Who was Cain in the Bible?

Cain was one of the sons of Adam and Eve. His birth is the first one recorded in Scripture, leading us to believe that Cain was Adam and Eve's firstborn: "Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man'" (Genesis 4:1). The name Cain is based on the Hebrew root word qanah, which means "possession." Cain was a rebellious man who rejected God's plan, ignored God's warnings, and received God's judgment.

Cain is most infamous for being the world's first murderer. When his sacrifice was rejected by God while his brother Abel's was accepted, Cain grew angry (Genesis 4:4-5). God warned Cain against further sin, but Cain spurned God's warning and killed his brother Abel in a field (verses 6-8). God punished Cain by increasing his hardship and banishing him from society (verse 10-12). But God also marked Cain in some way to protect him from being killed by revenge-seekers (verse 15). Cain settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden, married a sister (or cousin or niece), and had descendants that are listed in the Bible to the sixth generation. Cain built a city (verse 17), and his descendants included nomadic herdsmen, musicians, and smiths (verses 20-22).

Cain's descendants, some of whom are listed in Genesis 4, grew more and more wicked. Lamech, the fifth from Cain, was a polygamist and a murderer, and he boasted of his sin (Genesis 4:23). All of Cain's seed were probably wiped out in the flood. Genesis 5 follows the more godly line of Seth, one of Cain's younger brothers. Seth's descendants included Enoch, Methuselah, and Noah.

The tragic story of Cain illustrates the damaging effects of anger and jealousy. The willfulness and disobedience of Cain are alluded to in Scripture as a caution to others

who might follow in his steps. First John 3:12 warns us against a lack of brotherly love: "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous." Those who welcome evil into their hearts have a natural hatred for those who are righteous.

Hebrews 11:4 gives us a clue as to why Cain's offering was rejected: "By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did." Abel had faith, and, by inference, Cain did not. Cain did not receive the approval of God because his heart was not right with God. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God" (verse 6).

Finally, Jude speaks against ungodly men "who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4). These hypocrites within the church face certain judgment: "Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain" (verse 11). Like Cain, they have rejected God's will; like Cain, they proudly continue to ignore God's warnings; and, like Cain, they will be judged in the end.