**Lesson 7**

**19, 20 July 2021**

**Genesis 4:1-16**

**Comments from Chapter 6: *Study with Process***

* As you read through this chapter, especially the section on tools for building **comprehension**, you recognized many activities that we already do: using colored pencils to mark a text, looking up words in an English dictionary, referring to other translations of the Bible, and outlining. All of these things help us focus specifically on what the text actually says.
* Jen Wilkin suggested two exercises for helping us to **interpret** a passage of Scripture. The first one she mentioned referred to cross-references. Unfortunately not all Bibles have cross-references. I have about half a dozen different versions of the Bible in my study, and only a couple of them have cross-references. If your Bible does not provide cross-references, you might consider purchasing a second Bible that does have them. If so, it would be good to get a different version of the Bible from the one you normally use, so you will have the added advantage of seeing variations on how thoughts can be worded.
* The second exercise for interpreting Scripture is to paraphrase a verse or a passage. As Jen said, this exercise is perhaps the hardest of all the ones we use in Bible study. Putting something into our own words requires a lot of thought and effort. But it serves the excellent purpose of forcing us to really focus on what the text is saying.
* The final step in our Bible study is **applying** it to our lives. We look at what the passage has taught us about God, we note what it reveals about ourselves, and then we decide what we need to do in response to what we have learned. We want our Bible study to *change* us by transforming our minds and conforming us more and more to the image of God within us.

**Jen Wilkin, *God of Creation* video #6, “Cain and Abel”**

Last week we looked at Genesis 3 and saw why the present day world is so broken. We saw Adam and Eve make the wrong choice after being tempted by the serpent, we saw God confront them, and we saw the awful consequences of their sin. But we also saw hope. God promised that a seed of the woman would one day defeat the serpent, and Adam named his wife Eve *(life giver)* as a prophecy of hope, in anticipation of that event. All the patriarchs, everyone who lived prior to the Cross, held onto this promise. But put yourself in Adam and Eve’s place and try to imagine what was in their minds and hearts. Were they thinking, “Oh, this promise won’t be fulfilled for hundreds or thousands of years”? No, they probably were thinking that it would happen very soon, i.e. that one of their own children would be the promised deliverer. In Genesis chapter three we saw man sin against God, but in Genesis chapter 4 we see man sinning, not just against God, but against his fellow man. It is painfully sad to read the account of Cain and Abel, but we can learn much about ourselves and the progression of sin in our own lives from what we read about them.

**“I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”** – 1 Corinthians 11:11, 12 tells us that man and woman depend on one another. In the creation account we saw Eve being taken out of the man. Now we see a man being taken out of a woman. A better translation of what Eve said when Cain was born is, “I have gotten a man, *even the deliverer*.” So when Eve gives birth to Cain, she thinks, “This is the one! This is the one who will crush the head of the serpent.” It is heartbreaking as we look back at this account and see her excitement. She thinks she has given birth to the *promised deliverer*, but we know that she has actually given birth to the first *murderer*. Then she has a second son, Abel, whose name means *a mist* or *vapor*, so they already have some sense of their mortality.

**“Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.”** – Both of these professions, shepherd and farmer, reflect the mandate that God had given man to oversee His creation. The “cultural mandate” is going forward, despite the fact that sin has tainted all of creation. And even though the formal laws about sacrifices have not yet been given, we see that both Cain and Abel have some understanding that sacrifices are required and that they are to be given in a particular way. And we are not surprised to find that their sacrifices reflect their individual work. So the question is, why did God accept Abel’s sacrifice but not Cain’s? Was it because Cain did not offer a blood sacrifice? That is not probably the case, since when the laws for sacrifices were given centuries later, acceptable sacrifices *included* grain offerings and other “firstfruits”. So **what is it that makes a sacrifice acceptable to the Lord?** Notice that verse 5 says that “for Cain and his offering God had no regard.” **God always only wants an offering that comes from a pure motive.** The offering that is given in faith from a pure heart is the one that He desires. The wording of the descriptions of the two offerings gives us a hint about the heart condition of the two men. The text says that Abel brought the firstborn of his flock, while Cain brought some of the fruit, not necessarily the firstfruits, of his crops. What we can know for sure is that God would only reject an offering if it came from impure motives.

So even before he committed murder, we see that Cain has already committed an offense against God. He has made an outward show of righteousness with an inward resistance. Cain is the first “legalist”; he believes that he can simply do what is right according to the letter of the law, but his *heart* doesn’t have to be in the right place. He believes that *external* righteousness is all that is required. “I don’t have to *love* this; I just have to *do* this.” When Adam and Eve sinned, they were rather clumsy at sinning and at trying to cover it up. But now, just one generation later, we see a more sophisticated form of sin. And when murder is committed, we see sin becoming more bold. When Cain offered a sacrifice that was only outwardly acceptable to the Lord, what he was really doing was try to clothe himself in slightly better “fig leaves” than his parents had used. What he did is a false covering of shame. It is false righteousness that is actually filthy rags. Psalm 51:16-17 tells us that what the Lord desires is not sacrifice and offering but a broken and contrite spirit. There is an awareness of sin in Abel that Cain does not see.

**“Cain was very angry, and his face fell.”** – Look at Cain’s response to the Lord’s rejection. His response to being called to account is anger, and he rebels even further. But God is slow to anger. When He questions Cain about his anger, He is giving him an opportunity to change course and to repent. And when He asks Cain, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” He is basically saying, “You *know* what is required of you, but you have chosen to do otherwise.” God gives Cain an opportunity to repent and to slay his anger, and instead Cain will turn and slay his brother because his brother’s righteousness incurs his wrath.

**“Sin is crouching at the door.”** – Sin is personified here as a wild animal, an alpha predator which will indeed consume Cain. Do you remember the account of Antoine Yates who lived in New York City and kept an unusual pet? One day he went to the ER with bite marks on his arm, and he told the ER workers that his pit bull had bitten him. They thought the bite marks were too large for a pit bull. When the police went to his apartment, they discovered that what he actually had was a full grown Bengal tiger! This is an illustration of sin. Antoine Yates probably got the tiger as a fluffy cub to keep as a pet. He kept feeding it, and it kept growing. He fed it more, and it grew more. He kept telling himself the tiger was a pet, and he could keep it under control. But one day it revealed its wild nature and attacked him. Antoine learned that his “pet” tiger had been crouching, waiting to consume him. He was foolish . . . but this is the way that we handle sin. We tell ourselves, “It’s not that big of a deal. I can handle it.” But sin always grows bigger and bigger and bigger. It is *not* a pet, and sooner or later it *will* consume us. So when God pricks our heart and asks us what we are doing, we should be quick to acknowledge our wrongdoing and to repent and turn from evil.

**“Where is Abel your brother?”** – Cain’s anger takes over, and he kills Abel. Does God immediately strike him down? No, once again God shows His long-suffering and His slowness to anger. Once again he gives Cain the opportunity to repent and confess his sin. But Cain responds with evasiveness and blame-shifting, just as his parents had done before him. And the anger and sarcasm he adds to his response reveals just hard his heart has become.

**“The ground shall no longer produce for you, and you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer”** – God has pursued Cain, He has initiated dialogue with him, He has warned Cain of impending danger, but when Cain refuses to repent, God then assigns him a punishment which is appropriate for him. By forcing Cain to be a fugitive and wanderer, He prevents him from ever being a gardener again. You cannot grow produce if you are constantly moving from place to place. God knows how to make the punishment fit the crime.

**“This punishment is greater than I can bear.”** – Cain could have said, “This punishment is small compared to what I have done.” But instead he refuses to take ownership of his wrong doing, and he becomes even more angry with God. The only thing that comes out of his mouth is a series of complaints, and he shows no remorse at all for killing his brother. Then he turns his back on God, leaving the presence of the Lord—he wants nothing more to do with Him—and settles in the land of Nod *(“wandering”)* east of Eden.

**“The Lord put a mark on Cain...”** – We don’t know what the mark was that God put on Cain. It was obviously something visible, but we can only speculate on what it looked like. The bigger question, however, is why He did so. There are three possible reasons:

1. First of all it was a protection for Cain, so that no one would kill *him*. Anyone who saw him and knew what he had done might have been tempted to punish him by putting him to death. But God has said, “Vengeance is *Mine*; I will repay.” We do not have the right to take the law into our own hands and gain revenge for sin. That right belongs to God alone. God knows that the punishment He has given is the perfect one for Cain. It is a more appropriate punishment for Cain to be kept alive, and it will serve as an example to everyone who sees Cain to be reminded that what God says stands.
2. The mark also shows God’s generosity toward a sinner. In Cain’s lowest, unrepentant state God still preserved him. Even as He is administering justice, God shows mercy. We tend to think of justice and mercy as mutually exclusive, yet God demonstrates both simultaneously.
3. Cain will serve as a living warning to others. Ideally, those who see Cain and remember his story will be prompted to restrain their own anger and not allow it to grow to the point of committing murder. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warns that anger leads to murder; if people did not harbor anger in their hearts, then no one would commit murder. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day thought that as long as they didn’t commit the physical act of murder, they were okay. But Jesus challenged them to a deeper obedience to the Law. He says that we are to love the Lord our God with the totality of our being, and we are to love our neighbor as we love ourself. (Luke 10:25-37)

**The Good Samaritan** – Then Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to drive home the point. We may have thought that the Good Samaritan in that parable was meant to represent *us*, but he actually represents Christ. Christ is the “Good Samaritan” who rescues us at great cost to Himself. The parable is not about us deciding who to help in our lives; it is meant to teach us that **we should treat *everyone* we meet with favoritism**. It is a whole different way of looking at the world. What was Cain’s main concern? Cain! To the point that he would take his own brother’s life. So we should answer the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” with “Yes!”

**Abel** – Hebrews 11:4 says that Abel, even “though he died, he still speaks.” It is interesting that in the Genesis account, Abel never says anything! Yet the New Testament says that he still continues to speak because of his faithfulness to God. His offering was acceptable to God because it was offered in faith, from a pure heart. Abel is mentioned again in Hebrews 12:22-24. In that passage, as Mount Sinai is contrasted with Mount Zion, and the old covenant is contrasted with the new covenant in Jesus’ blood, it says that “the sprinkled blood…**speaks a better word than the blood of Abel**.” Abel, who was just a mist and a vapor in the Old Testament, keeps popping up in the New Testament. What did his blood cry out for in the Old Testament? It cried out for justice. But what did the blood of Christ cry out for? His blood cried out for mercy! That’s what the cross does for us; it speaks a “better word”.

**What about our worship?** – It is possible for us offer worship in a number of unworthy ways.

* We can do things that appear outwardly righteous just to *gain approval or get attention*. We need to ask ourselves, “Am I doing this for the Lord’s glory or for my own?”
* Sometimes we offer worship that appears acceptable but really isn’t because it is *just a cultural practice*. It is what everybody around us does, but it is not a matter of the heart.
* Sometimes we offer worship *out of habit*. It is what we have always done, but our “worship” has lost its freshness. It is no longer real.
* Sometimes we offer acts of worship *out of guilt*. Abel offered an acceptable offering of the firstborn of his flock, not because he felt a responsibility to take what was his and give it to God, but because he recognized that everything he owned belonged to the Lord in the first place. He saw himself as a *steward*, whereas Cain saw himself as *master* of his own domain.

**What do we learn about God from this account?** – God is **gracious** and stands ready to forgive. God is **wise** and warns of the true nature of sin, giving an alert long before things reach the breaking point. God is **just**. He always punishes sin. He is **gracious in the midst of His justice**, and He is **long-suffering**.

**TAKE AWAYS:** *Lesson 4 of Bible Study Fellowship’s course on Genesis contained some comments that I thought were good for us to consider this week.*

* **Refusing to open your heart to God opens the door to Satan**, who seeks only to lie, kill and destroy. (page 3)
* **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…Sin does not offer the freedom promised but instead results in increasing bondage and deepening damage. (page 3)
* **Am I my brother’s keeper?** How responsible am I for my hurting neighbor, the homeless in my city or a starving child on another continent? A humble heart that honors God loves people in tangible ways. God’s blessings in our lives should be stewarded well and benefit others. What would God ask us to do? (page 5)