

Day 1 – Introduction to the Text

Genesis 4:1-8

In 1994, one of the greatest acts of evil in the 20th century took place in Rwanda, Africa. In just 100 days, approximately 800,000 Rwandan people were slaughtered, not by an invading army, but rather, by their very own countrymen. Neighbor killed neighbor and in some extreme cases, husbands even killed their wives. While the UN maintained a small contingent in Rwanda, they were powerless to stop the ruthless genocide taking place right before their eyes.

What sparked the massacre? Envy, jealousy, and deep rooted hatred. The Hutu tribe—who made up about 85% of Rwandans—turned on the Tutsi tribe—the minority, but ruling party. If you are interested, you can view a fictional account of the Rwandan genocide in the movie *Hotel Rwanda*. My wife and I have seen it and were shocked by the atrocities portrayed in the movie. I remember at one point in the middle of the movie, she said, “I don’t understand. They are all related, but they’re killing each other!” That is the problem with sin—in the end, it doesn’t care about what does or does not make sense. Sin just wants to be fed.

Ultimately, that is the message God is trying to get across to Cain in our passage this week. Cain and his brother, Abel, bring their offerings to God. God accepts Abel’s offering, but rejects Cain’s. This makes Cain very angry. Standing there dejected, Cain is encouraged by God to choose the good. God also warns Cain about the power of sin. But Cain rejects God’s exhortation and warning. Instead, Cain feeds his sinful pride and jealous by rising up and killing his unsuspecting brother.

Sin manifests itself in many ways—lying, stealing, and adultery, for example. However, it is interesting that the first sinful act to take place after the Fall involved premeditated murder and not just any murder, but the murder of a younger brother by his older brother. Consequently, what is more interesting is that this pattern flows through the rest of Genesis (Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers). What an odd way for God to foreshadow our redemption—a redemption brought about by the murder of a brother by his brothers.

Scripture Memory: Genesis 4:6-7

Day 2 – What Does the Text Say?

Read Genesis 3:8-24 for the context

1. In what way do the man and the woman answer God?
2. What does God curse in the passage?
3. What does God do with the man and his wife, and why does He do it?

Read Genesis 4:1-8

1. Why does Eve name her son “Cain?”
2. What are Cain and Abel’s occupations?
3. In what ways is Cain’s offering different from Abel’s?
4. How does God portray sin in verse 7?

Day 3 – What Does the Text Mean?

Read Genesis 4:1-8 again

Verse 1: *the man had relations with his wife...* “The Hebrew literally means ‘knew.’ In the Bible, ‘knowing’ someone involves a personal and intimate involvement, not an impersonal knowing of information. Here ‘knowing’ is used of the most intimate, hallowed relationship between a husband and a wife. ‘Knowing’ is never used of animals, for which coitus only fulfills an instinctual appetite” (Waltke, 96).

I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD. There are two ways to interpret Eve’s statement. Her words could be taken in a positive light, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth [or ‘acquired’] a man.” Or negatively, Eve might be saying instead, “Just as the Lord created a man, so I have created a man.” Put this way, “Eve’s words are a boastful attempt to make herself ‘like God.’ Just as the Lord created a man, so now she has created one.” There are two reasons why the latter reading is preferred.

“First, there is a recurring theme throughout many of the narratives in Genesis, namely, the attempt and failure of human effort in obtaining the blessing that only God can give. God promises humankind a blessing, and human beings push it aside in favor of their own attempts to obtain blessing” (e.g., Gen 11 and 16). “The second consideration is Eve’s later words about the birth of Seth (‘God has granted me another child [zera ‘, lit., ‘seed’] in place of Abel,” v. 25). . . . The contrast between her words at the beginning of the narrative and at the conclusion is striking and revealing. At the beginning Eve says, ‘I have brought forth a man [‘iš],’ whereas at the close of the narrative she acknowledges, ‘God has granted me another seed [zera ‘].’ Eve does not say that Seth is given to replace Cain. Rather, Seth replaces Abel.” (Sailhamer, 96-97).

Verses 2: *Abel was a keeper of the flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.* “Abel’s vocation is not anticipated in chaps. 2–3, though the garden narrative permits it, while Cain’s is the one assigned to Adam (2:15; 3:17–19). Both professions were known in early society; shepherding and agriculture provided an occasion for a natural rivalry” (Mathews, 265-266).

Verses 3-5: “The reason for the different reception of the two offerings was the state of mind towards God with which they were brought, and which manifested itself in the selection of the gifts. Not, indeed, in the fact that Abel brought a bleeding sacrifice and Cain a bloodless one; for this difference arose from the difference in their callings, and each necessarily took his gift from the produce of his own occupation. It was rather in the fact that Abel offered the fattest firstlings of his flock, the best that he could bring; whilst Cain only brought a portion of the fruit of the ground, but not the first-fruits. By this choice Abel brought [a better offering than Cain], and manifested that disposition which is designated faith (πίστις) in Heb. 11:4. The nature of this disposition, however, can only be determined from the meaning of the offering itself” (Keil and Delitzsch, 69).

Verse 6: ***Why are you angry?*** “As before, God begins his admonition with a question designed to allow the listener to confess his failure (cf. 3:9)” (Waltke, 98).

Verse 7: ***sin is crouching at the door...*** “Sin” is likened to an animal “crouching” or “lurking” (NRSV) at the “door,” meaning the animal’s resting place, ready to stir if incited. “Crouch” (*rābaṣ*) is commonly used of domesticated animals in repose (i.e., 29:2; 49:9; Exod 23:5), including wild animals such as the lion (Gen 49:9). This pictures sin temporarily at bay and subject to its master but coming alive when stirred” (Mathews, 270).

Verse 8: ***Cain told Abel...*** “Cain’s answer to God’s questioning is not recorded in his words to God but in his words and actions toward his brother.

his brother... The key word *brother* occurs seven times in Gen. 4:2–11. This is the emergence of sibling rivalry, a problem that will plague each of the godly families of Genesis. In hatred, Cain begins the first religious war. Because he renounces God, he renounces his image.

and killed him... Cain’s bad feelings against God spill over into irrational behavior and an unjustifiable jealous rage against his brother. The sundering of the familial bond, begun in chapter 3, here escalates to fratricide in one mere generation” (Waltke, 98).

Bibliography

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update.

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