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**Genesis: “Cain Reconsidered”**

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**~ Genesis 4:1-15 ~**

### INTRODUCTION

Those of you who have 2+ children have probably been known to say: “*There have never been two children more different!*” Among my four children, you will find at least:

- One very compliant. . .another very strong-willed;
- One who did very well in school. . .another who struggled;
- One for whom every challenge was an opportunity. . .another for whom every challenge was an opportunity to get in trouble.

Researchers who study families say families are like a *mobile*—held perfectly in balance as each person plays the role they are given to play.

- Some kids play the “hero” role → making the family look good;
- Some play the “scapegoat” role → giving face to the pain and dysfunction of the family;
- Others play the “clown” role → bringing comic relief to the heaviness of life;
- Others will “hide” just because they enjoy being alone more than being around people.

All families are dysfunctional to a point—some more than others. **HUMOR>** I remember seeing a cartoon once that showed a massive auditorium (that would hold hundreds). On the stage was a big banner identifying the event as the FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON *FUNCTIONAL* FAMILIES. But there were only six people out in the audience. ☺

Most families have a certain amount of rivalry among the kids. . .or between the kids and one / both of their parents. **STORY>** I remember Ben, Jeremy and me building a “fort” up in the rafters of the garage (of the house we had just moved into). Ben was down on the ground. . .Jeremy and I were still up on the “platform” . . .a piece of wood went tumbling down. . .made a loud noise. It scared Ben, who cried out: “Mom, Jeremy’s trying to kill me!” ☺

Well, it was no different in Adam & Eve’s “family”. The story of the first *sibling rivalry* is recorded in **Genesis 4**. I’d like to take you through the story [cf. **vv. 1-15**]. . . . .

### BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

<sup>1</sup>*And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”* <sup>2</sup>*Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.*

That’s a pretty excited response from Eve (**v. 1b**), having just come through the agonies of childbirth. You remember the promise we looked at last week—that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head [**3:15**]. Eve may have thought that God was fulfilling that promise through Cain—that he would be the Savior to bruise the serpent’s head and get back everything they had lost. God did make a promise and it would be fulfilled, BUT in God’s own timing (not hers).

Not long thereafter, Abel was born. It's interesting to note the difference in how Adam & Eve named their children. CAIN means "to acquire"—a strong word. They were pinning their hopes on him to acquire favor with God. But they named their 2<sup>nd</sup> son ABEL which means "breath". It's not a bad word. But it means breath in the sense of vapor—that is, something fleeting, not very lasting, transitory. . .therefore, lacking substance. It was a perfect set-up for sibling rivalry, but perhaps not in the way you thought. You might have thought Abel was the favored child, but I think not.

CAIN was the favored one...the child of promise...the one in whom great expectations were placed. He was the apple of his parents' eyes. He grew up and became a tiller of the soil just like his father, Adam. He was definitely the dominant son in the family.

ABEL was different. He was the quiet one...the one you might well call a "lost child". His less favored position in the family probably led to his pursuing the solitary life of a shepherd. That's not a bad thing. David was a shepherd. . .and what a man of God he became.

Often the quieter ones run deeper spiritually. All those hours out in the fields gave him time to think and pray. And because of his lesser position in the family, Abel no doubt found his comfort and solace in God. He may have been the "lost child", but he was more spiritually-minded, more in tune with God. The writer of **Hebrews (11:4)** says of Abel: "*He was commended for his faith as a righteous man, and God spoke well of his offerings. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith.*"

We pick up the story in **v. 3:** <sup>3</sup>*In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.* <sup>4</sup>*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,* <sup>5</sup>*but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.*

Bringing offerings to honor God has been an integral part of worship from the very beginning. Not because God "needs" anything; it's just our way of showing love, honor, and respect. We'll never know exactly WHY God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's. After all, Cain was the so-called "favored one". I don't think it had anything to do with WHAT they brought. Both of their sacrifices came from the work of their hands...from the fruit of their labor:

- ABEL was a shepherd — so he brought an animal sacrifice (i.e.: a meat offering);
- CAIN was a farmer — so he brought things he had grown (i.e.: crops).

There was nothing wrong with that. If you go to the book of **Leviticus**, you'll see that God accepted BOTH meat offerings (i.e.: blood sacrifices) AND meal offerings (i.e.: made from grain grown in the field). Both were perfectly legitimate offerings unto the Lord.

No, the reason God accepted one offering and not the other had to do with the *attitude of heart* in which the offerings were brought. Cain figured God would accept his offering just because of his place in the family; he was haughty (like the Elder Brother in the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*). If your heart's not right, it doesn't much matter what you do. . .how much you "put on the dog". That's not going to impress God. In fact, in **Amos 5:21ff**, He has some pretty strong language for those whose hearts are not in the right place:

<sup>21</sup> *"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.*

<sup>22</sup> *Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.*

[See, there are both types of offerings; it doesn't matter which kind you bring.]

<sup>23</sup> *Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.*

<sup>24</sup> *Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living. [NLT]*

(i.e.: Let justice roll down like a river, and righteousness like a mighty stream!)

If there's *sin / hypocrisy* in our lives. . .if our *profession* doesn't match up to our *possession*. . .if we say one thing with our *lips* but do another thing with our *actions*. . .if there's *unforgiveness* in our hearts. . .if we're not tuned to the things that please God (e.g.: justice). . .if we're just serving God to *impress* or out of a sense of *obligation* (not heartfelt devotion)—in other words, if the attitude of our heart is not right—then we're going to be in the same place as Cain. God looks at the *attitude* and *intent* of what we do. He wants us to worship Him "*in spirit and in truth*" (i.e.: with a right spirit, hiding nothing). [John 4:24]

The day of worship (today) is a good day to examine your heart. Are there attitudes deep down you are harboring that are not pleasing to God? If so, maybe NOW is the time to bring them out from under cover...acknowledge them...turn them over to Him...and receive His forgiveness.

Look at Cain's reaction. It's really an OVER-reaction. He blows up in anger—at God! I'm not sure I'd have the nerve to do that. I remember once as a kid talking back to my mother (and, I'm ashamed to say, using a swear word). All I can tell you is I never did that again. 😊

God takes the role of a therapist: "*Why are you so angry? What's behind that? Where's that coming from? You look so downcast.*" [v. 6] What was going through Cain's mind? *Was he not God's favorite? Hadn't his parents reminded him of his unique relationship with God. . .that he was the promised one? His mother had told him so.*

In this case, this family system may have nurtured the sin of envy by favoring one son over the other. It's easy to do. I know one mother who avoids that by telling her children, "You're my favorite youngest daughter. . .you're my favorite oldest son." So at the end of the day, each child knows they are treasured and valued (even if she's had to be more of a disciplinarian with one in particular that day). That's the way to avoid ENVY, which the writer of **Hebrews (12:15)** calls the ROOT OF BITTERNESS that grows up within us like a poison, so that by it many are hurt and we miss the grace of God.

God then gives him another opportunity to do things differently: *<sup>7</sup>If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?* In other words, let's try this again, and make it right this time. But what are the three hardest words to utter in the English language? "*I was wrong.*" So hard, you see, because I'm never wrong. . .it's never really me. I will go out of my way to come up with some reason, some excuse—rather than taking responsibility...making a change...doing it differently.

So God warns Cain: *<sup>7</sup>If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you (to control you; have its way with you), but you must rule over it.*"

Oh, the resistance we put up when someone tries to correct us. Given the perniciousness of the human heart, very seldom can you tell / warn a person. I mean, you might try something like:

- "*You're drinking (or, you're spending) too much.*"
- "*Slow down before you fall down. Take a little better care of yourself.*"
- "*If you keep letting your temper get the best of you, you're going to lose your job*"

Most of us get defensive when we hear words like that, even when they come from someone we trust. That's why they teach us in counseling, pastoral care and Stephen Ministry not to give advice. Rarely is it heard, much less taken. It seems we're prone to hitting our heads against brick walls. We'd rather "hurt" than "change".

Cain, at this point, isn't hearing God. He's let himself become too driven, too consumed with passion. He's made up his mind. So he takes his brother out to the field. . .brutally attacks and kills him. Ever acted on strong feelings like that? Usually you regret it immediately afterward; but not Cain. Here he's witnessed what may very well have been the first death in human history. Maybe he didn't understand that once the

deed was done, you couldn't bring Abel back. You would think he would be blown away; but he exhibits no remorse...only cover up.

When God asks him where his brother is, he replies: <sup>9</sup>*"I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?"* Maybe not his guardian; but responsible? YES, of course!!! All God wanted was a simple acknowledgement / a confession from Cain of what he had done—so that He might have a basis to grant forgiveness and pardon (cf. **I John 1:9**).

Yet another chance to turn things around spurned.

Well, the LORD tells him: <sup>11</sup>*"Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup>When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crop for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."*

The consequences of sin may last a lifetime.

Cain complains to the LORD: <sup>13</sup>*"My punishment is more than I can bear. [Really his punishment was pretty mild considering the crime he had committed.] <sup>14</sup>Today you are driving me from the land—and from your presence. I will be a restless wanderer on the earth==a moving target. Whoever finds me will kill me."*

Here we come to the most staggering part of the entire story. Even though Cain has exhibited a haughty attitude...refused to back up and try again...given in to the anger & bitterness brewing in his heart...killed his brother...denied responsibility before God...snubbed God's attempts to offer forgiveness.....in spite of all that, God doesn't write him off or destroy him. He could have left Cain "out there" as a sitting duck for retribution—which might well have been what he "deserved". But instead, God does something to protect Cain from anyone who would try to do to him what he did to his brother. That to me reveals the kind of God YHWH is!

<sup>15</sup>*The LORD said to him, "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.*

And so we have the world's 1<sup>st</sup> tattoo! 😊 A mark of protection to preserve Cain's life. It was a mark of GOD's MERCY because Cain was truly worthy of death.

God loved Cain as much as Abel after all. Where did we ever get this idea that God hates sinners? He loves them—*us*, I should say (for we are all guilty as Cain was—maybe not of murdering a fellow human being; but when it comes to meeting God's perfect standards, all of us have fallen short). He loves us all so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, not to condemn the world, but to bear the penalty of sin (yours & mine) on the cross (cf. **John 3:16-17**). *"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (**Romans 5:8**).

What an act of mercy and grace!

- MERCY == not getting what we deserve (e.g.: condemnation, being cut off);
- GRACE == getting what we don't deserve (e.g.: salvation, a fresh start).

## LESSONS LEARNED

On the basis of this passage, this remarkable story of God's grace & mercy, what do we need to do? What are the lessons learned that we can apply this to our life?

- 1) If you're a parent, don't show favoritism. [It's hard! I remember taking bike rides with my first-born daughter, and the other kids as they grew older wanting to get in on the fun. I discovered early on that I needed to find a "special activity" that I did with each one.]
- 2) Make sure what you offer God (whether time-talent-treasure) is from the heart. Always give your best to Him.

- 3) Carefully weigh strong feelings before acting on them. Consider the consequences. Especially watch how you speak to someone. You can kill with your tongue, you know. We see it all the time in Reality TV. The hurt can last a lifetime.
- 4) Don't let anger (or any other negative attitude) cause you to miss out on God's blessings. Latch onto attitudes that you know are pleasing to God.
- 5) Don't spurn God's grace. Look for His mark of mercy & grace in your life day-by-day. As Jeremiah wrote: *"The unfailing love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each day."* [Lam. 3:21-23]

## **Study Guide for Genesis 6-10**

### **Day 1 — Genesis 6**

1. Who are the sons of God? The godly line of Seth, while the daughters of men represent the ungodly line of Cain; not fallen angels.
2. Is there a limit to God's tolerance of sin? See 6:3.
3. Where is the first mention of grace found in the Bible? See 6:8.
4. Was Noah sinless? No, but his life was characterized by walking with God, and he was a bearer of God's word to the world. See 2 Peter 2:5.
5. "Man's sin is God's sorrow." What does this mean? See Ephesians 4:30. Is it possible that you are grieving the Holy Spirit right now? Are you bitter about something? Are you unwilling to forgive someone?
6. Re-read Genesis 6:8-9. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." List character traits found in Noah. Would you have found grace in the eyes of the Lord in Noah's day? Have you found grace in the eyes of the Lord today? On what do you base your relationship with the Lord?
7. Describe the physical features of the ark. The ark was 300 cubits (450') long; 75' wide and 45' high. It had three decks and many rooms. It was more like a barge than a ship. Its purpose was to be stable in high flood waters. It was made of "gopher" wood (probably cedar or cypress), and covered with pitch inside and out. There was one window for air-flow, and one door.

### **Day 2 — Genesis 7**

1. Where did all the water that caused the flood come from? There were two sources: fountains or springs of the great deep, and the windows or flood-gates of the waters of heaven.
2. The unbelievers of Noah's day not only lost their earthly lives, but they now are in a lost eternity. Is this true? See I Peter 3:19-20 & Hebrews 9:27.
3. Name Noah's sons.
4. What does the ark picture for us today? It is a picture of salvation. The ark took the storm of God's judgment, while Noah and his family were safe inside. Similarly, Christ took the storm of God's judgment on the cross, but those who have believed are safe in Christ.
5. Noah, in godly fear, prepared the ark. His primary concern was for his family. What is your primary concern? Are you living a life of faith as an example to your family?
6. Was the flood local or world-wide? See 7:19, 21, 23.

### **Day 3 — Genesis 8**

1. How long did the flood last before the ark came to rest? Five months.
2. What kinds of geologic activity would have taken place on the face of the earth during the flood? The waters receded continually. These great volumes of moving waters would rapidly cut the soft sediments that had been laid down during the flood. Deep canyons like the Grand Canyon in Arizona would not take millions of years to carve, but would have been carved in a relatively short time.
3. Would Mt. Everest and the Himalayan mountains have existed before the flood? No. There would have been a lot of mountain moving going on all over the earth in the post-flood years as a result of the flood.
4. What does it mean, “God remembered Noah?” Had God forgotten Noah? It means that God intervened and acted on Noah’s behalf. God also remembered Hannah (1 Samuel 1:11), and God remembered the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42). How did God remember (intervene and act on behalf of) Noah, Hannah, and the thief on the cross? How has God remembered you?
5. Regarding how God intervened and acted on behalf of Noah: God made a wind, the waters subsided, the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rains were restrained. Then God had the ark rest on a level area in the mountains of Ararat.
6. What did Noah do as soon as he came out of the ark? He built an altar and worshipped the Lord with burnt offerings.
7. What is the Noachic Covenant? See chapters 8 & 9. God promised that as long as earth’s history continued, there would never again be a world-wide catastrophe such as the flood of Noah’s day. The Noachic Covenant was made with Noah and his sons and their descendants. In other words, for all mankind, for all nations, for all time. Therefore, the Noachic Covenant is still in existence today.

#### **Day 4 — Genesis 9**

1. What was the greatest catastrophe this world has ever seen? The world wide flood of Noah’s day, described in Genesis 6-8.
2. Was the flood a local flood confined to the Mesopotamian Valley, or was it a world-wide flood? It was a world-wide flood. See 2 Peter 3:3-6.
3. What guarantee do we have that God will never again destroy earth with a world-wide flood? God said that he would not do so. His word is a guarantee. See Genesis 9:15. The rainbow is the sign that God gave to confirm this covenant. See Genesis 9:12.
4. Explain the significance of the “bow” in rainbow. The Hebrew word for “bow” is the same word that is used for a bow used to shoot arrows in battle. When peace covenants and peace treaties were made in ancient days, the warrior would put away or hang up his battle bow as symbolic that there was now peace. God said, “I set my bow in the cloud.”
5. How did Noah’s three sons react to Noah’s drunkenness and nakedness? Ham, Noah’s youngest son, saw his father’s nakedness and mocked him. Shem and Japheth refused to look at him and covered him.
6. How did Noah show moral impropriety? How did Ham show moral impropriety? Noah showed moral impropriety when he got drunk and exposed himself. Ham showed moral impropriety when he mocked his father, dishonoring him.
7. Where does moral integrity begin? It begins at home, and is later seen in interaction with others. Both Noah and Ham were believers, but in one instance they both exhibited moral impropriety. As a godly person, how can you be an example of moral integrity? Start with your family, then move out to others.
8. You are never immune to sin in this lifetime. How can you keep up your guard? See 1 Peter 5:8-9. There are lots of biblical examples of godly people who let down their guard. Walk in the Spirit, and depend on the Lord’s em-powering or enabling.

## **Day 5 — Genesis 10**

1. Why is Genesis 10 an important chapter in the Bible? It bridges the gap between Noah and Abraham. Here we learn how all people and nations descended from the three sons of Noah. . .how and where the different nations spread out after the flood and after the Tower of Babel.

2. Re-read Genesis 10:32. How were the nations divided after the flood? From the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations. The Indo-European nations descended from Japheth. The descendants of Ham spread southwest into Canaan and Egypt and other parts of Africa. The descendants of Shem continued to possess the Mesopotamian Valley and the surrounding areas.

3. To what does Genesis 10:25 refer? The Tower of Babel.

4. How did the races come about? The genetic variation seen in the people around the world today could be the result of spreading out after the tower of Babel. The gene pool of Noah's three sons and their wives consisted of all that was necessary for the so-called racial differences to emerge. Another possibility is that a few mutations of the genetic pool after the flood led to different racial features. In spite of some minor genetic differences, we are all one people, so racism is foreign to the Bible. See Acts 17:26.

5. The prevailing thought among social scientists today is that monotheism is a late development in human evolution. They say that early man was an animist, worshiping the spirits in the objects of nature. Then, they say, man moved up to polytheism, worshipping many gods. Finally, they say, man arrived at monotheism. The Bible teaches just the opposite.