



GENESIS

The First Family & Sin's Escalation - Genesis 4-5

Context in Genesis

Genesis 4-5 follows the creation and fall narratives, shifting the focus to the early human generations after Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Chapter 4 recounts the story of Cain and Abel, highlighting themes of sin, jealousy, and divine judgment, while Chapter 5 provides a genealogy from Adam to Noah, emphasizing human mortality and the continuation of God's covenant lineage. This sets the stage for exploring humanity's moral struggles and God's ongoing relationship with his creation and his people. Ch. 4 emphasizes the corruption of humankind (Cain's line), while Ch. 5 traces the faithful line (Seth's) leading to Noah and the flood narrative.

The Structure of Genesis 4-5

Genesis 4: Cain, Abel, and the Spread of Sin

1. The Birth of Cain and Abel (4:1–2)
 - *Eve bears Cain and Abel; their occupations are farming and shepherding.*
2. Cain Murders Abel (4:3–16)
 - *Cain's unacceptable offering vs. Abel's acceptable one (4:3–5).*
 - *God's warning to Cain (4:6–7).*
 - *The murder and God's judgment (4:8–15).*
 - *Cain's exile to Nod (4:16).*
3. The Descendants of Cain (4:17–24)
 - *Cain's family line and cultural developments (4:17–22):*
 - *Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methushael, Lamech.*
 - *Jabal (livestock), Jubal (music), Tubal-cain (metalworking).*

- *Lamech's violent boast and polygamy (4:23–24).*
4. The Birth of Seth (4:25–26)
- *Replacement for Abel; beginning of calling on the Lord's name.*

Genesis 5: The Genealogy from Adam to Noah

1. Introduction (5:1–2)
 - *“Book of the generations of Adam”; God's creation and blessing of humanity.*
2. The Lineage from Adam to Noah (5:3–32)
 - Pattern for each generation (repeated 9 times):
 - *Age at fatherhood → Name of son → Years after → Total lifespan → Death.*
 - Key figures:
 - *Adam – Seth (5:3–5).*
 - *Seth – Enosh (5:6–8).*
 - *Enosh – Kenan (5:9–11).*
 - *Kenan – Mahalalel (5:12–14).*
 - *Mahalalel – Jared (5:15–17).*
 - *Jared – Enoch (5:18–20). Exception: Enoch “walked with God” and was taken (5:21–24).*
 - *Enoch – Methuselah (5:25–27).*
 - *Methuselah – Lamech (5:28–31).*
 - *Lamech – Noah (5:32):*
 - *Noah's three sons (Shem, Ham, Japheth) are introduced.*

The Birth of Cain and Abel (4:1–2)

Exegetical Matters

- Although Adam and Eve forfeited eternal life, they continued to live for some time and brought about the next generation.
- Cain (*qayin*) is named from a derivative of the verb translated as “brought forth” or “acquired” (*qaniti*). Eve acknowledges that, though on a human level, Cain's birth was a result of her physical intimacy with Adam, he was also a result of the Lord's grace and mercy—his “help”.
- God's continuation of humanity's line and story demonstrates the first glimpses of the redemption promised in the warning/judgment to the serpent in Genesis 3:15.
- Adam and Eve's second son was named Abel (*hebel*), which is related to the word for vapor, which is translated as “futility” or “meaningless” in Ecclesiastes.

Cain Murders Abel (4:2-12)

Exegetical Matters

- Why does God accept Abel's sacrifice but reject Cain's? The text doesn't say directly, but a reason for God's "regard" for one and not the other may be seen in Cain's presentation of *some* of his produce compared with Abel's *firstborn* and *fat portions*.
- In other words, it appears Cain offered the ordinary and Abel the best, the quality of their respective offerings reflecting the condition of their hearts.
- Yahweh's rejection of Cain's offering doesn't appear to have been without recourse for Cain's improvement. Nowhere does the text indicate that Cain's error was permanent.
- In 4:6-7, God rebuked Cain for his response to God's displeasure. Rather than wanting to change and do the right thing, Cain grew angry and sullen, intent on ignoring the Lord's instruction to "do what is right."
- The Lord's warning is realized in the ominous verse 8. Allowing sin to rule over him instead of him ruling over it (compare 3:16 and 4:7), Cain commits the first fratricide by luring Abel out into the field and killing him.
- As in 3:9, God introduces his judgment speech with a question, "Where is your brother Abel?"
- Cain lies to God and also dismissively asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In the same way that Adam did not watch over (*šāmar*, 2:15) the garden, so Cain does not keep (*šāmar*, 4:9) his brother.
- Abel, whose life was like a vapor (see above), is described as crying out for the Lord's help in his death, and the earth, which took in Abel's blood, will take his side and make Cain's efforts frustrating and challenging.
- Cain's punishment is effectively an intensification of the punishment given to Adam—work will be increasingly difficult, and as a wanderer, he will further experience the expulsion from Eden.

Implications for Today:

- We know God does not *need* sacrifices, but rather desires sincere worship. He doesn't dislike ritual, far from it. The rituals were God's idea! However, he is to be worshiped on his terms, not ours.

*If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and everything in it is mine.
Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?
Offer a thanksgiving sacrifice to God,
and pay your vows to the Most High.
Call on me in a day of trouble;
I will rescue you, and you will honor me.
(Psalm 50:12-15)*

- This passage foreshadows the biblical paradigm of repentance, forgiveness, and restoration.
- It also illustrates the heaviness and irrationality of sin, rebellion against the Lord's words and ways, which seems simultaneously insane and powerfully alluring.

“Cain kills Abel because he can’t kill God, so he kills the one that pleased God. Unrighteous anger results from an interference with satisfaction, a hatred of vulnerability, and a love of control. Unrighteous anger seeks to gain independence from God and others. Cain resists the controls that he perceives God trying to put on him. Unrighteous anger delivers us from trusting God who does not comply with what we want.”

– Tremper Longman III

Token (Tattoo?) of Grace and Execution of Judgment (4:13-16)

Exegetical Matters

- Cain is expelled to the land of Nod (4:16), a place whose name is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning “to wander.”
- Cain fears he will fall prey to the hostility of others, especially as he is pushed further from Eden and the life-giving presence of the Lord.
- However, in his mercy, God extends kindness and protection to Cain, promising severe retribution to any who would harm him.

- Much speculation has been made of the nature of the mark on Cain (4:15), but the text only indicates that, whatever the mark was, it protected Cain from the same hostility he first demonstrated against his brother.

The Line of Cain (4:17-26)

Exegetical Matters

- This begins back-to-back genealogies, one of Cain and one of Seth, another son of Adam and Eve. These genealogies serve a purpose beyond mere historical interest.
 - First, they demonstrate that humanity is divided into two camps: one that rejects God and one that follows him. While, in a literal sense, both genealogies descend from Eve, the “woman” in 3:15, spiritually, the line of Cain is descended from the serpent, and the line of Seth represents the other line with whom they are in conflict.
 - Second, these genealogies, particularly Cain’s, associate certain developments in civilization with his line of descent, thus suggesting a certain darkness to them.
- By associating Cain with the first city (4:17), the narrator comments on civilization:
 - Cain’s punishment was that he should be a wanderer; yet, he took steps to create a permanent habitation for himself and others. This could be interpreted as an act of resistance against God’s punishment (and thus sinful).
 - Some similar concerns with establishing concentrated areas of rebellious humanity will reappear in Genesis 11 (think, the Tower of Babel).
 - The question is also raised about where all these people have come from. Revisit the lesson from September 17th to recall the various ways to think through the timeline and expansion of the human population. However, the point of Genesis 4-5 is not the other humans left unmentioned, but instead a focused attention on God’s dealings with these particular ancestral lineages.
- 4:18 quickly moved through three generations (Enoch to Irad to Mehujael to Methushael) before dwelling longer on Lamech.
- Lamech is the first example of a polygamous man described in the Bible. Though later permitted (Ex 21:7-11), God’s original design was clearly monogamy (Gen 2:24). That polygamy emerged from the line of Cain is an implicit critique of the practice.

- Lamech's character is revealed in his speech to his wives (4:23-24): he's a man of unjust vengeance, willing to execute disproportionate justice, and he presumes upon an intensification of the Lord's protection for Cain.
- Lamech's children (4:20-22) are associated with (perhaps representative of?) various cultural developments that lead to concentrated human populations, such as cities: agriculture, music, and metallurgy.

Implications for Today:

- From the narrator's perspective, people are not getting better over time, but rather much worse.
- What is the Cainite genealogy saying by associating the development of civilization with those descended from Cain? The association between herding, music, and metalworking and Cain's line is a reminder that there is a dark side to civilization. It is not to say that cities, nomadic herding, music, and metalworking are irredeemable evils, but that they can be dangerous to humanity by increasing human strife, oppression, and suffering.
- Cities bring large numbers of people together into close proximity. The book of Genesis conveys that humans are sinners, at our core, self-seeking; thus, a large mass of humanity can lead to exploitation and violence of all kinds.
- However, God can also use cities for redemptive purposes. Think of Jerusalem's role in the OT, or the way the church is described as the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22.
- The creators, shapers, and participants in civilization need to be mindful that these things are not unqualified goods, but must be redeemed by God to be beneficial.

*The LORD is great and highly praised
in the city of our God.
His holy mountain, rising splendidly,
is the joy of the whole earth.
Mount Zion—the summit of Zaphon—
is the city of the great King.
God is known as a stronghold
in its citadels.*

(Psalm 48:1-3)

The Line of Seth (5:1-32)

Exegetical Matters

- The name of Adam and Eve's third son was Seth (*sheth*), and he is introduced as a replacement for Abel, thus a follower of God, unlike his murderous brother Cain. The name Seth reveals his role as a replacement, "God has given (*shath*) me another offspring in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." (4:25).
- The genealogy provides no narrative for Seth but quickly passes over to his son Enosh. This line is further distinguished from that of Cain by the narrator mentioning at this point that "people began to call on the name of the Lord" (4:26).
- 5:1 marks the beginning of a new section in the book, characterized by the *toledot* formula, the "family records of Adam."
- This genealogy is linear (moving from father to son), but there is some question as to whether any generations are skipped. That there are exactly ten generations between Adam and Noah and then ten more between Noah and Abraham, some suggest this is literary artifice rather than historical precision (like the genealogy of Jesus in Matt. 1).

Implications for Today:

- In our good zeal to point out the problems with proponents of the prosperity gospel, we should not miss the clear teaching that godliness typically leads to good results.
- It is not at all untypical that good results arise from our relationship with God and our obedience in the here and now. Such is taught by the very structure of the covenant, which connects blessings with obedience to the law and punishments with disobedience (see Deuteronomy 27 and 28), or consider the book of Proverbs with the rewards granted to the wise and the dire consequences connected to foolish behavior.
 - In these chapters, the godly line lives long lives. Whether these numbers are literal or symbolic, the long lives of those in the godly line who live before the flood are to be read as a consequence of their "calling on the name of the Lord."
 - God will connect the radical shortening of lifespans to human sin (6:3).
 - Enoch stands as an example of righteousness who was rewarded with a long life and then entered God's presence without experiencing death.