



11

Cain and Abel

Key Themes

- God demands obedience and trust.
- God is merciful toward sinners.

Key Passages

- Genesis 4:1–17; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:10–12; Genesis 3:20, 5:4

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Contrast the offering of Cain with the offering of Abel.
- Connect God's mercy and justice shown to Cain to the gospel.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "Why was Cain's sacrifice rejected?"

Have students mark Genesis 4:1, Hebrews 11:4, and 1 John 3:10 in their Bibles with bookmarks.



Studying God's Word

page 4

The sacrifices of Cain and Abel reveal God's demand for a pure heart of worship toward Him. The first human death occurred when Cain murdered Abel out of jealousy. In this account, God reveals that He is just to punish sin yet shows mercy to sinners as well.

Study the Prepare to Share section.

Go Before the Throne.



Activity: An Acceptable Sacrifice

page 7

Students will contrast the offerings of Cain and Abel with one another and compare them to other mentions of sacrifice throughout Scripture.

Student Guides

Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

To prepare your heart and mind for this week's lesson, read Genesis 4:1–17; Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:11–12.

The sin committed at the Fall of man through the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:6–7) brought corruption on the human race. Adam and Eve were cursed by God (Genesis 3:16–17) and sent out of the garden (Genesis 3:24). Eve had two sons—Cain and Abel. As they grew, Abel was a keeper of the sheep, but Cain tilled the ground (Genesis 4:1–2). After some time, they each brought an offering to the Lord—Cain some of the “fruit of the ground,” and Abel “the firstborn of his flock” (Genesis 4:3–4). In Genesis we are simply told that “the Lord respected Abel and his offering, He did not respect Cain and his offering” (4:4–5). But why?

Various Scriptures from the New Testament help to solve this puzzle. The book of Hebrews records that Abel made his offering “by faith” and that “he was righteous” (Hebrews 11:4). Cain, however, was of the wicked one and murdered his brother because his works were evil (1 John 3:11–12).

Cain's actions spoke loudly of the desires of his heart. Because of his jealousy, he killed his brother—who walked by faith in righteousness toward God.

And God used this unlikely scenario to display His gracious mercy. God is a holy God and, because of His holiness, had to judge Cain's sin. But instead of requiring a life for a life as the law demanded (Exodus 21:23–24), God spared Cain, making him a fugitive and vagabond on the earth—a fugitive specially marked by God and protected from those seeking revenge for his offense (Genesis 4:14–15).

The effects of the Fall came fast and furious. It doesn't take long for sin to corrupt and this first murder illustrates that. In the first generation after Adam and Eve, we see jealousy, selfishness, and hatred. And yet, God was already revealing the depths of the mercy in His character—a mercy that has repeatedly been demonstrated as man continues to disobey God in his sinfulness.

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

“Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife” (Genesis 4:16–17).

One of the most-asked questions about the book of Genesis is, “Where did Cain get his wife?” This question is often used by skeptics to discredit the historical truth of the book of Genesis because most Christians don't know how to answer it. If Adam and Eve were the first humans, and if their first two sons were Cain and Abel, then where did Mrs. Cain come from? Some have answered this by saying that God must have created other people or races on earth who did not descend from Adam and Eve. However, Scripture is very clear that ALL people are descendants of Eve (Genesis 3:20). And since only descendants of Adam and Eve can be saved, believers need to be able to show that Cain's wife—like all other humans—was a descendant of Adam and Eve.

The answer to this question is, in fact, quite simple: Cain married his sister or perhaps another close relative like a niece. Genesis 5:3–4 states:

And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters.

Notice that the Bible tells us that Adam had “sons and daughters.” Exactly how many, we aren't told, but given that Adam lived more than 900 years, it could have been a lot! One Jewish tradition states that Adam had 33 sons and 23 daughters.

Many people reject this very clear answer, citing the law against brother-sister marriages. But keep in mind that way back then (about 6,000 years ago) close relatives could marry—they had to in order to start their own families. Even Abraham married his half-sister (Genesis 20:12). It was not until much later—2,500 years after Cain married his wife—that God commanded Moses that people were not to marry close relatives (Leviticus 18:6). We know now that this command, directed by the providence of God, protects us from many genetic deformities that could result from the marrying of close

relatives. These deformities are one of the results of sin and its consequences, which brought disease and death to God's perfect creation. Cain and Mrs. Cain, living near the beginning of creation, wouldn't have had as many genetic mutations as we do today, so marrying a close relative was no problem.

God's Word gives us answers. We need to approach all questions with biblical glasses, standing on the authority of the Scripture—knowing that the Bible is our starting point.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the account of Cain and Abel, we see that God respected the offering of Abel (Genesis 4:4). Abel's offering was the firstborn of his flock—an animal offering presented with a pure heart. As we look at animal offerings throughout biblical history, we can see the amazing foreshadowing and significance of them.

The very first animal sacrifice was made by God Himself to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve after they had disobeyed and introduced sin to the human race (Genesis 3:20–21). Adam and Eve deserved instant death because of their sin, yet we see God displaying His glorious mercy as He killed the animal(s) to make garments as coverings for the sinners. In hindsight we can see how this is a foreshadowing of the substitutionary death of an animal to pay for sin. The foundational elements of God's plan of redemption are shown here on the occasion of the first sin in the Garden of Eden.

Scripture tells us of more customary animal sacrifices ordained by God. Noah sacrificed animals after the Flood (Genesis 8:20), Job sacrificed animals for the sins of his family (Job 1:5), and Abraham sacrificed the ram that God provided as a substitute for Isaac (Genesis 22:13). Clearly, God had revealed the concept of substitutionary sacrifice long before the time of Moses and the Law.

However, it was at the time of Moses, when the Israelites left Egypt, that God specifically appointed a sacrificial system to cover the sins of His people. Leviticus 17:11 states "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atone-

ment for the soul." In this system, the life of the animal atoned for—or covered—the offenses of the sinner; the animal died as a substitute for the sinner.

We know, of course, that animal sacrifices can never cleanse us from our sin. Scripture states, ". . . in those [Old Testament] sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:3–4). The ultimate purpose of the sacrificial system was to demonstrate that the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). It was God's way of preparing us to receive and believe in the perfect Lamb of God whose blood would finally take away the sins of all who would turn to Him in repentance and faith (John 1:29).

This we know, that before the universe was created, before time existed, before man was formed, God knew that we (in Adam) would sin. He also had a predetermined plan by which salvation for our sins could be received through the free gift of grace by the death of the perfect sacrifice—Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God and only Savior.

What an amazing God we serve! "For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Holy, sovereign God, thank you for your Word. Please seal it to my heart and give me total faith and trust that every word is true. Instill in me, dear Lord, a heart that is obedient, faithful, and righteous like the heart of Abel. Please accept my life as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to you. And please work in the hearts of the students this week. Give them the desire to please you with all their hearts—not just in appearances—but with all their soul. Thank you, Lord, for your faithfulness, justice, and mercy.

► **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.



Review

Last week we continued our study of the Corruption of the universe at the time Adam sinned. We said that the impact of the Fall was universal.

? Who can remember some of the specific consequences of Adam's sin and the Curse God pronounced in Genesis 3? *The entire*

creation now groans from the corruption in the universe. God cursed the serpent to crawl on its belly and eat dust; Satan was doomed to be crushed by the Seed of the woman; the woman would have increased pain in child birth and desire to have authority over her husband; Adam was to work hard to provide food and would eventually die; the ground would produce thorns and thistles; the animals were all cursed.

Even though God had cursed His originally perfect creation, He also offered hope. A Savior would come to take the penalty for Adam's sin—a penalty that we all bear—and the Savior would eventually restore the creation. At the Consummation, there will be a new heavens and earth where the effects of the Curse no longer have a hold. There will be no more death, disease, or suffering for those who trust in Christ.

We have a glorious hope of redemption provided through Jesus and a great opportunity and responsibility to share that hope with those who do not know Christ.



► Write on the board, "Why was Cain's sacrifice rejected?"

► Have students mark Genesis 4:1, Hebrews 11:4, and 1 John 3:10 in their Bibles with bookmarks.

Genesis 4:1–15

► Be careful not to bring preconceived ideas into the text.



Studying God's Word

Our lesson today will look at the first murder recorded in Scripture—Cain killing Abel. There are some very important ideas in the text that will help us understand what led to the murder and a wonderful connection to the gospel. And, we will deal with one of the tricky little questions that skeptics offer as a challenge to the Bible.

READ THE WORD

Let's read Genesis 4:1–15 together and begin our look at this infamous event. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God's Word by asking the right questions.

? **What is the historical context of this passage?** *Adam and Eve had sinned against God and had been expelled from the Garden of Eden.*

? **Which son was born first?** *Cain was born before Abel.*

? **What were the occupations of the two sons?** *Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer.*

- ? **What did Cain bring as an offering to the Lord?** *An offering of the fruit of the ground.*
- ? **What did Abel bring as an offering to the Lord?** *The firstborn of his flock and their fat.*
- ? **How did God respond to the two offerings?** *The Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.*
- ? **How did Cain respond to God’s disfavor?** *He was angry and his countenance fell.*
- ? **What caution did God give to Cain?** *God cautioned him to do the right thing and to ensure that sin did not rule over him.*
- ? **How did Cain respond to God’s warning?** *He ignored God’s warning and chose to sin and murder his brother.*
- ? **How did Cain respond to God’s question about Abel’s location?** *He lied to God and said he did not know and turned the questioning back to God.*
- ? **How did God respond to Cain’s sin?** *Since Cain was a farmer, God cursed the ground so that it would not yield for Cain. God also condemned Cain to be a fugitive and a vagabond (wanderer) on the earth.*
- ? **Cain responded by telling God his punishment was too great—a form of asking for mercy. What did Cain fear would happen to him?** *That anyone who found him would kill him.*
- ? **How did God demonstrate mercy to Cain?** *He set a mark on him and promised to avenge sevenfold anyone who would take his life in revenge.*
- ? **What parallels do you see in this account and the account of the Fall in Genesis 3?** *God warned both Adam and Cain; Adam and Cain both willfully rebelled against God; God asked Adam and Cain about what they had done; Adam and Cain rejected their own responsibility; God punished Adam and Cain but did not carry out their deserved death immediately.*
- ? **What was Cain’s motive for killing his brother?** *Jealousy seems to be the best explanation based on the text—God respected Abel’s offering and not Cain’s, and Cain became angry.*
- ? **How would you summarize the main point of the passage?** *In spite of God’s warning, Cain rebelled against God by killing his brother—but God was merciful to Cain and allowed him to live while protecting him from vengeance.*

Let’s see if we can get a little more information on why God accepted Abel’s offering and did not accept Cain’s offering.

Turn to Hebrews 11:4 in your Bibles. *Assign a reader.*

Hebrews 11:4

- ? **How did Abel offer his sacrifice to God?** *By faith.*
- ? **What does this verse tell us about Abel?** *He was righteous.*

Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and his sacrifice revealed that he was righteous before the Lord. His sacrifice and offering were given out of honor and respect to the Lord. He loved the Lord and obeyed the commandments of the Lord.

Discover the Truth

There are a few more ideas that we could draw out of the text, and we will look at a couple more ideas in a few minutes.

We do not have specific details about how Cain and Abel knew they were to offer sacrifices to God, or what that process looked like, but they knew it was an expectation. As the brothers brought their offerings, presumably to the same altar at the same time, Cain's sacrifice was rejected by God and he became jealous of Abel's acceptance. As a result, Cain killed his brother and faced God's curse.

But God was merciful to Cain by not taking his life as he rightly deserved and by placing a mark on him so that others would be afraid to take vengeance for the murder. Cain was openly disobedient and God judged his disobedience. This is another example of the intersection of God's justice and mercy that reminds us of the gospel.

Even though our sin deserves to be punished, Jesus Christ willingly offered Himself as the sacrifice to pay for our sin.



MERCIFUL



An Acceptable Sacrifice

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, we don't have any information from the text on what was required for the sacrifices that were offered by Cain and Abel and others alive at that time. We have lots of information that can be used to infer what God may have required from those first sacrifices. As God describes the sacrificial system in Leviticus, we see the requirements. As you look over the questions in your workbook, try to understand why it was that Cain was rejected by God and Abel was accepted.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Discuss the following points after the students have had time to answer them.

1. **What are the differences between the two offerings described in Genesis 4:1–5?**
Cain offered a grain (fruit of the ground) offering and Abel offered the firstborn of his flock and their fat. Leviticus 2:14 also calls for the offering of the firstfruits of the harvest.
2. **Read Leviticus 2:1–2 and 4:27–31. How do these offerings compare to Cain and Abel's offerings?** *Cain's is similar to the grain*

offering and Abel's sounds much like the sin offering of the animal and its fat.

3. **What information does Hebrews 11:4 give about Abel and his offering?**
Abel offered his sacrifice in faith, testifying of his righteousness before God.
4. **How is Cain described in 1 John 3:10–12?**
Cain was a child of the devil and his works were evil.
5. **What do the following passages tell you about God's attitude toward sacrifices? 1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6; Proverbs 15:8; Proverbs 21:3.** *All of these point to God's desire for a pure heart rather than sacrifices. While God is pleased with sacrifices offered rightly, if they are done with the wrong motives, they are rejected.*
6. **In summary, describe why God accepted Abel and his sacrifice and not Cain's.** *Although many people point to the fact that Cain's sacrifice was not a blood sacrifice so it was not acceptable to God, that is not the clear picture from the Bible. From the text of Genesis 4, it seems that Cain's attitude toward the sacrifice was the reason it was rejected. God commands the offering of grain and drink offerings later, so these offerings are not inherently wrong. It is important to note that Abel's offering is described as coming from the firstborn while Cain's is not described as the firstfruits. This could be a clue to the attitude and the acceptance—Cain brought some fruit while Abel brought the first and the best of his flock. God also told Cain that he would be accepted if he did well (4:7), so his attitude, not his offering, seems to be the emphasis. Ultimately, it is the heart attitude that God looks at, not the offering itself.*



READ THE WORD

Another common challenge to the biblical history of man has to do with Cain and what we read in Genesis 4:16 and 17. They ask where Cain got his wife if Adam and Eve were the original parents of all of humanity.

Let's read Genesis 4:15–17 together and try to answer that question. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Genesis 4:16–17

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **When did these events take place?** *Just after God had cursed and marked Cain, he left the area.*
- ? **Where did Cain settle?** *In the land of Nod on the East of Eden.*
- ? **According to the text, where did Cain marry his wife?** *The text doesn't say where they were married, but many people assume that Cain went to Nod and found a wife in Nod.*
- ? **What two things did Cain do in Nod?** *He had a son and built a city.*
- ? **Are there any people in the land of Nod?** *There is nothing in the text that would suggest that there were people in Nod.*
- ? **To this point in the Bible, how many people have been identified?** *Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel.*
- ? **If Adam and Eve are the parents of every human, how was Cain related to his wife?** *She must have been his sister (or possibly a niece).*
- ? **How does Genesis 3:20 confirm this?** *Eve is called the mother of all living, so every person is descended from her.*
- ? **How does Genesis 5:4 give us more insight into this topic?** *It tells us that Adam and Eve had many sons and daughters, so Cain, Abel, and Seth were not the only children of Adam and Eve. If Adam and Eve did not have any daughters, humanity would not have continued!*

Genesis 3:20

Genesis 5:4

Discover the Truth

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word “Nod” means “to wander.” Some have suggested that this meant that Cain spent the rest of his life wandering, as Cain said to God in Genesis 4:14. However, since Cain built a city in Genesis 4:17, Nod was probably an actual region as well.

Cain is described as the first son of Adam and Eve, but Genesis 5:4 tells us that there were also other children. We are not told the order or names of any of those children, but we know they must have been born. It may sound a little funny to our modern ears, but Cain married either a sister or a niece (or some other very close relative).

Rather than going to Nod and finding a wife there, he likely already had a wife and took her with him to Nod.

- ? **What are the immediate objections to this idea?** *Some may suggest it is “gross” or wrong, and some may point to the prohibition against marrying close relations in Leviticus 18:6. Point out that this prohibition comes 2,500 years after creation and that Abraham married his half-sister and Isaac married a close cousin.*
- ? **Why might it have been acceptable for close relatives to marry in the beginning (Hint: think of the condition of the original creation compared to now)?** *One of the dangers today comes from genetic disorders that can result from close marriages. That would not have been a consideration close to the originally perfect creation. Adam and Eve were*

perfect and did not have any genetic mutations. As the years went by, mutations would increase, until the "genetic load" was so great that God commanded that close relatives not marry. Also, since God chose to start with two people, the only option would be to have brothers marry sisters.

Many Christians suggest that there were other people groups already in Nod, either groups that God had created or allowed to evolve, and that Cain went there and took a wife from among them. Looking at Genesis 4:14, Cain was afraid that "anyone" would kill him if they found him. So it must have been his family that Cain was afraid of, not some other tribe of people who lived in another area. Why would another group want to kill Cain for killing someone they didn't even know? It just doesn't make sense from the text.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

It is sad to think that within the first generation from Adam and Eve, people were killing one another. The impact of sin was so devastating that Cain was willing to kill his own brother out of jealousy over an act of worshipping God.

Both of the brothers had brought offerings, but Cain's heart was not right in his offering. Despite a direct appeal from God to not allow sin to overtake him, Cain killed his brother and then tried to deny he knew what happened. Not unlike his parents, he attempted to shift God's attention away from his own sin.

But God, who is rich in mercy, did not punish Cain with immediate death, but allowed him to live and even have a family. Not unlike Cain, we can expect consequences for our sin, but because of what Christ has done on the Cross, we don't have to fear the ultimate punishment of an eternity in hell. When we repent and place our trust in Christ, we have Christ's sacrifice on our behalf that is completely accepted by the Father. It is no longer our sin that God sees when He looks at us, but the perfect merit of Jesus. We are free to serve Him, knowing that He has given us a new heart.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

We have taken a look at how sin showed itself in the life of Cain, but we need to remember that the same sinful nature is in every person. We need to make sure that we turn some of our attention to how we live in light of what we have just read from God's Word.

- ? How can we relate the things that we do to please God (our offerings) to the offerings presented by Cain and Abel? *Though we do not offer items on an altar,*

the attitude we have when we do those things that God has commanded of us is important. If we perform our deeds to receive the praise of man, as Jesus condemned the Pharisees for, our works are worthless (1 Corinthians 3:11–15). We should seek to serve God with a pure heart, as Abel is commended for, rather than following Cain's example.

- ? In Hebrews 13:15–16 calls us to “offer the sacrifice of praise to God,” not forgetting “to do good and to share,” as God is pleased with such sacrifices. How is this apparent in the account of Cain and Abel and in your life?

According to Hebrews 11:4, Abel's sacrifice was offered in faith and Cain's was not. Just like Abel, we should not trust in our own works to earn us righteousness, but our righteousness should come through our faith in Christ.

- ? How does the pattern of sin found in James 1:13–15 compare to what we see in the account of Cain and how can that help us understand why we sin and how to avoid it? *Cain's jealousy of his brother's acceptance (a sinful desire) led him to kill his brother despite a warning directly from God to master it. We should recognize our sinful desires and put them to death before they are fully grown and lead us to sin against God.*

- ? Abel offered the firstborn of his flock and elsewhere we see the idea of God honoring the firstfruits offered to him. How can we apply this idea to our offerings to God today? *Whether it is our time, money, or talents, we should give God the first and best of what He has given to us in the first place. Proverbs 3:9 tells us to “Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase.”*

- ? How can you relate the mercy shown to Cain to the mercy shown to you through Christ? *Even though Cain deserved to die for killing his brother, God was merciful to him. Each of us has sinned against God and deserves to die for that rebellion against a perfect and holy God, but God has shown mercy to us in sending Christ to die in our place.*



MEMORY VERSE

Genesis 2:15–17 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God for His patience in withholding judgment and calling sinners to repentance.
- Thank God for providing a substitute for sinners.
- Ask God that each person would offer his first and best to God each day and in the strength of the Holy Spirit.