

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 6 (4:1-16): Some Summary Thoughts

As Genesis 3 ended, Scripture portrays the havoc that rebellion against God wreaks on marital relationships. Genesis 4 is going even further to reveal the devastating impact that sin has upon fraternal relationships. The pattern that began with Adam and Eve's rebellion: sin --- punishment --- renewal, continues in chapter 4.

Chapter 4 opens on an upbeat note. Adam and Eve, having been expelled from the garden and God's Presence, experience the joy of a newborn child. Eve acknowledges her dependency upon God in her choice of a name for their child. She calls him Cain (*qayin*), saying “*I have gotten [acquired/produced] (qaniti) a man with the help of the LORD.*” (4:1). A second pregnancy results in a son who receives a more poignant name: Able (“ephemeral, nothingness”).

The sons bring “offerings” to God; God's response is telling. Cain becomes a tiller of the soil (like his father). Abel takes up the life of a shepherd. Both determine to “worship” the LORD by bringing offerings to Him. Scripture states Cain brought some part of his produce, fruit of the ground (4:3); while Abel brought “*the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions*” (4:4). God's reaction is to have “regard” for Cain's offering, but no “regard” for Abel's (4:4). These texts suggest that the distinction in the two offerings is that Cain gave “some” of what he had; Abel gave the best of his best. One interpretation, then, for God's response in rejecting Cain's offering and accepting Abel's could be that He disregards offerings that receive little regard from the owner. The author of Hebrews offers a broader perspective, stating that Abel's was more acceptable because it was offered “by faith” (Heb 11:4).

The progression of the text suggests that Cain's response to God was also critically important!

- Apparently in frustration at not receiving the reaction from God that he had expected, Cain becomes angry.
- The ruptured relationship between Cain and God translates into violence against his physical brother.
- As a result, Cain becomes the first person in Scripture to whom *sin* is attributed (4:7).
 - This text depicts “sin” as a choice, albeit a very difficult choice (4:6-7)
 - Sin is portrayed as a predator with a possessive, aggressive character that must be resisted (4:7)
 - A powerful lesson, however, is that just as we can choose against God and/or our brother, it is just as possible for us to choose *for* God and *for* our brother.
 - In other words, we can choose to take responsibility and in God's Words, “*do well*” (4:7)
 - As the text plays out, a primary lesson is: as we make choices *for/against* our brother, so God makes choices for us!!

God's question to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” is not just rhetorical. Through God's challenge to Cain, we can also hear God challenge us to forego self-gratification, self-obsession and self-interest and love our brother! As God teaches in His reorientation of Eve's “desire” for self-gratification to a renewed “desire” for the relationship God initially designed, so too God challenges us to examine our own “desires” to see where their central focus is. When we “worship” God by bringing offerings to Him and misunderstand our own relationship to God, then it is possible to view our “worship” as an avenue in which we gain God's approval or disapproval. When God does not appear to respond to us as we expect or anticipate, then our emotions can take over and we can react in hurt, disappointment and/or anger – toward God and toward each other. This text strongly suggests that a right relationship with God is impossible when our relationships with each other are at odds (see also Matt 5:21-24).

God's punishment, as was true for Adam & Eve's disobedience, follows swiftly. The punishment fits the crime. The tiller of the soil who has shed blood upon the cursed earth now receives a Divine curse. That which is most precious and valued to him – the soil and its “strength” – is taken. He is sent to wander throughout the earth denied the very land he longs to farm. Being driven from the land, Cain also worries that the action drives him away from God's Face, making him a “marked” fugitive open to death at anyone's hand.

God's Grace/Renewal: To calm Cain and reassure him that God remains Sovereign and in control despite Cain's sin, God “marks” Cain to relieve him of possible vengeance from other human beings. In compassion, God extends His Grace to supply Cain protection. Though Cain may feel separated from God, the alienation apparently is not complete. God's grace shines forth.

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 6 (4:1-16): Some Summary Thoughts (cont)

Parallels from Genesis chapter 3 and chapter 4: Keeping in mind the operative paradigm provided in this sixth lesson: a framework consisting of sin ---- punishment ----- renewal, it is fascinating to compare how similar the interactions are between God and mankind in both chapters. Note:

Genesis 3	Genesis 4
Rebellion: Pictures the tension wreaked upon marital relationships as Adam & Eve rebel against God (3:12)	Rebellion/Sin: Pictures the devastating impact of “sin” upon fraternal relationships (4:8)
Rebellion: Adam & Eve experience the potential to “rule” God’s creation under God’s Dominion; but choose to remove the gap and become “like God” (3:6-11)	Rebellion/Sin: Cain is born with the help of God (4:1); then chooses to remove competition to secure/earn favor with God (4:8). In effect, Cain chooses to play God
Rebellion: Eve “desired” wisdom that the serpent inferred could be hers if she ate from the prohibited tree (3:6). God reorients her “desire” to be for her husband as part of His punishment (3:16)	Rebellion/Sin: Cain is warned that sin “desires” control of his life, but he must resist it (4:7)
God questions Adam & Eve to make them confront their wrong choices: “Where are you?” “What have you done?” (3:9, 13)	God questions Cain: “Why are you angry?” “Where is your brother?” (4:6, 10)
Man’s response to God: Adam excused his sin and shifted the blame (3:12)	Cain’s response to God: Cain denies his sin (4:9)
Mankind’s response to God: Adam & Eve hid, fearful of God’s Presence (3:8)	Cain’s response to God: Cain initially refuses any culpability for his actions & rejects any responsibility for his brother (4:9)
Punishment: The earth receives a Divine curse because of the first couple’s rebellion (3:17)	Punishment: Cain receives God’s curse for the blood he sheds upon the cursed earth (4:11)
Punishment: God further punishes Adam & Eve by “expulsion/banishment” (<i>garash</i>) from the garden & His Presence (3:23)	Punishment: God punishes Cain by “expulsion/banishment” (<i>garash</i>) from the soil (4:14)
Grace/Renewal: God clothes Adam & Eve in animal skins; God is acknowledged in birth of Cain (3:21, 4:1)	Grace/Renewal: “Mark” on Cain given to spare him; birth of Seth (4:15, 25)

This portion of chapter 4 closes with the “wanderer” (“*nad*” 4:14) wandering eastward (interestingly this and future references of going “east” strongly suggest moving away from God). When Cain finishes his wandering, he establishes a city in the land of “*nod*” (“wandering”). Cain’s lineage that will follow (4:17-24) continues the story line about man’s continued moral decline as they move further from God.