His curse on Cain or easing his punishment. Instead, God was demonstrating mercy in two ways. First, He made a promise to avenge any retaliation against Cain. Second, He placed a **mark** on Cain that served as a warning to others.

Key Word

Mark

Cain believed he would be an easy target for vengeance in the wake of his sin. Apparently, God agreed. So, the killer received a measure of protection from other killers through the mark God placed on him.

There is no definitive explanation of the **mark** that God placed on Cain. The Hebrew word can also refer to a sign or token. For centuries people have speculated about this mark, but all we know is that it was given to protect Cain.

Sadly, over time, the “mark of Cain” has been used to promote racial discrimination against those with dark skin. This interpretation is completely off base since the mark was not a curse but a source of protection and security.

In addition, it defies logic to connect the mark of Cain to any group today. Noah and his sons, who came from the line of Seth, not Cain, were the only survivors of the flood (Gen. 10:32). As a result, the line of Cain was erased. Even if the mark was hereditary, no one would have been left with it after the flood.

EXPLORE Genesis 4:13-15



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can find God's grace even in our just punishment.

READ:

Call for the group to read silently Genesis 4:13-15, looking for evidence of God's grace. Lead the group to determine if Cain was more concerned with his punishment or his guilt. To supplement the discussion, refer to information provided on page 53 of the PSG.

REFLECT:

Lead the group to discuss how Cain developed the logic of his argument. Encourage the group to consider how they would feel and respond if they had been in God's shoes. Compare and contrast what they would have done to Cain to what God did.

MINI-LECTURE:

Using the information for verse 15 (PSG, p. 53), explain how God showed incredible grace to Cain. Note that many have misunderstood the "mark" of Cain as part of his judgment. *But, in truth, the mark was an act of God's mercy and grace.*

ASK:

In what ways does God's grace work in conjunction with His justice and righteousness? (PSG, p. 53)

TRANSITION:

When we dishonor God and His commands, it leads to contempt for God's creation—including other people.

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Lead the group to list the steps of Cain's sin using James 1:12-15 as a guide. Take time to read both Genesis 4:1-15 and James 1:12-15. Note the steps of progression in sin. Using the information in those verses, match the steps in Cain's sin with the progression from James. Ask: ***What does this tell us about our own struggle with temptation and sin?***

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 54 of the Personal Study Guide:
- *Believers must resolve anger before it grows into sin.*
 - *People must take responsibility for their sin.*
 - *Believers can find God's grace even in our just punishment.*
- DISCUSS:** Discuss why it's important that believers take personal responsibility for their sin. Encourage adults to list some things that hinder them from taking personal responsibility.
- DISCUSS:** Guide the group to discuss the second question set under Apply the Text on page 54 of the PSG: **Why is unresolved anger so dangerous? How can one deal rightly with sin in one's life?**
- PRAY:** Lead a time of silent prayer, encouraging the group to ask God to reveal any unconfessed sin in their own lives and to confess that sin to God.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by stopping to examine your own life to determine where jealousy or anger may be causing issues that you need to address or confess to God. Taking personal responsibility for one's own actions is a key teaching in this lesson. Email or text the group to challenge them to consider where they are, or are not, taking personal responsibility for their sin.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
Explore the Bible Adult Commentary
offers additional information and biblical
insights related to the key passages.
(Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com**.)

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