

# Genesis 4.1-15 / Faith Bible Church / 08.30.20

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## Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** Have you ever thought about what kind of person you *want* to be? The big turning point in my life came when I realized I *wasn't* who I wanted to be or who I had dreamed I would be.
- In any moment, you either are on the top line, submitting to God and depending on God, or you are on the bottom line, doing your own thing in your own ways; you are walking in the light with God or slinking with your sin into the shadows; you are following Christ or following Satan.
  - Those moment by moment choices add up to the person you experientially are. But what kind of person do you *want* to be? Listen, we all struggle with sin, none of us can be perfect. But how badly do you want that top line walk with God?
  - Some people choose the bottom line, determined to get away with whatever they can, unconcerned with shame or knowing God. I trust none of you have made that choice.
  - Yet I expect all of us could have more passion for God and his way of life. Any of you see the movie *War Room* a few years ago? As I watched the end of the movie, I yearned for a deeper experience with God, I yearned to be partnered with others who were determined to walk with God, and my conviction grew that I could be praying more fervently for this to happen.
  - Many of us are lukewarm. We love God, sure we do, and we gather to sing praises and hear sermons, and we serve monthly or even weekly, but serving is not our ambition, we don't move from hearing to proclaiming, our singing is not heartfelt, and our love is not passionate.
  - Here's one problem: our choice in life is as stark as black and white, top line or bottom line, but we want both. We want the best of God and the best of the world. So we in effect hedge our bets. Just like someone who prays but also carries a rabbit's foot or consults a horoscope, we look for God's blessings, but invest most of our effort in blessing ourselves with worldly stuff.
  - And the thing is, if we try to straddle the fence between the top line and the bottom line, between the kingdom of God and the world run by Satan, we will fail to remain on the top line. For starters, trying to straddle the fence is itself bottom line behavior; also the fence is not a fat and flat 4x4 beam, it is slanted toward the world, because we have a corrupted human nature, and as we have seen in this study, we are easily deceived and tempted. If you want to walk with God, you have to make a conscious decision to do so.
- † Please open your Bible to Genesis 4. Adam and Eve have been banished from the garden of Eden, they have corrupted their nature, and they have lost control of the world to Satan and his demons. But they still have a relationship with God, purpose as God's image bearers, and the opportunity to build a family who would walk with God. Let's see what happens and how it relates to us.

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**[2: 4.1] Genesis 4.1 NIV: Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD [Yahweh] I have brought forth a man."**

- † When God created Adam and Eve in his own image, God had four purposes for people, do you remember them? They were to reflect God's character, represent God in all situations, reproduce the image of God throughout the Earth, and rule over creation in God's name.

- Adam and Eve lost control of the earth to Satan when they submitted to *his* guidance through the serpent. Jesus referred to this when he said Satan was now the ruler of this world. Adam and Eve still could be good stewards of the Earth, but they were not the power here any longer. Despite that setback, they carried on with their other purposes, as they began to reproduce God's image by raising children up to know God and to live as his image.

† In our verse, there is a homonym, two words that sound alike: They named the boy [קַיִן], or "Cain," because as Eve said [קָנִיתִי אִישׁ], "I have brought forth a man." But what did Eve mean by this?

- **[3: 4.1 options]** The NET effectively says "I have created a man just as Yahweh did."
- The text also could read, "I have created/made a man with help from Yahweh." Several translations [NIV, NLT, CSB] use that option.
- Or it could read, "I have acquired/gotten a man with help from Yahweh." Several translations [NASB, ESV, NKJV] use that option.
- Or it could read "I have created a man who is Yahweh." I don't know of any major translations using this option, but it would be consistent with the grammar earlier in the verse: the verse says she bore [אֶת־קַיִן] = she bore Cain, with [אֶת] marking Cain as the direct object of the sentence; now it says she created a man [אֶת־יְהוָה] = she created a man who is Yahweh. The NET Bible notes acknowledge this is grammatically possible, but call it fanciful.
- It is difficult to know exactly what Eve meant, because [אֶת] can mean "with" or "with the help of," or it can just mark the direct object of the sentence.

† It might seem strange to you that Eve would think she bore a child who was also God, yet that is exactly what happened to Mary thousands of years later, with the birth of Jesus.

- Perhaps Eve thought this baby was the seed [descendent] who would be the savior whom God had promised in Genesis 3.15. Believing the promise would be good. Perhaps she also believed the savior would be both divine and human. We do not have evidence of God revealing that yet, but again this is what turned out to be true; and the savior would have to be both human [as the seed of the woman] and the perfect image of God if he were to set things right again.
- Now you might think I am way out into speculation here, but this was Luther's interpretation, and it is held by a few notable scholars of our day, such as Walter Kaiser [former president at Gordon-Conwell Seminary] and Charles Baylis [professor at Dallas Seminary]. Food for thought.

† In any case, Eve took a lot of credit here, didn't she? Later, we see godly women such as Hannah and Mary humbly thank and praise God for their pregnancies, without taking any credit.

- When a friend of mine got his wife pregnant, he was seen on Facebook "pounding his chest," saying "my sperm are potent!" He was joking, but it is our human tendency to take credit instead of giving God glory. I'm not sure football players need to point to the sky after scoring, but certainly the miracle of birth, of reproduction, should cause us to glorify God, not ourselves.

**[4: 4.2] Genesis 4.2 NIV: Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.**

† The term for flocks [צֹאן] usually refers to sheep or goats. Why would Abel take care of flocks?

- Remember, they did not eat animals. So Abel kept flocks for clothing or sacrifice or both. We saw in Genesis 3.21 that God brought about the first animal deaths, in part to cover their nakedness, though they were clothed already with leaves.
- We inferred that God wanted to cover their sin also. The human method of shifting blame and hiding from God was insufficient, so God brought them to confession and animal sacrifice.
- There is no mention of required offerings or sacrifices before Adam and Eve sinned. But after they sinned, God sacrificed the first animals to cover their nakedness and cover their sin, so now they would offer regular sacrifices to appease God's wrath until the promised savior came. That would be consistent with how God dealt with his people throughout Old Testament history.

† Cain was farming crops. Was this wrong? No, he was doing the work of his father, Adam, the work God specified Adam and his descendants would do. And they had to eat. So both brothers had valid work to do, and their work complemented what the other was doing, providing for different needs.

**[5: 4.3-5] Genesis 4.3-5 NIV: In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.**

† The Old Testament does not explain why one offering was acceptable and the other was not.

- One theory is that Abel went out of his way to bring the best of what he had, while Cain did not. The text notes that Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flock, and either the fattest of them or the fatty portions of them [the Hebrew could go either way].
- On the other hand, while the text never says Cain did *not* bring his best or first, it never says he *did* either. The law code for Israel would require first fruits for specific offerings, meaning the first of the grains to ripen.

† **[6: Hebrews]** Let's see if the New Testament can enlighten us. **Hebrews 11.4 NIV: By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings.**

- But why was Abel's sacrifice better? How was it an expression of faith when Cain's was not? Both brought offerings of their work, but only Abel's was acceptable and of faith.
- Another theory is that Cain had no faith, that he was religious and did make a valid offering, but he was just going through the motions.
- Yet both were openly talking with God; and we shall see in the ensuing dialogue that God points Cain toward doing what is right. The point is that Abel acted on his faith, he somehow took the top line of submission and dependence, while Cain somehow took the bottom line in rebellion.

† **[7: 1 John] 1 John 3.12 NIV: ...his [Cain's] own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.**

- Now this is *before* Cain attacks his brother; John gives this as a reason *why* Cain attacked Abel. But what was evil about Cain's deeds up until then? We only know of two deeds before the attack: Cain was farming crops, which was fine; and Cain offered a sacrifice of grain. Even if Cain's sacrifice was inadequate, why would making this sacrifice have been *evil* in God's sight?

- † The one answer that makes sense is that God had mandated animal sacrifice to cover sin. We believe the first death of animals was not just about covering nakedness with stylish clothing, but to cover sin in a way that would temporarily appease God's wrath. Later in the Bible, we consistently see God implement this process for his people.
  - Furthermore, it is a foreshadowing of the most important sacrifice, the one which truly paid our penalty for sin and permanently appeased God's wrath, the sacrifice on the cross of the promised savior seed of the woman, the New Adam, whom we know as the Messiah, the Christ.
  - All that being the case, it makes sense that Abel was keeping flocks not just for clothing, but for the family to make regular sacrifices to God in the way God had specified; "In the course of time" as the NIV has it, is a Hebrew clause that suggests a designated time for the offering; it is reasonable to assume there also was a designated method.
- † **[8: sacrifice]** So Abel acted righteously [1 John 3] by offering a better sacrifice of an animal [Genesis 3-4], because he was acting in faith [Hebrews 11] in the promise of a savior and in the animal sacrifices as a symbolic and temporary solution for God's wrath about sin until that savior came.
  - Before Jesus came, everyone had to sacrifice. To trust and obey is the way of righteousness, but after the corruption of our natures, we all struggle with obeying, even Abel, which is why the only way to righteousness before God is to trust in his promise of grace, his promise to save us.
  - Cain did not act in faith on the promise, in that he did not offer an animal sacrifice. Thus he did not show submission or dependence, and so he was unrighteous in God's sight.

**[9: 4.6-7] Genesis 4.6-7 NIV: Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 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 is a great memory verse. Look at the contrast: walk with God on the top line and you will be fine, but understand that a personified "sin" is working against you, trying to lure you through deception and temptation to the bottom line.
  - This sinful force could be evil, a demon, but usually it is our own corrupted flesh and the influence of our culture [our collective corrupted flesh]. Either way, if you dally with the dark side – if you even try to straddle the fence – sin is crouching in wait, ready to dominate you.
  - We face this battle every day, moment by moment, but we can be victorious, we can subdue sin, if we yield to the Holy Spirit, if we consecrate ourselves to Christ, if we trust and obey.
  - God commanded this to Cain: he must subdue the sinful urge. We all have those urges and we must subdue them; we have no excuses for sin! Cain had a choice, it was his responsibility to choose. We have that same responsibility; and you do have to choose to end up on the top line.

**[10: 4.8-9] Genesis 4.8-9 NIV: Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"**

- † Our beliefs dictate our actions. Cain failed in his ethics because his theology was bad. He had a weak and unresponsive faith, so he acted with anger, violence, selfishness, and arrogance. God offered an opportunity for repentant confession, by asking the question, but Cain refrained.

- † **[Slide 11: 1 John]** The Hebrew text implies this is premeditated murder. This is Cain's answer to God's questions. He turns to the bottom line, the flesh and sin, instead of trusting and obeying God.
- **1 John 3.11-12 NIV: For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 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.**
  - We know Cain was physically born to Adam and Eve, but he was "of" or "from" the evil one, he belonged to the evil one, just as Jesus said to those who failed to believe in him in **John 8.44 NIV: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires."**
  - When we see heinous crimes, we might think, "How could anyone do that?!" We have our answer through this example. Two brothers – no difference in upbringing or advantages; no social pressure or corrupting influences – and one kills the other, simply because the other did the right thing and was commended, while the one did not and was not. Our sin is *evil*.
- † How do we react when someone else is blessed but we are not? One of us is wealthy and one is poor; one is happily married, one is lonely. How do we handle these differences, are we jealous?
- How do we handle *that*? Do we get angry at God, jealously angry at those who have what we want? or do we focus on regaining contentment, knowing we are blessed abundantly, trusting that God's decisions are correct, remembering we should do the right thing no matter what?
  - If we react on the bottom line, we are being self-righteous and following Cain's example, and disaster will come to our soul and our life.
- † **[12: 1 John 3.13]** Cain's attack on Abel in a sense is the first religious war: Cain, who will walk apart from God's revelation, killed the faithful believer simply because he *did* walk with God. At odds with God himself, Cain attacked the image bearer of God.
- Do you remember that God prophesied about this? He said there would be enmity between the seed of Satan and the image bearing seed of the woman.
  - The people of Moses, the nation of Israel, would be warned by this revelation, that they could expect hostility from the godless people they would encounter in Canaan.
  - The church also should hear this warning. After contrasting the attitude of Cain with that of the believer, John said in **1 John 3.13 NIV: Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.** If you are living for Christ, you will attract some hostility from the godless.
  - Another thought: Scholar Alan Ross notes that both kinds of people were in Adam's family; and both kinds of people were in covenant Israel; so we might find both kinds of people in the church today. We might face hostility not only from the secular world, but also from those who call themselves Christians but do not seek to walk the top line of faith and obedience.
- † In all the godly families of Genesis, we see a sick form of rivalry, as evidence of the corrupted nature in all of us. In Genesis 3, we saw this corruption would mean families would suffer division instead of unity, guardedness instead of openness; now we have the extreme of murder.
- It also is worth notice that if we say we are not our brother's keeper, we are paraphrasing Cain, who is not the best example for top-line attitudes. The Bible actually teaches that we *are* our brother's keeper, that we should be giving and receiving the "one-another" commands with each other in our fellowship.

**[13: 4.10-12]** Genesis 4.10-12 NIV: The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

- † What is gained by the sinful bottom line approach? Cain has eliminated his rival, his brother, but he still must contend with God.
  - Cain sinned by offering the wrong sacrifice and by killing his brother. His punishment also was two-fold: he would have to leave his family and their land where he had shed blood, and he would no longer find success as a farmer.

**[14: 4.13-15]** Genesis 4.13-15 NIV: Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” But the LORD said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.

- † Is Cain’s response repentance? No; it’s self-pity. We saw Adam play the victim card by shifting blame; now his son plays a different victim card, that his punishment is too severe.
  - Cain sees a four part punishment: cut off from the land, from God, from family, and destined to wander about in danger. It is ironic that he fears being killed, he who is the first murderer.
  - Cain would now walk without God, but this was his choice: he walked away from God onto the bottom line, insisting on his own will for sacrifice, then by murder to resolve his anger, then refusing the opportunity to repent, and now going his own way spiritually altogether.
- † God still showed him mercy, protecting his life from his parents, his sisters, the multiple generations which would develop over time. God prevented Cain from becoming a victim of violence, reflecting God’s attitude toward vengeance which would be coded into law for Israel.
  - Judgement and revenge are God’s prerogatives, not ours. God might allow a nation to carry out his will for justice, but he does not want people to sin to try to right a wrong. You hear me? God never tells us to sin, to take the bottom line, to accomplish something good or to right a wrong.

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## Conclusion

- † **[15: summary]** Sometimes when you study a narrative in pieces, as we are forced to do, it can be easy to lose the thread of the theme or plot. So let me summarize.
  - The one eternal and all powerful God plans to establish a representative people here, so people must pursue faith and obedience, depending on God and submitting to him.
  - Adam and Eve screwed up, introducing sin into the world and corruption into our nature. But the image plan did not change. God still wants people to reflect his character, represent him in all situations, reproduce his image throughout the earth, and – even if we cannot rule at this time – to be good stewards of creation, acting in God’s name.
- † **[16: 3 parts]** In response to the crisis of sin and evil coming into the world, and of God’s people being corrupted in their rebellion, God responded with judgment and grace. There would be real

repercussions for sin, but God provided a way for Adam and Eve to continue being his people and for an ultimate solution to the problem of sin, death, and evil.

- Part one of that plan was repentant confession. When we slip into sin on the bottom line, we need to get right with God by confessing our error and repenting, which means to turn back to walking with God on the top line.
- Part two of that plan was animal sacrifice. The shed blood of the animal would symbolically represent the punishment people deserved for sin, and would temporarily appease God's wrath, so that people could remain in fellowship with him.
- Part three of that plan was the promise to send a savior, a seed of the woman who would defeat Satan and evil, and somehow put all things right in creation, especially between God and people.
- The savior's sacrifice would offer permanent atonement, it really would pay the penalty for our sins, thus permanently appease God's wrath, thus make permanent peace between God and his people. That is why we call Christ's sacrifice a substitutionary atonement: he took our punishment to make peace for us with God.

† **[17: faith]** Starting with Adam, Eve, and their family, God required both faith and obedience for righteousness. But from the start, obedience proved impossible. That is why God offers grace. Grace is unmerited favor; none of us can deserve it or earn it, but God gives it as a gift. Grace says even though we are corrupted and we sin, we are righteous in God's sight if we at least have faith.

- The content of saving faith grew as God revealed more over centuries. When God judged in Eden, all Adam and Eve knew about God's promise was they could confess when they screwed up, they could appease God's wrath with animal sacrifices, and someday would come a savior, the seed of the woman, who would set things right forever. That is what they had to believe.
- Abel did believe this, Cain did not; or at least we can say that Abel believed enough to act on it, Cain did not. The biblical text is concise, sharing just what we need to know; here it says Abel offered the required animal and God saw his faith and judged him righteous; not so with Cain.
- Today, we know a lot more about the gospel promise: the divine Son of God came to earth to be born miraculously by a virgin girl, thus becoming the prophesied seed of the woman, both man and God, so that he could represent us and bear all God the Father's wrath for our sin.
- In daily life, do we believe enough to act on what we know about Jesus? We say taking the top line is to trust and obey. In the graphic, obedience is symbolized first, but the reality is that you will not step onto that top line by obeying unless you already trust God's promise to deliver salvation and the other spiritual blessings explained in scripture, and you trust that God's judgment about what physical blessings you should receive is for the best.
- We all sin, but if you consistently are on the bottom line, willfully sinning, then it might be because you do not have true faith, you do not believe yet in God's promises or you are not content yet to accept God's judgement about blessings in life. Think on that; pray; then repent.
- We no longer sacrifice animals, because the Savior is our sacrifice; we trust in *his* sacrifice and continue to repentantly confess our sins. We recognize our sin is evil, choosing to trust and obey by consecrating ourselves to Christ and yielding to the Holy Spirit, to subdue our sinful urges, so we can live on the top line walking with God. For people of faith, that is the only desirable place; we want to be like Abel, not Cain.