

HUMANITY HATES

CORE PASSAGE: GENESIS 4:1-12

Context: Adam and Eve, the first image-bearers of God, created by Him, sinned and were banished from the garden of Eden. Exiled from the garden, Eve gave birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. As their story unfolds, we find the consequences of sin continue to spread from Adam and Eve’s decision to take of the forbidden fruit, not trusting in God’s good character and instruction. Thus begins the long story of humanity’s pride and sinful ways, revealing our full need for a Savior and Redeemer who will forgive us of our sins and make us new.

Key Concept: Sin leads us to disordered feelings and responses, and to hateful actions.

DAILY READINGS

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| ☐ Day 1: Genesis 4:1-5 | ☐ Day 4: Genesis 4:13-16 |
| ☐ Day 2: Genesis 4:6-8 | ☐ Day 5: Genesis 4:17-26 |
| ☐ Day 3: Genesis 4:9-12 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 75 |

Sin leads us to disordered feelings and responses (Genesis 4:1-7).

¹The man was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. She said, “I have had a male child with the LORD’s help.” ²She also gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel became a shepherd of flocks, but Cain worked the ground. ³In the course of time Cain presented some of the land’s produce as an offering to the LORD. ⁴And Abel also presented an offering—some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. The LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵but he did not have regard for Cain and his offering. Cain was furious, and he looked despondent. ⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you furious? And why do you look despondent? ⁷If you do what is right, won’t you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

God Knows Our Sinful Thoughts and Actions

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden of Eden, and now the story continues with Adam and Eve outside the garden. What will life be like now? How will it be different? In Genesis 4 we find the results of sin and brokenness in the world, how it affects humanity and the family unit.

After leaving the garden, man and woman were still called to procreate, multiply, and build their family, so the man was intimate with his wife. The Hebrew word there literally means he “knew” his wife. This idea of intimacy and knowledge recalls that humanity ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the repetition of this “knowing” idea in Genesis 4:9,17,25 will remind the reader or hearer of that as well.

THEOLOGY
Connection

STEWARDSHIP: God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions. They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others.

Eve gave birth to Cain and acknowledged that this was only “with the LORD’s help” (v. 1). The name Cain can mean “brought forth” or “produced.” With the Lord’s help, Eve has brought forth a man. Though humanity was banished from the garden, they still acknowledged God’s place as the Lord, Creator, and Sustainer of all. Though women were and are still cursed with pains in childbirth (3:16), Eve acknowledged the Lord and His help in giving birth. Throughout the Bible, God is acknowledged as sovereign over conception, birth, and life. God is at work in every birth and delivery. Procreation and multiplying His people has always been a part of God’s plan for humanity to rule and have dominion over the earth.

After Cain, Eve also gave birth to Abel. The name Abel means “breath.” Some suggest that this alluded to the shortness of life and breath he would have on the earth. Abel is described as a shepherd and Cain as one who “worked the ground” (4:2), both good and viable ways to work. We can assume that both knew of God through their parents, and in due time, they knew that God deserved an offering. Even in humanity’s banishment, God had a plan and purpose for them to continue to be in relationship with Him, though not to the full extent as it was with God dwelling among them in the garden of Eden.

Cain offered “some of the land’s produce,” but Abel offered “some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions (vv. 3-4). From these contrasting descriptions, Abel seemed to have given more of a sacrifice, offering the “firstborn” and offering the “fat portions,” which are the best parts of the animal. We can assume this was a heartfelt, genuine offering of his best, and that’s why God accepted it. In contrast, Cain did not

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give out of a generous heart in the same way as his brother. It is possible he held back some of the best portions for himself. Thus, God had regard for Abel and his offering but not for Cain and his.

God knows and sees our hearts when we try to serve and worship Him. There’s no point in trying to trick Him or give halfheartedly or take what we think is ours. Ultimately, everything is from the Father and of the Father. Later in the Bible we see further consequences of not fully giving or intentionally trying to trick God through the actions of Achan, who stole goods from a victory (Josh. 7), as well as from Ananias and Sapphira, who said they had given all the proceeds of a sale when actually they only gave in part (Acts 5). In both instances, death was the consequence. God is omniscient, seeing and knowing everything. Yet sometimes we still go through our lives not always giving Him our all or our best, thinking He doesn’t know our thoughts.

In what parts of your life do you not give your all or your best to God?

Sin Will Lead Us to Anger and Despondency

Cain became furious and despondent (Gen. 4:5). Was He angry merely because God didn’t accept His offering or because God didn’t accept his offering but accepted his brother’s offering? The focus on Abel being his brother in this passage points to the latter. Other than Adam and Eve, this is our first encounter with human relationships in the Bible, and it starts with anger, despondency, and jealousy. Our hearts are prone to sin because we are constantly comparing ourselves and our condition with others. Adam and



Eve compared their situation with God’s. “The Lord shouldn’t have all the knowledge; we should too.” That led to the first sin. Now Cain was comparing himself to Abel. “I’m the older brother; I should be acknowledged, not him!” He was frustrated, angry, jealous, discouraged, and disappointed. The Hebrew word for *despondent* literally means his face was fallen.

Amazingly, the Lord, who knows all things and yet still seeks out and speaks with His sinful people, can be found in this passage encouraging Cain with great compassion. We don’t know how God said it, but it could have been an encouragement and a rebuke at the same time. God noticed Cain’s anger and asked him why he was furious, literally hot, and why his face was fallen. It’s quite possible that God could have seen Cain’s emotions physically on his face. The Lord told Cain that if he did what was right, then he would be “accepted” (v. 7), literally “lifted up,” in contrast to his fallen face. Sometimes the root of this Hebrew word also has the meaning of “forgiven.”¹ However, if Cain didn’t do what was right, then sin would be crouching at the door, somewhat like the serpent crouching before Eve when she was in the garden.

At this point, Cain had no dramatic repercussions, no critical punishment; he had only committed a sin of omission, not giving an acceptable offering. God merely didn’t have regard for Cain’s offering. (Of course, disregard from God can be viewed as a harsh punishment, but God had not declared any curses on Cain yet.) It’s possible that with His words, God was giving Cain a chance to redeem himself and find himself restored to a right relationship with the Lord. God knew that Cain had the choice and ability to choose good; whether he would do so or not was up to him.

WORD Study

DESPONDENT: The Hebrew phrase used for “despondent” literally means his face fell. It carries the idea of one who expresses publicly his sense of dejection or lost hope.

Sin was trying to get to Cain, but God encouraged and challenged Cain to “rule over it” (v. 7), the same way humanity was to rule over the created order. If we don’t rule over sin, sin will rule over us.

Don’t we find in our lives that a small sin often leads to bigger sins if we don’t take control of it? Sin creeps in; it crouches at the door where and when we are least likely to see it. We almost trip over it, but that doesn’t mean we’re not guilty of it. If sin has crept into our lives, then we have allowed it to. Instead of continuing on that downward path, we need to confess our sin to God for forgiveness and strive to root it out.

Like God encouraging Cain, telling him to “rule over” sin (v. 7), we are to do the same for those with whom we have the ability and power to. Sadly, we often just choose not to do so. When our feelings get the better of us—our jealousy, anger, frustration, despondency, or pride—it is easy to fall into sin’s grip, but we must resist this. We can choose to rule over sin. We must be alert and aware, however, and not let the devil or our own flesh get a foothold in our lives. God is compassionate and merciful when we sin and will try to lead us toward righteousness. But will we listen? Would Cain listen and choose what was right?

When you sin, how do you tend to respond if not in repentance?

Sin leads us to hateful actions (Genesis 4:8-12).

⁸ Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s guardian?” ¹⁰ Then he said, “What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! ¹¹ So now you are cursed, alienated from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood you have shed. ¹² If you work the ground, it will never again give you its yield. You will be a rest-less wanderer on the earth.”

Sin Can Multiply Hateful Actions

Cain chose poorly and chose the path of sin and let it rule him instead of ruling over it. He went from a sin of omission to a sin of commission, willfully doing a heinous act against God’s will. It was intentional and evil, all because of jealousy and pride. First, with deception, Cain lured Abel “out to the field” (v. 8), away from their home, away from their parents. Cain probably thought no one could see them there. Cain then attacked and killed Abel. He attacked the *imago Dei*, the image of God, in another human, his brother no less. This point is taken seriously in the fact that Abel is continuously mentioned with the reference of being “his brother” (vv. 8-9). Relational and familial bonds were of high value for people in Moses’s day and for us today, but Cain severed those bonds with murder.

How did that act of murder even begin? How did Cain even think about murder—there was no precedent set for it? Cain was furious and despondent and he had a problem. He wanted that problem to go away.

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He wanted to be the only one acknowledged for his efforts, not someone else. Logically speaking, the only thing to do was to get rid of the problem, and if Abel was the problem for Cain, then he had to get rid of Abel. Sin happens when we think that in on our own efforts, we can get rid of a problem. When we have a problem, we should collect our thoughts and bring the situation before God for a solution, or else we will find ourselves sinning with our own efforts. For Cain, what started as simply a poor offering led to the murder of a person with whom he had tight bonds and a relational obligation. But as the apostle John saw it, as mentioned in his first epistle, Cain’s “deeds were evil” (1 John 3:12), and sin led to more sin which led to more sin.

Similar to how God asked Adam and Eve where they were after they had sinned in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:9), God called out to Cain with the question “Where is your brother Abel?” (4:9). The Lord graciously aims to elicit a response of repentance from His people. When sin is revealed to us by God, the Holy Spirit, or others, we have a choice to confess and repent or to hide and make excuses. Unfortunately, sometimes the easier choice is the latter, but this will lead to further consequences. In Cain’s situation, after sinning with deceit and murder, he continued with lies, saying he didn’t know where his brother was (another reference to knowledge and the use of the Hebrew word *yada*, “to know”). Further, Cain then tried to strip himself of his responsibility as an older brother, saying, “Am I my brother’s guardian?” as if he wasn’t supposed to guard, care for, and protect his younger brother. His words are haunting because the answer was yes—he was supposed to be his brother’s guardian. Instead, he was his brother’s murderer.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“When we ask ‘Who is my brother; of whom am I the keeper?’ the answer is, every one whom God has given you, every one whom you have the power to help, even though it be but by the kind word spoken—we are their keeper, and God looks to you to see to it that they learn from you something of His love and care.”²

—W. Robertson Nicoll
(1851–1923)

The all-knowing God can see all our sin, no matter how much we try to hide or deflect. God said, “What have you done?” as an exclamation, not as a question. God already knew. He saw and heard Abel’s blood crying out from the ground (v. 10). There is nothing we can hide from God. Adam and Eve failed to see that. Cain also failed to see that. This is a warning for us. God sees everything. And He wants us to come to Him in confession and repentance instead of with lies and excuses. He sees our hearts. He sees our sin. He wants to lift us, not let us fall. But in the end, we make our own choices, and many times those choices are evil ones in which we let sin rule over us.

When have you seen sin lead to more sin as a general example or from an example in your own life?

Sin Leads to Unfruitfulness and Aimlessness

Cain wasn’t cursed when he gave a poor offering. Instead, God warned him and gave him a second chance. But Cain chose evil; he chose to be of the evil one (1 John 3:11). So God said, “Now you are cursed” (Gen. 4:11). God takes sin seriously, and since we know good from evil, He calls us to choose good over evil, just as the apostle John wrote:

The one who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil’s works. . . . This is how God’s children and the devil’s children become obvious. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother or sister. (1 John 3:8,10)

GOSPEL Connection
Abel’s blood “cries out . . . from the ground” for justice, and rightly so (Gen. 4:10), but Jesus’s blood declares those who believe in Him to be covered with His righteousness, cleansed from sin, and justified before God (Heb. 12:22-24).

The idea of obligation to your brother and sister was expanded to the idea of the church family, not just your immediate family. We are called to love, not to do evil, to those in the body of Christ and beyond.

Cain was cursed even further than his parents for his evil acts against his brother and against God. He was cursed to not being able to work the ground at all, not producing anything of value from it. The repetition of the Hebrew word for *ground*, literally “loose soil or dust,” is seen in verses 2,10,11, and 12. The ground will continue to be a reminder of the curse and consequences of sin, and fortunately, or unfortunately, the ground is everywhere we go, a constant reminder. Cain had been a cultivator of the land, but now it would not yield for him. And more than that, God said to Cain that he would be “a restless wanderer” (v. 12). Cain was exiled to wander aimlessly, without family, without God, without land, and without cultivation of the land.

It’s interesting to note that the heart of humanity and what we live for is productivity and purpose. Though many may not be able to articulate that fact, it is true that we find meaning for life when we are fruitful in something and feel like we have a purpose in this world. That’s why Cain’s punishment was a severe one. He was cursed to have the ground yield nothing for him. He was cursed to be an aimless wanderer. Sin led to sin that led to more sin in his life, and the consequences would be damaging. Sin’s consequences can lead to unfruitfulness and aimlessness, characteristics that we never want to have and that could lead to hopelessness.

The stage was set for the familiar refrain of God’s people continuing to rebel against Him, choosing

wrong over right because of pride and jealousy. But even in administering His punishment, God was full of grace. If we continue reading, we find Cain crying out to God that his punishment was too much—being an aimless wanderer would surely lead to someone killing him (vv. 13-14). But God in His grace assured Cain that any would-be killer would “suffer vengeance seven times over” (v. 15), and He placed a mark on Cain so no one would kill him (v. 15). This is our God—One who punishes sin but with grace and mercy.

Though Cain had to hide from and leave the presence of the Lord (vv. 14,16), he was not murdered and he became a city builder and had a long lineage (vv. 17-22). To some, that might not seem like Cain was punished very much—he still had a long life, a large family, and a profession. But we are reminded that material and worldly things are not always blessings from the Lord. As Paul wrote to the Philippian church:

I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ. (Phil. 3:8)

Cain had to leave God’s presence because of sin, and a life without God is devastating, even with all the worldly “blessings” of this life. Through a worldly lens, Cain may have prospered, but he did so without God’s presence, and that is the greatest curse in itself.

And thus, Eve was bereft of two sons—one dead and one banished to be a wanderer. But God in His graciousness allowed Eve to give birth to another son, Seth (Gen. 4:25), who would continue the line of God’s people as promised.

How does sin derail our sense of purpose and productivity?

 HEAD

How might misunderstanding God’s character lead you to sin?

 HEART

How can you commit yourself to being a loving keeper of your brothers and sisters in Christ?

 HANDS

How can you assure someone this week that the gospel can help break his or her progressive spiral of sin?

References

1. Thoralf Gilbrant, “5558. nāsā,” *The Old Testament Hebrew-English Dictionary*, The Complete Biblical Library (WORDsearch, 1998), Logos.

2. W. Robertson Nicoll, Jane T. Stoddart, and James Moffatt, eds., *The Expositor’s Dictionary of Texts: Genesis to St. Mark*, vol. 1 (New York: Hodder and Stoughton; George H. Doran Company, 1910), 25.