

# Genesis 4:1-26 – "Offer Faithful Sacrifice"

## Text: Genesis 4:1-26 (CSB)

**1** The man was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. She said, "I have had a male child with the LORD's help." **2** She also gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel became a shepherd of flocks, but Cain worked the ground.

**3** In the course of time Cain presented some of the land's produce as an offering to the LORD. **4** And Abel also presented an offering—some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. The LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, **5** but he did not have regard for Cain and his offering. Cain was furious, and he looked despondent.

**6** Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you furious? And why do you look despondent? **7** If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

**8** Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

**9** Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's guardian?" **10** Then he said, "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! **11** So now you are cursed, alienated from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood you have shed. **12** If you work the ground, it will never again give you its yield. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

**13** But Cain answered the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear! **14** Since you are banishing me today from the face of the earth, and I must hide from your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth, whoever finds me will kill me."

**15** Then the LORD replied to him, "In that case, whoever kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." And he placed a mark on Cain so that whoever found him would not kill him. **16** Then Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

**17** Cain was intimate with his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. Then Cain became the builder of a city, and he named the city Enoch after his son. **18** Irad was born to Enoch, Irad fathered Mehujael, Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. **19** Lamech took two wives for himself, one named Adah and the other named Zillah. **20** Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of the nomadic herdsmen. **21** His brother was named Jubal; he was the father of all who play the lyre and the flute. **22** Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. Tubal-cain's sister was Naamah.

**23** Lamech said to his wives: Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, pay attention to my words. For I killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. **24** If Cain is to be avenged seven times over, then for Lamech it will be seventy-seven times!

**25** Adam was intimate with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, for she said, "God has given me another offspring in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." **26** A son was born to Seth also, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

## Key Background:

- **The First Children:** Cain and Abel are the first children born to humanity, entering a world already corrupted by sin. Eve's statement "I have had a male child with the LORD's help" may reflect hope that Cain could be the promised offspring of Genesis 3:15 who would crush the serpent—but this hope proves tragically misplaced.
- **Two Occupations:** Abel becomes a shepherd, Cain a farmer. Both occupations are legitimate and honorable. The issue isn't their vocations but their hearts. This establishes that God looks at the heart of the worshiper, not merely the external profession or activity.
- **"In the Course of Time":** This phrase suggests the brothers had been worshiping God regularly. The offering wasn't spontaneous but part of an established pattern of worship. God had clearly communicated how He was to be approached, though the specific instructions aren't recorded here.

- **Cain's Offering:** Cain brought "some of the land's produce"—literally "from the fruit of the ground." The text's description "some" suggests it was not the firstfruits or the best, though this is secondary to the fundamental problem: Cain's offering was bloodless. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). Cain's offering revealed that he did not understand or acknowledge his own sinfulness, nor did he recognize his need for atonement. His grain offering represented human effort and self-righteousness rather than humble submission to God's prescribed means of approaching Him as a sinner needing forgiveness.
- **Abel's Offering:** Abel brought "some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions." Three things stand out: (1) Firstborn—the best he had, (2) Fat portions—the choicest parts, (3) Blood sacrifice—an animal died. Abel's offering demonstrated faith in God's revealed will and acknowledged his need for atonement. He understood that sin requires death and that forgiveness comes only through the shedding of blood. Abel gave sacrificially, thoughtfully, and in faith (Hebrews 11:4).
- **God's Regard:** The LORD "had regard for" Abel's offering but not Cain's. The Hebrew suggests God looked favorably, with acceptance and pleasure, on Abel and his offering—but not on Cain. Hebrews 11:4 explains: "By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain." The difference was faith, heart attitude, and obedience to God's revealed will. Abel offered in faith, acknowledging his sin and God's prescribed remedy. Cain offered in disobedience, refusing to acknowledge either his sin or God's required means of atonement.
- **The Principle of Blood Atonement:** God established the pattern of blood sacrifice in Genesis 3:21 when He killed an animal to make coverings for Adam and Eve after their sin. This first recorded sacrifice demonstrated that sin requires death and that God Himself would provide the covering for sin through a substitute. The principle runs throughout Scripture: "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). "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 atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11). Abel's blood sacrifice was accepted because it acknowledged sin's seriousness, recognized the need for a substitute, and looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice—Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Cain's bloodless offering was fundamentally insufficient—it could not atone for sin, no matter how sincere the effort or how excellent the produce, because God had established that forgiveness requires the shedding of blood.
- **God's Warning to Cain:** God mercifully confronts Cain before he acts, asking questions designed to lead to repentance: "Why are you furious? Why do you look despondent?" God offers a path forward: "If you do what is right, won't you be accepted?" Even after Cain's rejected offering, God provides opportunity for correction. The phrase "do what is right" points to God's previously revealed instructions about acceptable worship—bring the required blood sacrifice, acknowledge your sin, and approach God on His terms, not your own.
- **Sin Personified:** "Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (v. 7). This is the Bible's first use of the word "sin" (*chatta'th*). Sin is pictured as a predatory animal waiting to pounce. The word "desire" (*teshuqah*) is the same word used in Genesis 3:16 for the woman's desire for her husband—suggesting sin's desire is to dominate and control Cain. But God says Cain "must rule over it"—he has both responsibility and ability to resist.
- **The First Murder:** Cain's premeditated murder of Abel is the first death recorded in Scripture, and it's fratricide—brother killing brother. The progression from rejected worship to anger to murder demonstrates how unchecked sin escalates. James 1:15 confirms: "When sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death."
- **Abel's Blood Cries Out:** God declares, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground" (v. 10). Blood has a voice before God, demanding justice. Hebrews 12:24 contrasts Abel's blood (crying for vengeance) with Jesus's blood (speaking better things—mercy and forgiveness).
- **Cain's Curse:** Just as the ground was cursed because of Adam (Genesis 3:17), now Cain himself is cursed and "alienated from the ground." The farmer can no longer farm successfully—his vocation becomes frustration. He becomes "a restless wanderer," picturing the spiritual restlessness of all who live apart from God.
- **The Mark of Cain:** God places a mark on Cain to protect him from being killed. This isn't the "mark of the beast" or a curse, but a sign of God's mercy—preventing vigilante justice and allowing Cain to live. Even in judgment, God shows grace. The mark's nature isn't described, but its purpose is clear: protection.
- **Cain's Descendants:** Cain builds a city (representing human civilization apart from God), and his lineage produces cultural achievements—nomadic herding, music, metalworking. This shows that common grace allows even the ungodly to develop culture, arts, and technology. But moral corruption also grows, culminating in Lamech's violent boasting and polygamy.

- **Lamech's Escalation:** Lamech's poem (vv. 23-24) celebrates violence and revenge. Where God promised seven-fold vengeance for anyone who kills Cain, Lamech arrogantly claims seventy-seven-fold vengeance for himself. This represents the complete corruption of Cain's line—pride, violence, and self-glorification replace humility and dependence on God.
- **Seth—The Replacement:** God graciously gives Adam and Eve another son, Seth, as a replacement for righteous Abel. Eve recognizes this as God's provision. Through Seth's line, the promised seed of Genesis 3:15 would eventually come—culminating in Christ (Luke 3:38 traces Jesus's genealogy back to Seth, to Adam, to God).
- **Calling on the Name of the LORD:** With Seth's son Enosh, "people began to call on the name of the LORD" (v. 26). This marks the beginning of corporate worship and prayer. While Cain's line pursued earthly achievements apart from God, Seth's line sought the LORD. This establishes two spiritual lineages throughout Scripture—those who walk with God and those who walk away from Him.

## Questions from the Story:

- What does Eve say when Cain is born (v. 1)? What might her statement reveal about her hopes for this child?
- What occupations do Cain and Abel pursue (v. 2)? Are these vocations themselves good or bad?
- What does Cain bring as an offering to the LORD (v. 3)? How is his offering described?
- What does Abel bring as an offering (v. 4)? What specific details are given about his offering?
- How does God respond to Abel and his offering (v. 4)? How does He respond to Cain and his offering (v. 5)?
- What is Cain's emotional response to God's rejection (v. 5)? How does he look?
- What questions does God ask Cain (v. 6)? Why does God confront Cain before he acts?
- What does God promise if Cain does what is right (v. 7)? What path forward does God offer?
- How is sin described in verse 7? What does it mean that sin is "crouching at the door"?
- What does God say about sin's "desire" (v. 7)? What does this reveal about sin's nature?
- What command does God give Cain regarding sin (v. 7)? Does Cain have the ability to resist?
- What does Cain say to Abel (v. 8)? What happens in the field?
- What question does God ask Cain (v. 9)? How does Cain respond?
- What does Cain's question "Am I my brother's guardian?" reveal about his heart?
- What does God say about Abel's blood (v. 10)? What does it mean that blood "cries out"?
- What curse does God pronounce on Cain (vv. 11-12)? How will this affect his occupation and life?
- How does Cain respond to his punishment (vv. 13-14)? Does he show repentance or just regret?
- What fear does Cain express (v. 14)? What does this reveal about his conscience?
- How does God respond to Cain's fear (v. 15)? What does God place on Cain?
- Where does Cain go (v. 16)? What does "away from the LORD's presence" signify?
- What does Cain build (v. 17)? What does city-building represent in biblical narrative?
- What accomplishments are listed among Cain's descendants (vv. 18-22)? What do these cultural achievements show about common grace?
- What does Lamech say to his wives (vv. 23-24)? How does this demonstrate moral corruption?
- Who does God give to Adam and Eve (v. 25)? Why is Seth significant?
- What begins to happen in Seth's generation (v. 26)? What does "call on the name of the LORD" indicate?
- Why did God accept Abel's offering but reject Cain's? What does Hebrews 11:4 reveal about the difference?
- What does this passage teach about the importance of approaching God on His terms, not according to our own preferences or efforts?
- How does the principle of blood sacrifice in Abel's offering point forward to Christ's atoning death?
- What does Cain's bloodless offering reveal about his understanding (or lack thereof) of sin, guilt, and the need for atonement?
- How does Abel's willing sacrifice of the firstborn of his flock demonstrate his acknowledgment of sin and trust in God's prescribed means of forgiveness?
- What does God's warning to Cain teach us about God's desire to prevent sin rather than just punish it?
- How does the personification of sin as "crouching at the door" help us understand spiritual warfare and temptation?

- What does Cain's progression from anger to murder teach us about the danger of unchecked emotions and unresolved bitterness?
- How does Cain's question "Am I my brother's guardian?" contrast with God's design for human community and responsibility?
- What does Abel's blood crying out for justice teach us about God's awareness of injustice and His commitment to righteousness?
- How does the contrast between Cain's line (cultural achievement without God) and Seth's line (calling on the LORD) demonstrate two ways of living in the world?
- In what ways do we sometimes offer "Cain-like" worship—approaching God on our own terms, through our own efforts, without acknowledging our sin or God's required means of atonement?
- How does the biblical truth that approach to God requires blood atonement humble our self-righteousness and point us to our absolute dependence on Christ's sacrifice?
- What does God's patience with Cain, even placing a mark of protection on him, reveal about divine mercy even in the midst of judgment?
- How does the biblical principle "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" point us to our need for Christ's sacrifice and guard us against thinking we can earn God's acceptance through our own works or religious activity?