

# Cain Spreads Sin Into the World

Genesis 4

## Focus Verse

“If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” – Genesis 4:7

- Cain and Abel Offer Sacrifices – Genesis 4:1-7
- Cain Rejects God’s Mercy – Genesis 4:8-24
- God’s Grace Overrides Sin’s Devastation – Genesis 4:25-26

## Engage

A recent medical study intentionally contaminated a doorknob in a busy building with a virus. Within a few hours, nearly 60% of other commonly touched surfaces were contaminated. Forest fires, gossip, even silly or serious social media posts spread fast and with unintended consequences. **We rarely anticipate the consequences our choices generate.** Many personal stories recall a decision that changed the course of life. Human history includes such a day. The sin of Adam and Eve seemed small but brought world-altering results.

The contamination of humanity by sin surfaced in a big way within Adam’s own family. Genesis 4 records the first children born to the first couple, but it also shares the shocking first murder within that first household. All people born, from this first generation to today, inherit a desire to sin that cannot be overcome by human effort. **Sin spreads disaster and causes distance in our relationships.** Sin permeates this world, but it is not an incurable disease. Even this sad chapter contains a ray of hope and light, as God carries forward His plan to bring a Redeemer. People infected by sin’s contamination began to seek the Lord. Does the reality of sin only discourage you or lead you to call on the name of the Lord?

## Cain and Abel Offer Sacrifices — Genesis 4:1-7

### First Family – 4:1-2

God promised that Eve would be the mother of all people.<sup>1</sup> God blessed Adam and Eve with children. They conceived two sons: Cain first, then Abel. Eve’s declaration upon Cain’s birth acknowledged the Lord’s help and may indicate she thought he was the promised victor over sin.<sup>2</sup> God divinely ordains marriage so one man and one woman become one flesh, a multi-dimensional union. The intimate nature of sexual relations extends the sacred unity of marriage into family life. Every child conceived is one whole person created from two – mother and father. Childbirth is not a necessary part of every marriage, nor the sole reason for sexual intimacy. **Children offer extraordinary evidence of God’s very good plan for creation.**

**Every member of the first family and everyone born since carry the inherited marks of sin and death, inescapable apart from a Savior.**<sup>3</sup> Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel and Seth were all sinners. The response of each individual sinner to Holy God and His grace determines the path of life. Some yield to God’s mercy, others resist. Genesis 4 portrays this vividly.

### Two Sons and Two Offerings – 4:3-7

Cain and Abel grew up and chose vocations. Abel kept flocks, and Cain farmed the soil. Clearly both sons knew offerings were expected, but we do not know what or how God instructed them regarding offerings. At the time for offerings, Cain brought some fruits of the soil and Abel brought fat portions from the firstborn of his flock. **God looked upon Abel and his offering with favor and upon Cain and his offering with disfavor.** What was the difference? Did Abel’s blood sacrifice reflect costly obedience while Cain’s sacrifice somehow indicated disobedience? The passage does not explain the reason for God’s response.

In Genesis 3, God sacrificed animals to cover Adam and Eve, and perhaps he instructed them along with that provision. Regardless of what they knew, *what God knows* offers the key to understanding this account. He knows everything about everyone. **With perfect accuracy, God understands the motivation of every heart.** He knows when external conformity does not indicate heart obedience. God recognizes the one who comes in a humble posture of gratitude

and worship. He knows when people go through the motions for personal benefit. The fact that God reads the motives of our hearts perfectly should lead us to go before Him in honesty and humility. Worship, then and now, should include:

- **reverent awe** of the judgment and mercy of God.
- **honest confession** of personal sin before the God who knows us completely.
- **expectant faith** in God's acceptance of Jesus' death on our behalf.
- **enduring hope** in God's promised defeat of sin.

Scripture is silent about how God revealed His judgment on the two sons and their offerings. We do know God is righteous. He is perfectly just in all He does. **God's words, actions and plans are always right.** Because God is God, He alone sets the standards for what is good, what is true and what is right. Somehow, Abel knew God accepted him and his offering. Cain knew this but also knew that he and his offering were not accepted. God's response was pure and righteous, not because he liked Abel or preferred what he brought. Both Cain and Abel were sinners in need of God's forgiveness.

Cain's face clearly reflected his response and attitude. "So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast." Cain's angry response reveals much about his heart toward God. The exposure of his heart that could generate humility led instead to anger and bitterness toward God and his brother. Despite this,

God loved Cain and continued to reach out to him in mercy. God sought angry Cain, initiating a conversation that offered the opportunity to confess and repent. With compassion, He asked, "Why are you angry?" **God offered Cain the way back, the chance to do right and the opportunity to master the sin crouching at his door ready to take him into deeper rebellion.**

Life often takes us to crossroads – pivotal points where our response determines our way forward. Hurts, disappointments and personal failures happen as regular fare in a fallen world, even in Christian families and workplaces. How we respond to what happens matters. **The same event that could soften and grow us could anger and harden us.** We can yield to God or bolster our position and allow anger and bitterness to compound damage. Cain's unacceptable sacrifice happened. Cain refused God's loving reach to make it right. What are you facing, and what does your response reveal?

**The two sons and their two offerings represent two distinct ways of life.** The New Testament expands our understanding of these two ways to respond to God. Though Cain and Abel were equally sinners and needy before Holy God, Abel chose the better way. The way of Abel demonstrates the path of righteousness and humble faith in God.<sup>4</sup> The way of Cain demonstrates unrighteousness, marked by evil, empty religion.<sup>5</sup> How will you guard your life against shallow, external compliance that ignores the deeper matters of your heart? God draws near to those who draw near to Him.

## The Doctrine of Sin – Its Character and Universality

Genesis 4 verifies the devastation sin brought to humanity. **Sin is the internal, inherited nature of every person ever born.** Sin is any lack of conformity to the will of God, anything that is not of God. Sin so pervades human nature that, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:10-11). Acts of sin manifest in many varieties, but spring from the sin lodged deep within us. Our sinful nature and desires produce acts of sin. Even young children reveal inborn rebellion. No one needs to teach a sinner to sin; we do it quite naturally. Our corrupted mortal bodies and the decaying created world offer evidence of the ongoing consequences of rejecting the perfect character and creative order of God.

### **Understanding the reality of sin's universal stranglehold on humanity brings needed clarity.**

When we understand that only God can solve mankind's biggest problem, we stop expecting human solutions for the brokenness we witness all around us. When we understand the systemic damage of sin, we recognize that even the most promising human relationships can disappoint. We can stop looking for flawed people to meet needs only God can satisfy. Knowing sin pervades and enslaves, we can be on our guard against sin's deceptive promises and cheap counterfeits for the lasting meaning and true freedom only God can give. When we understand the character and universality of sin, we can understand and appreciate our desperate need for grace and a Savior.

**Sin is defeated in Jesus.** Sin blinds all people to the truth of the gospel. We run away from God rather than seek Him. Thanks be to the God who seeks and saves sinners! Faith in Jesus Christ frees believers from sin's penalty. He breaks sin's power so believers are free to choose not to sin, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus defeated sin, we await the promised day of eternal deliverance from sin's presence. (See Romans 5:12-21; James 1:13-18; 2:10; 1 John 1:8-10.)

# Cain Rejects God's Mercy — Genesis 4:8-24

God lovingly extended the way of repentance and obedience to Cain, which he refused. Instead, his thoughts and words rehearsed his grievance, became filled with pride and dismissed the grace and mercy of God. Willful defiance and rebellion set in, allowing his sin to escalate. His bitterness against God and resentment of his brother grew to deadly proportions. **Refusing to open your heart to God opens the door to Satan, who seeks only to lie, kill and destroy.**

## Cain's Sin Multiplies – 4:8-12

### Cain murders Abel – 4:8

Cain determined he was right and God was wrong. He lured his trusting brother into a field and killed him. His premeditated murder of Abel shocks us. Abel, whose only offense was righteous character, died at the hands of Cain, the older brother who should have loved and nurtured him. **Within one generation from the Fall, this evil act exposed the depth of sin's deadly blow against humanity.** Surely this violent act failed to satisfy the emptiness within Cain.

### Cain lies to God – 4:9-10

**We again witness God's love for sinners as He seeks out Cain, an angry man with blood on his hands.** The Lord asked, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain lied to God by saying, "I don't know...." How foolish to lie to the Creator, who knows everything and who cannot be fooled! Cain then revealed contempt for God, love and family with his cynical question – "Am I my brother's keeper?" In fact, Cain should have loved and cared for Abel. Sin corrupts the loving bonds of human relationships.

The Lord made a final appeal to Cain's conscience with an opportunity to confess his sin. "What have you done?" The Lord called Cain to attention and demanded he listen. God Himself heard Abel's blood cry for justice from the ground.<sup>6</sup> **God upholds the cause of the righteous, the persecuted and those rejected for the sake of His name.**

### Cain's rebellion brings God's curse – 4:11-12

Holy God expelled Cain, as his rebellion had reached a point of no return. He was driven from and no longer able to harvest crops from the ground that drank his brother's blood. He rejected God's warnings and was left without the comfort of God and family. He became a restless wanderer. In many ways, Cain received what he desired. **Cain was responsible for his sins and earned the consequences of his rebellion.**

## Cain's Destructive Downward Spiral – 4:13-24

**When God's way of escape is rejected, sin escalates.** Anyone who willingly seeks fulfillment outside of God's design experiences the diminishing return of sin. Sin promises what it cannot deliver. Expression and approval of evil must intensify to deliver the same thrill. Sin does not offer the freedom promised but instead results in increasing bondage and deepening damage. Cain's story grows worse and worse, not only in his own life, but also in his legacy.

### Cain's complaint and God's mercy – 4:13-16

**Cain complained and expressed bitter resentment against God's just punishment.** He cried, "My punishment is more than I can bear." Cain again refused responsibility for his actions and continued to resist God. In self-focus and self-pity, he claimed God was "driving him away" and would not care for him. He feared someone would find and kill him. God answered, "Not so ..." (4:15).

God put a merciful mark of protection on Cain that Scripture does not describe. **The mark signified God's care for his life, despite his unrelenting rebellion.** The mark warned of God's sevenfold vengeance against anyone who dared to murder Cain. Untouched by yet another demonstration of God's mercy, Cain went out from the Lord's presence and never appears to look back. Though he personally had experienced that God was real and powerful, he continued to live in contempt of God, though happy for God to spare his life.

The Bible teaches God accepts any repentant sinner.<sup>7</sup> God offered Cain multiple opportunities to repent, but he chose his own path. Separated from his family, identity and livelihood, Cain rebelled even further against God. He lived in Nod, the Hebrew root of the verb "to wander." **His attitude and actions spread into the next generations.** Ultimately his chosen practice of self-rule became the mainstream of humanity.

### Cain's legacy – 4:17-24

Cain married and bore children. A common question is, "Where did Cain get his wife?" The Bible clearly says Adam and Eve bore many children. Marriage between brothers and sisters was later forbidden but not restricted at this point in history.<sup>8</sup> A brief summary of Cain's family covers an extended period of time with no mention of God. **The sinful nature of individuals compounds to inflict societal damage, particularly when paired with outright disdain for God.**

### **Enoch – 4:17-18**

This first-mentioned son was the namesake for a city Cain built. The desire to make much of self stands out in Cain's life and those who follow his path. **Those who refuse to worship the Creator put people and created things above the worship of God.**<sup>9</sup> In grace, God allowed societal advancements such as agriculture, music and instruments, arts, and metallurgy and tools, even among those who did not recognize and worship Him.

### **Lamech – 4:19-24**

Seventh in the line of Cain, Lamech rises as the infamous hero of Cainite civilization. The first polygamist, he redefined marriage and family in defiance of the one-flesh union God designed. He further expressed his arrogance in what has been called the "Song of the Sword" in verses 23-24. Lamech boasted of his murder of a man in retaliation for a wound. Thus, he appointed himself judge and executioner of his own vengeance. **In rebellion against God, Lamech celebrated his vengeful spirit, outdoing God by promising a 77-fold vengeance.**

Scripture beyond Genesis 4 further describes the way of Cain and its impact on God's people. As a restless wanderer, Cain was at first far removed from

godly society worship. **Over time, those like Cain began to divisively enter faith communities and mix among churches and believing family members.** These covert imposters profess faith and consider themselves righteous by their own standards. Jude alerts Christians to this reality in his letter, "For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."<sup>10</sup>

Sin destroys meaningful community. To reject God's love and refuse to admit sin leaves us painfully alone. **True community happens when we love and serve one another above ourselves.** To seek community but desire to be a hero – served and admired by others – destroys genuine human relationships and true fellowship. Do you strive to create a world that revolves around you? When we submit to God as Creator and Father, we freely receive what we desire because our heart is aligned with His. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."<sup>11</sup>

## God's Grace Overrides Sin's Devastation — Genesis 4:25-26

God turns the spotlight from the tragic story of Cain's descendants back to Adam, Eve and God's great plan for humanity. **God's plan and work continues, even in a world where evil abounds.**

### **Abel's Legacy through Seth – 4:25**

God gave Adam and Eve another son, Seth. **Eve praised God, the One who grants all life.** She spoke of His grace to give her another child in place of Abel. Perhaps she hoped Seth would be the promised one to overcome sin. She spoke in humble honesty about the pain surrounding her first two sons: Cain killed Abel.

### **Seth's Descendants – 4:26**

God's light shines through the darkness. Seth followed the way of Abel. Through Seth, then Enosh, God began the human line through which Jesus Christ was ultimately born. The last verse of this sad chapter rings with hope, as "At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD." **People with faith in the living God rise in Seth's family.** The legacy of Seth's descendants will be studied next week.<sup>12</sup>

The sin of Adam and Eve created new realities for mankind. Their sin passed onto their children and all humanity. Cain's lack of devotion to God produced sin that quickly spread like an avalanche. The civilization built by Cain and his descendants set a course we still see today. **Sin spreads disaster and distance in our relationships.** Fierce pride wrecked Cain's ability to yield to God. Sin ruptures personal peace, families and communities.

The broken family left in the wake of Cain's rebellion offer us hope and evidence of God's grace. Though equally ruined by sin, Adam, Eve, Seth and Enosh humbly recognized and sought God. Adam and Eve praised God, recognizing His promise and provision in the birth of Seth. The challenges of daily life in a sin-infested world led men and women to call on the name of the Lord. **The humble, those who acknowledge the wreckage of sin and seek God, find Him gracious and merciful.**

An old hymn says it well: "Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore; Jesus ready, stands to save you, full of pity, love and power. I will arise and go to Jesus; He will embrace me in His arms; in the arms of my dear Savior; Oh, there are ten thousand charms."



## Hold Fast

Sin presents a bigger problem than we often realize. **The core of humanity and the course of history reflect the destruction of sin.** The distortion and devastation reflected in the first family capture the depth of sin's wound on humanity. Adam and Eve experienced the acute pain of losing a son they loved by the hand of another son they also loved. Sin's deadly damage greatly exceeds mere human solutions. Modern thinking elevates education, goodwill and increased awareness with hope that mankind will eventually solve the ills of this world. While effort to ease suffering should be commended, we must acknowledge the root problem – sin. The “goodness” people believe lies within mankind is not actually good. We need a Savior. Jesus is that Savior.

Every human encounters conflicting realities. The world is beautiful but broken. God created a beautiful world people enjoy, whether they acknowledge God or not. But life in the world of

beautiful landscapes and breathtaking sunsets leaves us wanting. The beautiful world we experience today groans under the curse of sin along with humanity.<sup>13</sup> Relationships are hard. Work is hard. Understanding ourselves is hard. Even the wealthy and powerful lack satisfaction. These unavoidable and clashing truths land heavy on the human heart. Some respond in humility and seek God. Some look only to self and this world's charms. The futility in Cain's legacy continues. **Your posture before God sets your course for this life and eternity.**

**The hopelessness of sin paves the way for the hope of the gospel.** The Holy Spirit brings the Bible to life to teach us about sin, guilt and righteousness. He can also guide us through conscience, counsel from other believers, in prayer, in worship and through circumstances. He gives new life to believers. He established the Church to grow in the community and likeness of Christ and His coming kingdom. These provisions guide us to worship and serve God alone.

## Apply It

Human pride makes no sense. Sin so distorts our grasp of ourselves that we foolishly believe what is not true. If honest, we know well the depth of our personal limitations. We know we have failed ourselves, those we love and certainly our Holy God, should we acknowledge the fact He exists. Yet, we elevate the broken fragments of our lives, even the good things God provides, and feel proud. **Shattered to the core by sin, we have no legitimate reason for pride.** Why is humility, which makes sense, so hard? Why is pride so easy? How will God use the story of Cain to reveal pride in you? Is your heart rightly humbled before God?

**“Am I my brother's keeper?”** Cain offered his question as a rebuke to God, but

he raises a legitimate question. How much responsibility and investment does God expect from me, beyond my family and my people? How responsible am I for my hurting neighbor, the homeless in my city or a starving child on another continent? My financial, emotional, physical or spiritual investment will not solve the full extent of human suffering inflicted by the Fall. Because I cannot solve everything, am I free from helping anything? A humble heart that honors God loves people in tangible ways. God's blessings in your life should be stewarded well and benefit others. History proves the impact of Christian churches and organizations to alleviate suffering and share the gospel around the world. Is your world too small? What would God ask

you to do? Do you see those outside your inner circle as your brothers and sisters?

Human beings were designed by God to worship. People either worship God or something else. God is the only true and worthy place for our hearts to find rest. Our enemy Satan and this world's system offer many counterfeit options for worship. **Knowing the truth about our sin and our desperate need for God should drive us to humble gratitude and worship.** We should rejoice in God's provision of Jesus as our Savior. We also express thanksgiving for God's many daily provisions of guidance and grace. God seeks worshippers who worship Him in spirit and truth. (John 4:24)

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

**1: Mother of humanity:** Genesis 3:20

**2: Victor over sin:** Genesis 3:15

**3: Sinners in need of Savior:** John 3:16-21

**4: Way of Abel:** Matthew 23:35; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12

**5: Way of Cain:** 1 John 3:12; Jude 1:11

**6: Lifeblood:** Genesis 9:5; Numbers 35:29-34; Job 16:18;  
Hebrews 12:24; Revelation 6:9-10

**7: God accepts repentance:** Psalm 51:17; Ezekiel 18:21-23;  
John 6:37

**8: Sibling marriage:** Leviticus 18:9, 11; 20:17; Deuteronomy  
27:22

**9: Worship of created things:** Romans 1:18-25

**10: Imposters:** Jude 1:4

**11: Seek His kingdom:** Matthew 6:33

**12: Seth's faithful line:** Genesis 4:26; 5:1-2, 22-25, 29; Luke  
3:21-38

**13: Creation groans:** Romans 8:19-21