

## “Raising Cain” (Genesis 4:1-26)

Do you remember the TV show *The Incredible Hulk*? The main character was a scientist named Dr. David Banner. Banner was basically a very friendly man. But whenever he got angry, his eyes would turn green and he would be transformed into this big, green, hulking monster (played by former professional bodybuilder, Lou Ferrigno). If you were a person in need, he would save you. But God help you if you were the one he was mad at because he would pick you up and throw you to the other side of the room like you were a rag doll. Dr. Banner didn't like what anger did to him. In fact, the whole show is built around Dr. Banner's desire to find a cure so this won't happen to him anymore.

The lesson that I learn from *The Incredible Hulk* is: If you don't learn to deal with your temper, it will turn you into a monster of a person. It can change you into someone you don't want to be. This is what happened to Cain in Genesis 4. He had a bad temper to start with, but he didn't deal with it. Eventually, it turned him into this other person...an evil person.<sup>1</sup> However, Cain's problem was not an anger problem; his problem was a worship problem! The expression of inappropriate anger was a sin that was symptomatic of a greater problem. In Genesis 4:1-26, we will learn from the account of Cain how to worship God on His terms.

**1. The birth of the two sons (4:1-2).** Our account begins with these words: “**Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain**” (4:1a). After the fall, Adam and Eve began a family.<sup>2</sup> Eve gave birth to “**Cain**” whose name means, “acquire, get, or possess.” His Hebrew name is Cain; his English name would be “Got.”<sup>3</sup> Eve responded to Cain's birth by saying, “**I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD**” (4:1b). The literal rendering of Eve's reply is, “I have gotten a son, the Lord.” Some Bible students interpret this to mean that Eve believes she has begotten the Savior (cf. 3:15). This is possible, of course. Perhaps more likely, Eve understood from the prophecy of 3:15 that one of her offspring would bring about her redemption.<sup>4</sup> Regardless, in this statement there is an implicit declaration of faith and gratitude (cf. 3:20).<sup>5</sup> Eve acknowledges that God has enabled her to bear a child, a child through whom her deliverance may soon come. In 4:2a, Moses records, “**Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel**” (4:2a). Unlike Cain's name, Abel's name is not explained by Eve. However, the Hebrew word “**Abel**” is the word “vanity” or “breath,” appearing throughout Ecclesiastes. Traditionally understood, his name reflects on the temporary nature of his existence. It is important to notice the terms “**brother**” and “**Abel**” each appear seven times, stressing the relationship between the two men.<sup>6</sup> In these opening verses, Moses is trying to prepare us for what is to come.

[After giving a brief account of the birth of the two sons, the narrative focuses on the worship of these two brothers.<sup>7</sup> The primary purpose of this account is to reveal what kind of worship is pleasing to God.]

**2. The worship of the two brothers (4:2b-5).** In 4:2b, Moses writes, “**And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.**” Abel is a shepherd and Cain is a farmer. Both of these vocations are noble; one is not better than the other. This leads into an exercise in worship in 4:3-5a: “**So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit<sup>8</sup> of the ground. Abel, on his part also<sup>9</sup> brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.**” Both brothers bring offerings to the Lord suitable to their vocations (4:3). Yet, God regarded Abel and his offering and not Cain and his offering (4:4b).<sup>10</sup> Some insist that the reason for this is Abel offered a blood sacrifice while Cain did not. However, there does not appear to be anything wrong with Cain offering fruit as opposed to animal sacrifice.

Later in Israel's history, grain offerings and harvest offerings are legitimate expressions of worship that God accepts and even commands.<sup>11</sup> So if it is not a failure to bring a blood sacrifice, why does God reject Cain and his offering?

The New Testament authors inform us that God regarded Abel because he had faith (Heb 11:4) while Cain did not (Jude 11-13 and 1 John 3:11-12). Therefore, it seems clear that Abel was in relationship with God and Cain was separated from God. A very important principle is this: "God always inspects the giver and the worshipper before He inspects the gift, service, or worship."<sup>12</sup> This means it is critical that you are in relationship with God before you seek to worship or serve Him. Otherwise, your worship is unacceptable.

There is also an interesting clue in the Genesis account that tells us about Cain and Abel and their offerings. In 4:4, Moses records that Abel offers "**the firstlings of his flock**" (cf. Exod 34:19; Deut 12:6; 14:23) and the "**fat portions**" (cf. Num 18:17) for his offering.<sup>13</sup> The word that is translated "fat portions" means "choicest, best part, or abundance."<sup>14</sup> Abel gave what cost him most—the firstborn! On the other hand, Cain merely offers "**the fruit,**" not the first fruit, of the ground (4:3). Abel brought the best parts of his flocks and Cain was not so particular. Abel went out of his way to worship God by giving his best. Cain merely discharged a duty. One of the key themes throughout Scripture is God seeks worship that is perfect and costly (Lev 22:20-22; 2 Sam 24:24). He will not be satisfied with second best (Mal 1:6-14; Rom 12:1).

The Butterball Company set up a Thanksgiving hotline to answer questions about cooking turkeys. One woman asked if she could use a turkey that had been in the bottom of her freezer for 23 years. The Butterball expert—how's that for a job title—told her it would probably be safe if the freezer had been below zero the entire time. But the expert warned her that even if the turkey was safe to eat, the flavor would likely have deteriorated and wouldn't be worth eating. The woman said, "That's what I thought. We'll give the turkey to our church."<sup>15</sup> While this is an amusing story, it does hit a bit close to home for some Christians. Sin first shows itself in what you give God.

Motives matter to God. God is not impressed with those who do the right thing for the wrong reason. This truth is taught throughout the Bible. In Matthew 15:8, Jesus looks at the Pharisees and quotes Isaiah, "These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me" (see also Micah 6:7-8). Sometimes people can have very bad motives for doing good things. There is a story about a man who was riding in a New York City taxi. He noticed the cab driver slowed down to avoid hitting a pedestrian. Trying to compliment the driver's action, he said, "I noticed you slowed down for that fellow." The driver responded, "Yeah, if you hit them, you have got to fill out a report." I would stay out of the way of that cab if I were walking in New York.

What are our motives for serving the Lord? Every so often we need to do a motive checkup and ask ourselves: Why am I nice to other people? Why do I put money in the offering plate? Why do I serve in Awana on Wednesday night?

[Whatever the cause of God's rejection of Cain's offering; the narrative itself focuses our attention on Cain's response. It is there that the narrative seeks to make its point.]<sup>16</sup>

**3. The response of the oldest brother (4:5b-8).** When Cain learned that God had "no regard" for his offering, "[he] became very angry and his countenance fell" (4:5b). Cain became angry with God! Rather than being concerned about remedying the situation and pleasing God, he became very angry. We must stop here and ask these questions of ourselves: How do we respond when God says no?

When God convicts us and deals with the sin in our lives, how do we respond? Do we seek to make things right? Do we come before the Lord in worship and confession with a humble and contrite heart? Or do we pout and get ticked off? The Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, said it best, “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa 66:2b).

Do you have a problem with your temper? One lady said, “I occasionally lose my temper, but it’s over quickly.” Her pastor replied, “So is an atom bomb explosion, but think of the damage it causes. So is a cyclone, but think of the destruction it leaves. So is a bullet fired, but think of the death it can cause.” We must not assume that unrighteous anger is ever justified or appropriate.

In customary fashion, in 4:6, the Lord pursues Cain with three consecutive questions: **“Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?”** God was not pleased with Cain or his offering. These first two questions demonstrate that He was even more displeased by Cain’s response. Yet, many of us have been told by other well-meaning Christians that it is perfectly acceptable to get mad at God. We like to justify our anger by saying, “He’s a big God. He has broad shoulders. He can handle my cussing and complaining.” Well, sure He can, but is this the appropriate response to the almighty Creator of heaven and earth? I don’t think so.<sup>17</sup> He is a sovereign God that is to be feared. He wants us to trust Him, even when things don’t make sense. Unfortunately, many Christians have a small view of God that allows them to have temper tantrums with Him.

In 4:7, the Lord says, **“And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”**<sup>18</sup> This clearly implies that Cain knew what was right. He knew the quality of offering to bring and chose not to bring it. He knew his heart was not right, but he chose not to address it. Yet, this verse also shows God’s grace, for Cain was still invited to bring the correct offering. God warned Cain and He wanted Cain to **“do well,”** but Cain hardened his heart. Sin is like a wild animal ready to pounce and devour its victim.<sup>19</sup> What a graphic picture the Lord paints! What a reminder that we do indeed have a choice whether or not to sin. Flip Wilson was wrong when he said, “The Devil made me do it.” On the contrary, when we sin, we sin because of our refusal to rely on God’s power to “master it.”<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, instead of heeding God’s warning, Cain ignored God’s words and allowed himself to be mastered by sin. This resulted in the very first murder. Moses writes of the tragic event in 4:8: **“Cain told Abel his brother.<sup>21</sup> And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”** In his anger, Cain took the life of another human being...and his victim was his very own brother.<sup>22</sup> The use of “rise up” is most appropriate, since the “rising up” of Cain to kill his brother is a direct consequence of the “falling” of his countenance, when Abel’s offering was accepted but his was not.<sup>23</sup> Under the Mosaic Law, the fact that a killing took place in a field, out of the range of help, was proof of premeditation (cf. Deut 22:25-27).<sup>24</sup> We cringe at such a horrible act and think, “I could never do something like that.” But if we were honest, many of us would have to confess our own lists of people we’ve assassinated with our words or attitudes.<sup>25</sup>

A lesson we learn from the murder of Abel is that anger and jealousy can be very destructive. It is certainly not Abel’s fault that Cain’s sacrifice is not pleasing to God. But when God accepts Abel’s offering and rejects Cain’s, Cain directs his anger, jealousy, and hatred toward his brother. The history of crime shows that when given the opportunity, hatred often leads to murder. That is what Jesus was pointing to in Matthew 5 where He says hating your brother is really the same as murder.

You may be angry today. It might have been something, which happened this morning. Maybe you are mad at your mom and dad because they won't let you go to a friend's house after church. Or maybe something happened years ago. Perhaps a neighbor or someone in the church cheated you out of some money or took advantage of you in some way, and you still have a bitter attitude. Whatever type the anger is, you need to get control of it and get rid of it. Ephesians 4:27 says if you don't control your anger, you give the Devil a foothold (lit. "a place") in your life. That is what Cain did. Uncontrolled anger and jealousy resulted in Abel's death and destroyed Cain's life too. Don't let it happen in your life. Acknowledge that the attitude is wrong, confess it to the Lord, and ask His help in overcoming this destructive attitude.

**4. The pursuit of a gracious God (4:9-16).** In 4:9, Cain foolishly thought he could hide his sin from God. He's following in his father's footsteps (3:8). Yet, God seeks Cain just like He sought Adam and Eve. God is a seeker. After Cain's treacherous sin, the Lord does the unthinkable—he dialogues with Cain. He speaks with grace, not wrath. The Lord says to Cain, **"Where is Abel your brother?"** Cain responds by saying, **"I do not know."** Cain begins on a sinful note by lying to God. Puny old Cain tells an omniscient God that he doesn't know where his brother Abel is. Come on! The fact that Cain can dispassionately deny what he has done and show a total lack of care and concern for his brother closely parallels man's total lack of regard for woman in 3:12, where man icily refers to his companion as "the woman" and places all the blame on her, thereby revealing a complete absence of the intimacy and companionship that earlier had characterized their relationship.

To make matters worse, Cain goes on to utter the infamous old adage, **"Am I my brother's keeper?"** This was a tragic mistake on Cain's part. Now, if I was God, I would have smoked Cain right where he stood! But not the Lord! Instead, He asks Cain a follow-up question that is the same question He asked Eve (3:13): **"What have you done?"** Wouldn't you just hate to be Cain right now? The Lord then stops asking questions and says, **"The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground"** (4:10). This is a key sentence. The words **"to me"** demonstrate how seriously God takes first-degree murder. When another person kills a baby, a child, or an adult made in the image of God (1:26; 9:6), the blood of the victim cries out to God! Sin cannot be covered up from God. It can be hidden from people, but not from God. Secret sin on earth is open scandal in heaven!

As a consequence of Cain's act of deliberate sin, God curses him (4:11-12), just like He cursed the serpent (3:14) and the ground (3:17-19). Woe! Moses records these tragic words: **"Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth."**<sup>26</sup> This is the first instance in Scripture where a human is **"cursed."** The ultimate penalty for a Hebrew is not death, but exile, a loss of roots.

In 4:13-14, **"Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment<sup>27</sup> is too great to bear! Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.'"** Cain's complaint is peppered with the use of seven personal pronouns. All Cain cared about was himself. There was no fear or reverence for God, no regret for the loss of innocent life, no sorrow for sin, and no thought for his parents who had lost one son tragically through murder and would be losing another through rebellion. There was only a preoccupation with himself.<sup>28</sup> The killer fears being killed. He who turned on one of his relatives now must watch out for any of his relatives.<sup>29</sup>

In 4:15, the Lord speaks again to Cain, **“Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.’ And the LORD appointed a sign<sup>30</sup> for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him.”** God continues to demonstrate His grace and compassion—even to Cain! The Lord gave Cain a sign before judgment was carried out. Isn’t this just like the Lord?

The Lord’s program always seems to be mercy before judgment. How fortunate we are that this is the case. If it weren’t, we would have been snuffed out a long time ago! No matter what you’ve done, God wants a relationship with you. There is no sin that you have ever committed that is too big for God. He will accept you IF you accept His Son’s sacrifice for your sin. We do not know what the **“sign”** was. Some have supposed it was a mark of some kind on Cain himself (e.g., a tattoo), others a special hairstyle. One of the ancient rabbis argued that the sign was a dog that accompanied Cain on his wanderings. The dog assured Cain of God’s protection and frightened attackers.<sup>31</sup> Others think it is some sign in the external world, such as an intensified fear of killing another human being.<sup>32</sup> To that end, God places a mark on Cain before he expels him. This will protect Cain from recrimination. Here again is mercy before judgment.

In 4:16, we read these sad words: **“Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod,<sup>33</sup> east of Eden.”** One question that is asked is: Did Cain repent? Probably not. The New Testament Scriptures uniformly speak of Cain in the negative with phrases like “the way of Cain” (Jude 11) and one “who was of the evil one and slew his brother” (1 John 3:12). His life is contrasted with “righteous Abel” (Matt 23:35). Nevertheless, we do not know what ultimately happened to him.<sup>34</sup> He may have responded to God. Cain was not beyond God’s grace<sup>35</sup> and neither are you.

[It is important to note that Adam’s sin (3:6-7) progresses to murder between brother and brother (4:1-16), and then to the decay of society (4:17-26).]

**5. The tale of two men (4:17-26).** In 4:17, we have a well-known proof text used by skeptics. The verse reads: **“Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son.”** Of course, the obvious question is: Where did Cain get his wife? The answer is quite simple: Cain married his sister (or possibly a niece). The Bible says Adam “had other sons and daughters” (5:4). In fact, since Adam lived 930 years (5:5), he had plenty of time for plenty of children! Cain could have married one of his many sisters, or even a niece, if he married after his brothers or sisters had grown daughters. Regardless, one of his brothers would have married a sister. Marriages between close relatives were at first unavoidable if the whole human race came from a single pair. Marriage between siblings and close relatives was not prohibited until the Mosaic Law, instituted thousands of years later (Lev 18:6-18). There were no genetic imperfections at the beginning of the human race. God created genetically perfect Adam (1:27). Genetic defects resulted from the fall and only occurred gradually, over long periods of time.

In 4:18-19, we read about a man by the name of **“Lamech”** who becomes the first bigamist. Bigamy was common in the ancient Near East, but it was never God’s desire (cf. 2:24; Matt 19:4-5). God permitted it, however, as He did many other customs of which He disapproved (e.g., divorce, marrying concubines, polygamy, etc.)<sup>36</sup>; but He was not pleased with this violation of the marriage covenant.

In 4:20-24, we see that Cain prospered even though he rebelled against God. Cain’s prosperity led the way in producing cities, music, weapons, and agricultural implements—in short, civilization.<sup>37</sup> Even among ungodly people God allows development and progress. It is part of His kindness to the entire human race. This is another indication of God’s grace. Cain’s descendants took the lead in building cities, developing music, advancing agriculture, creating weapons, and spreading civilization.

In 4:23-24, Lamech said to his wives, **“Adah and Zillah, listen to my voice, you wives of Lamech, give heed to my speech, for I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me; if Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”**<sup>38</sup> Lamech, who is Cain’s great-great-grandson, writes a piece of poetry, but what an ugly piece of poetry it is! It is a song. One can easily see that its lines are parallel and poetical. Lamech is singing a song. But what is he singing about? He is singing about polygamy, murder, and revenge. This is a “sword song” in which Lamech wears violence as a badge of honor. God allows the makers of musical instruments to arise, but they misuse their very culture to promote violence. This is how men and women use their culture. God allows family life, music, and technology but how does man use His blessings? He perverts them! Music is wonderful. Yet, music can be used for wicked purposes also.<sup>39</sup>

Do you realize the influence of the media on you and your children? Think about many of the songs that are popular today. They are full of violence, sex, and self. What about the impact of television? Did you know that the average American family watches 6.5 hours of TV daily? One way of making sense of this astronomical figure is to consider this: The average child spends 900 hours a year in school but 1,500 hours a year watching TV.<sup>40</sup>

[Just when things seem to be beyond hope, the Lord shows forth His hand of sovereignty and promise.]

In 4:25-26, Moses writes, **“Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, ‘God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him.’ To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.”** Obviously, 4:25-26 should not be understood as a sequel to 4:17-24. Cain’s genealogy does not extend six generations before Adam fathers a child again. Cain’s sons prospered and founded the new world after the fall. Yet, they were not to be included in the lineage of the Messianic “seed” (cf. 3:15). The author turns another page with the birth of “another offspring in place of Abel” (4:25). This strategic birth reveals that the “seed” would continue through the line of Seth. Seth’s name, from the Hebrew verb translated “granted” and meaning “to set or place,” expresses Eve’s faith that God would continue to provide seed despite death.<sup>41</sup>

After the birth of Enosh (Seth’s son), it is noted that **“then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.”** The phrase **“call upon the name of the Lord”** usually refers to proclamation rather than prayer in the Pentateuch.<sup>42</sup> Here it probably refers to the beginning of public worship of Yahweh. This is the inauguration of true worship (cf. 12:8; 13:4; 16:13; 21:33; 26:25).<sup>43</sup> **“Enosh”** means “weakness” and in his weakness he turns to God with petition and praises (Ps 149:6).<sup>44</sup> Man will not pray until he recognizes his human weakness and inability and is utterly dependent upon God. So Cain’s firstborn and successors pioneer civilization, while Seth’s firstborn and successors pioneer worship.<sup>45</sup>

Will you humble yourself, acknowledge your own weakness, and turn to the Lord for His strength. As Paul writes in the New Testament, “. . .the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor 1:25).

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This illustration was revised and adapted from Marc Axelrod, *Dealing with Anger: Genesis 4:1-16*.  
<http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=62735&ContributorID=9610>.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase translated “had relations” is the Hebrew verb “know” (*yada*), which speaks of intimate knowledge by experience. This is why “know” is often used to mean “have sexual intercourse,” the most intimate experience a husband and wife can share.

<sup>3</sup> Cain’s birth is connected by Eve with the verb “have gotten.” In Hebrew this verb sounds very much like “Cain.”

<sup>4</sup> Some believe that Eve was boasting that she had created a man (Cain) as God had created a man (Adam). John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 111-112; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1:1-11:26*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 265; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15: WBC* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 101-102.

<sup>6</sup> It is also interesting that Cain, the leading character of the account, is mentioned 14 times in 17 verses.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the chapter begins and ends with the subject of worship (4:3, 26).

<sup>8</sup> Hauser comments, “The noun ‘fruit’ provides yet another link with Genesis 2-3. In 3:1-6 the serpent beguiles woman, persuading her to eat the ‘fruit’ of the tree in the midst of the garden. ‘Fruit’ is used three times in those verses and symbolizes both the temptation placed on woman and the deed committed by her. The use of ‘fruit’ in 4:3 immediately reminds the reader of the earlier role ‘fruit’ played in the fall. This is appropriate, for in 4:1-16 ‘fruit’ again plays a significant role in the offense committed. Yahweh has no regard for Cain’s offering of the ‘fruit’ of the ground, and Cain’s anger over this leads directly to his murdering of Abel. The reader is thus led to parallel the offense of Cain with that of Adam and Eve.” Alan J. Hauser, “Linguistic And Thematic Links Between Genesis 4:1-16 And Genesis 2-3,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23:4 (December 1980), 300.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to recognize that the word “also” does not suggest that Abel was following Cain’s example and “also” bringing firstfruits. The narrator is very careful here to contrast two forms of sacrifice. The word “fruit” (*pri*) refers to Cain’s offering and “firstlings” (*bkorah*) refers to Able. This is no accident and is designed to show that Cain brought a “so-so” offering and Abel brought God his best. The adverb “also” modifies the verb “bring” and simply means that Able performed the same action (he “brought”). In other words, “also” does not address what he brought but *that* he brought. The significance of this verse is the quality of the offering. Abel first offered himself and then brought the best and most expensive portion to God, Cain did not.

<sup>10</sup> For a list of various possibilities see Jack P. Lewis, “The Offering of Abel (Gen 4:4): A History of Interpretation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:4 (December 1994):481-96.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis writes, “Apart from this episode (Gen 4:3-5) *minhah* (“offering”) occurs in Genesis for gifts like those Jacob offered Esau (32:14, 19, 21-22; 33:10) and those Jacob’s sons took to Egypt (43:11, 15, 25-26) but does not appear again in a worship setting. The term, which without distinction describes both Cain’s and Abel’s offering, may mean “tribute” (1 Kgs 4:21 [5: 1]; 10:25). It usually is used of cereal offerings (cf. Lev 2:1-3; etc.) when in worship settings, but it also may refer to an animal offering (cf. 1 Sam 2:17; 26:19; Mal 1:10, 13; 2:13). Lewis, “The Offering of Abel...” 482.

<sup>12</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *More Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1992), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Exod 23:19; 32:26; Lev 2:12; 23:10.

<sup>14</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17: NICOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 223.

<sup>15</sup> *Why Serious Preachers Use Humor*, LeadershipJournal.net: Monday, January 10, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 112.

<sup>17</sup> Some Christians insist that it is permissible to be angry with God by referring to various Psalms where David expresses doubt and anger. However, these are not prescriptive, they are descriptive. David’s interaction with God is not always to be imitated cart blank.

<sup>18</sup> The last portion of Gen 4:7 may be read as a command (“you *must* master it”); an invitation (“you *may* master it”); or a promise (“you *will* master it”).

<sup>19</sup> Waltke suggests this picture may be an allusion to the serpent waiting to strike the heel (Gen 3:15; cf. 1 Pet 5:8). Waltke, *Genesis*, 98.

<sup>20</sup> The apostle Peter illustrates this truth in the New Testament to “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). These two parallel verses tell us a great deal about sin.

**The Bad News:**

- Sin is waiting on us (“crouching at the door”). The influence of the world, the flesh, and the Devil are always conspiring our fall. If one doesn’t trip us up, the other will. All that is needed is “an opportunity” (lit. “a place,” Eph 4:27).
- Sin desires us (“its desire is for you”). Most of us have experienced desire or passion for an individual of the opposite sex, right? Well, sin has an unholy desire and passion for us. The Devil wants to kill us, but since he can’t, he will do all that he can to destroy and render us ineffective.

#### The Good News:

- We can master sin (“but you must master it”). We have the power to overcome sin. When temptation knocks, we can send Jesus to the door. We have been given all that we need to say “no” to sin.
- We must be broken and humble before God (“be of sober spirit”). This is crucial. If we are to stand a chance against the power of sin, we must acknowledge our helplessness. We must honestly believe that, without the enablement and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we are at sin’s mercy. We must understand the wickedness of our flesh. This will require the Lord to break us of our pride and self-reliance. We must always be on guard (“be on the alert”). Sin is sly and unpredictable. Sometimes, sin goes after us when we’re at our peak, when we feel untouchable and incapable of committing a sin. Other times, sin fights dirty and will attack when we are down, discouraged, and defeated. Yet, if we know how sin operates, we will be prepared and make sure that we’re always on our guard.

<sup>21</sup> Eaton explains the absence of further comment: “The Samaritan Pentateuch reads, ‘Let us go into the field.’ This is supported by ancient versions and is apparently original.” Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: Genesis 1-11* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1997), 109.

<sup>22</sup> Sibling rivalry plagued each of the godly families in Genesis.

<sup>23</sup> This use of “rise up” (*qum*) is especially important since it is one of only two verbs used to describe the act of murder. It thus helps to develop the motif of alienation, as does also the specific wording: “Cain rose up against his brother Abel.” Hauser, “Linguistic And Thematic Links Between Genesis 4:1-16 And Genesis 2-3,” 301.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis* (<http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/genesis.pdf>, 2004), 61.

<sup>25</sup> The story of Cain and Abel, well known in Western thought and literature, set the stage for sin’s advance. The acclaimed playwright Arthur Miller said, “If a brother could murder a brother, nobody is safe, all bets are off, and there is no future.” But God graciously provided a future, even in the darkness of Gen 4. Paul Wright, ed., *Genesis: Shepherd’s Notes* (Nashville: Broadman, 1997), 22.

<sup>26</sup> The parallelism between Adam and Cain continues with the writer’s theme of Cain’s alienation from the ground. Adam’s initial relationship with the ground was most intimate: He was created “from the dust of the ground” (2:7), and his function was to “till” it (2:5, 15; cf. also 3:23). Cain also begins with an intimate relationship with the ground: He is a “tiller of the ground” (4:2) and brings to the Lord an offering from the “fruit of the ground” (4:3). Due to Adam’s offense the ground will be cursed, bearing weeds along with produce and forcing him to toil in order to eat (3:17-19). Cain’s punishment is even harsher: When he tills the ground it will no longer yield its produce to him (4:12), and he will be driven from the face of the ground (4:14).

<sup>27</sup> The word translated “punishment” (*avon*) is elsewhere always translated “iniquity” (cf. 1 Sam 20:1; 1 Kgs 17:18; Job 7:21; 14:17; 31:33; Ps 38:19). This has led some to suggest that Cain is expressing remorse and repentance.

<sup>28</sup> Anne Graham Lotz, *God’s Story* (Nashville: Word, 1999 [1997]), 111-112.

<sup>29</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 233.

<sup>30</sup> The commentators have interpreted Cain’s “sign” or “mark” in a variety of ways. 1. Paralysis. This view rests on the meaning of the word used to translate “sign” in the Septuagint. 2. The word “Yahweh.” This view originated in an ancient Jewish commentator’s interpretation. 3. A long horn growing out of the middle of Cain’s forehead. This interpretation comes from another Jewish commentator, and many medieval paintings represent it. 4. Some other identifying mark on his person, perhaps even his name. This view sees a parallel with other marks that identify and protect their bearers to which the Bible refers (cf. Ezek 9:4; Rev 7:3; 13:16-18; 14:1). 5. A verification of God’s promise to Cain. The text does not identify the sign, but it was some immediate indication that God gave Cain to assure him that he would not die (cf. 21:13, 18; 27:37; 45:7, 9; 46:3 with 21:14; 44:21). This view rests on the usual meaning of “sign” in the Old Testament (cf. Judg 6:36-40; 2 Kings 2:9-12; et al.), which the Hebrew construction supports here. See Constable, *Notes on Genesis*, 63-64.

<sup>31</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 107.

<sup>32</sup> The word “sign” (*oth*) elsewhere mainly refers to an external event (e.g., Exod 10:2). Eaton, *Genesis 1-11*, 108.

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<sup>33</sup> Cain settled in the land of Nod, which means, “wandering” (cf. Gen 4:12b).

<sup>34</sup> Although Cain’s descendants were affected by what he had done (Gen 4:17-24), it is fascinating to note that the name of Cain’s first son, Enoch, means “dedication,” or “consecration” or “initiation.” It speaks of a new beginning. It could be that Cain desires to start over again and build a new life for himself.

<sup>35</sup> Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing*, 107.

<sup>36</sup> Hamilton observes, “To be sure, no rebuke from God is directed at Lamech for his violation of the marital arrangement. It is simply recorded. But that is the case with most OT illustrations of polygamy. Abraham is not condemned for cohabiting with Sarah and Hagar, nor is Jacob for marrying simultaneously Leah and Rachel. In fact, however, nearly every polygamous household [*sic*] in the OT suffers most unpleasant and shattering experiences precisely because of this ad hoc relationship. The domestic struggles that ensue are devastating.” Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, 238. Cf. Deut 21:15-17.

<sup>37</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002 [1988]), 164.

<sup>38</sup> The seventh generations from Adam through Cain and Seth, ungodly Lamech (4:19-24) and godly Enoch (5:24), stand in sharp contrast to each other. The former inflicts death, and the latter does not die.

<sup>39</sup> Eaton, *Genesis 1-11*, 115.

<sup>40</sup> Stats courtesy of “Faith Highway” (<http://outreach.faithhighway.com>.)

<sup>41</sup> Waltke, *Genesis*, 101.

<sup>42</sup> Usage of this expression in the Pentateuch supports the idea of proclamation more than praying (cf. Gen 12:8; Exod 34:6; Lev 1:1). The meaning of *sem*, “name,” also requires interpretation, since the word is actually followed by the name itself. The word “name” also refers to characteristics or attributes (see Isa 9:6). The idea of this line is that people began to make proclamation about the nature of the Lord (“Began to make proclamation of the Lord by name”). Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 169.

<sup>43</sup> In a chapter given over so much to names, how appropriate it is to read that at this time men begin to call on the name of the Lord (Yahweh). Long before God revealed himself fully as Yahweh to one people called Israel (Exod 3:6), or even to the patriarchs, there is at least a small group of people who grasp the identity of the true God. See Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), Electronic Ed.

<sup>44</sup> Waltke, *Genesis*, 101.

<sup>45</sup> Matthews, *Genesis 1:1-11:26*, 291.