

Cain's Sin (Gen 4:1-15)

Introduction

A question – Under what conditions does sin find us most exposed to its assault?
While many responses could be given, today's passage offers one divine insight.

A. The Birth of Cain and Able (4:1-2).

B. The offerings of the brothers and God's response (4:3-5).

1. What type of offering were these?

- a. There is no evidence within the text to justify the claim that Able's was a sacrifice for sin, a blood offering. Similarly, evidence is lacking that the animal slain to provide clothing for Adam and Eve is lacking (Gen 3:21).
- b. Both simply brought of their produce, the thing that they dealt with, as an expression of their gratitude. The Hebrew (4503) means "gift, tribute, offering" (BDB).

2. What was God's response? "He had no regard" (NASV) for Cain's offering.

- a. Hebrew "Gaze (steadily, with interest, etc.)... look for, aim at" (BDB) Leupold in his commentary writes that with this construction the Hebrew means "regard with favour".
 - b. Why did God accept the one offering but reject the other. The reason is provided by the Hebrew writer- 1) Able's was offered "by faith... through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts..." (11:4). The point here is not that God preferred animals to the fruit of the ground but the contrasting attitudes of the brothers' hearts.
 - 1) Attention is not centred upon the nature of obedience i.e. he heard and obeyed (Rom 10:17) but rather God saw something in Able's heart which was absent in Cain's.
 - 2) As opposed to faith, Cain's actions were moved by formalism; he would worship God but in the way he wanted, his attitude being illustrated in the ongoing narrative.
3. Cain became "very angry and his countenance fell" (5).

C. God's warning (4:6-7).

1. The warning consisted of three parts.

- a. The first was calculated to arouse Cain to the realisation that there was something very wrong in his conduct (6). The one who was justified in becoming angry was God because of Cain's conduct!
- b. The second was designed to show that all was not lost (7a).
- c. The third to warn Cain of his perilous situation (7b). If he doesn't do well...
 - 1) Sin is depicted as a wild monster poised to leap in through the door of opportunity that Cain's conduct had created.
 - 2) Despite sin's ferocity, Cain's responsibility was to "rule over it."
 - 3) There is never room for the excuse, "I couldn't help it!"

2. What Cain should have done – repent but instead we have the sorry story that follows.

D. The murder of Able and God's punishment (4:8-12)

1. He did not heed divine counsel but rather failed to repent, allowed the anger to consume his thinking and transferred the object of that anger to Able (cf. 1 Jn 3:11-12.)

a. How did this happen?

- 1) Was it a deliberate and planned act, treacherously executed as the context indicates or a crime conceived in the moment and immediately carried out which the narrative seems to imply?
- 2) The Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate add "Let us go out to the field."

2. God's question (9).

- a. It both struck the conscience of Cain taking his mind back to the murder scene whilst at the same time giving a further opportunity to repent.
- b. Nonetheless, Cain was hardened in his defiance, adding falsehood and insolence to murder in his reply.

3. The punishment (10-12).

- a. Murder cannot go unpunished; the sentence pronounced stressed the preciousness of human life and the enormity of the sin of murder (11).
- b. The necessity for punishment is seen by the fact that the curse laid upon Cain is in one sense retributive reinforcing the need for justice. The earth is pictured as opening its mouth to receive Able's blood and then acting to deliver retribution which is seen in two ways:
 - 1) The withdrawal of the earth's fertility.
 - 2) No longer able to enjoy the peace and productivity of a settled existence, he would be "a fugitive and vagabond (05110) upon the earth."
 - 3) 5110: "Move to and fro, wander, flutter, shew grief."

E. Cain's despair at God's decree (4:13-15).

1. Cain shrinks from the prospect of such a future. To be driven from the land where the rest of the human family to regions unknown and from the presence of the Lord was more than he could bear (13-14).
2. God's mercy (15). Note that "mark" is better translated "sign". As the rainbow was of God's covenant with man (Gen).

Points to be remembered

1. It is when we don't do well that sin, pictured as a vicious monster, is ready to pounce.
2. The ballooning character of sin. From formalistic worship Cain went on to murder, deceit, and insolence to his maker.
3. The mercy of God. Yet God was willing to show Cain mercy. He was protected from the vengeance of his fellow man and the opportunity for forgiveness remained available should he repent (Gen 4:7).