



## Genesis - Chapter Four

### I. Genesis 1:1-11:26 - Primeval History (continues)

#### 1.b Genesis 2:4b-4:26 - Earth's First People (continues/concludes)

##### Summary of Chapter Four

The chapter has two main story lines. The first tells of Adam and Eve producing their first two sons, which resulted in the first account of murder in the bible and it is a sad tale of fratricide, where Cain kills his righteous sibling Abel. The sole reason for this event is that God favoured the offering given by Abel above that of Cain's and the latter became jealous and angry. God does not allow Abel's death to go un-avenged but does not take Cain's physical life. Instead, his punishment is to spend the rest of his days separate from God and wandering through the land with his own descendants.

The second part of the chapter provides an account of the descendants of Cain. The first generations seemed honourable enough, dwelling it seems in a city, keeping livestock, producing useful tools and musical instruments. However, in the fifth generation Lamech is introduced, who is reported as moving away from monogamy and, much worse, boasting that he had killed a man for no good reason. The effects of the original sin were starting surface already.

Yet there was hope for Adam and Eve had another son Seth, who would produce a line of descendants who were far more honourable and the chapter concludes with the comment that the people had started to call upon God.

#### 1.b.iii Genesis 4:1-26 - Adam and Eve's Sons

This chapter shows mankind plunging further into sin, with Cain murdering his brother and his descendant Lamech taking indiscriminate revenge. Although they have been expelled from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are enabled by God to have two sons. With them rests the hope of an offspring who will overcome the

serpent. When Cain callously murders his righteous brother Abel, however, evil seems to triumph. Any hope that Cain's descendants will reverse this trend appears remote when Lamech boasts of killing a man simply for striking him. Against this background the brief announcement of Seth's birth to replace Abel offers fresh hope.

### 1.b.iii.1. Genesis 4:1-16 - Cain Murders Abel

Adam and Eve are initially blessed with two sons, both of whom become farmers. Cain produces crops while his younger brother keeps livestock. Both of them make offerings to God but Abel's is accepted because it was from his firstborn. This angered Cain who, despite wise counsel from God, rose up and killed his brother.

God punished Cain by making him a wanderer on the earth, excluded from the presence of God and his parents. The earth was cursed because of his brother's blood and Cain would reap nothing from it. Yet God offers him protection from being harmed by others, for if they were to do so then their own punishment would be sevenfold.

<sup>1</sup> Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have produced a man with the help of the LORD.'

#### Genesis 4:1

Eve's reference to the help of the LORD when Cain is born conveys a sense of optimism. The serpent may yet be overthrown by the offspring of the woman. This will not be Cain or his offspring, of course, for no one descends from him, although there would be many more like him: <<*Woe to them! For they go the way of Cain, and abandon themselves to Balaam's error for the sake of gain, and perish in Korah's rebellion*>> (Jude 11).

<sup>2</sup> Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, <sup>4</sup> and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

#### Genesis 4:2-5

Although Cain and Abel have contrasting occupations and present different types of offerings to God, the present episode is not designed to elevate herdsmen over farmers, or animal offerings over plant offerings. One way to explain why the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but not for Cain, is to posit that Abel's offering, being of the firstlings of his flock, is a more costly offering, expressing

greater devotion: <<*You have not brought me your sheep for burnt-offerings, or honoured me with your sacrifices*>> (Isaiah 43:23a). Another way to explain the difference is first to observe that both offerings are recognisable parts of the later Levitical system: for Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground, as confirmed in Deuteronomy 26:2 is an offering expressing consecration, and for Abel's offering of the firstlings of his flock, as confirmed in Deuteronomy 15:19-23, are a kind of peace offering, a meal in God's presence. However, at no point does the Bible suggest that offerings work automatically, as if the worshipper's faith and contrition did not matter; and Cain's fundamentally bad heart can be seen in his resentment toward his brother and in his uncooperative answers to God in the rest of the passage. Several NT texts derive legitimate inferences from this narrative, namely, that Cain demonstrated an evil heart by his evil deeds, while Abel demonstrated a pious heart by his righteous deeds, which John gives as a warning to the readers of his letter: <<*We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous*>> (1 John 3:12); and that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and was commended as righteous for that reason: <<*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks*>> (Hebrews 11:4).

It should also be noted that Abel offered a sacrifice of blood and, in doing so, he represents not only a shepherd but also a priest.

So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. There are some who seem to associate sin with an enjoyable life but here the opposite can be seen as true for Cain's condition is not a picture of happiness and joy! Charles Spurgeon wrote: 'There are many ungodly people still in the world who are not happy in the condition in which they find themselves. The present does not content them, and they have no future from which to borrow the light of hope. The service of sin is hard to them, and yet they do not quit it for the service of the Lord, They are in danger of having two hells - one in this life and another in the world to come.'

<sup>6</sup> The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?' <sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.'

#### Genesis 4:6-7

Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? This could either a straight forward question or a challenge to Cain for his poor attitude towards God, that mirrors a similar response to God's grace for Nineveh in later generations: <<*And the LORD said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'*>> (Jonah 4:4).

**If you do well, will you not be accepted?** The Lord's words challenge Cain to do better. He still has the possibility of turning, evidently with God's help, to please God. To succeed in doing this, however, he must overcome the domination of sin, presented here as a wild beast seeking to devour Cain. The same applies to everyone: <<*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*>> (Romans 3:23). Therefore, everyone must guard against the truth of God's warning: sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it. Yet, at the same time, the message is clear. Those who repent and turn to Jesus for redemption will be equally as welcome as the next. Cain could still have been equally accepted as was Abel, if only he had repented of his crime and sought to live his life to God from that moment on.

<sup>8</sup> Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let us go out to the field.' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

#### Genesis 4:8

Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. The brevity of the report of Abel's murder underlines the coldness of Cain's action. Jealousy, probably coupled with anger at God, causes him to slay his own brother without pity. The heinousness of this spiteful murder reveals that sin has mastered Cain.

Even in the depths of one of the worst kinds of sin, God reaches out with his love, grace and mercy. It seems he is always willing to give people the time and space they need to come to the right decision, for: <<*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance*>> (2 Peter 3:9).

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?'

#### Genesis 4:9

Am I my brother's keeper? When the Lord confronts Cain with his crime, his cold hearted nature causes him to deny any knowledge about his brother. Cain shows no sign of remorse nor does he even acknowledge his crime. He seems also to freely speak impudently rather than reverently in a direct conversation with God, showing just how far his heart was from his creator.

The cool impudence of Cain is an indication of the state of heart which led up to his murdering his brother; and it is also a part of the result of his having committed that terrible crime. He would not have proceeded to the cruel deed of bloodshed if he had first not cast off the fear of God and been ready to defy his maker.

For much of history man has become used to violent deaths, whether by natural disasters, through war or even individual acts. Yet Cain had no such knowledge of what death was like, let alone the violent death his actions brought upon the earth. Whether this crime was premeditated or not does not matter. He should have found the outcome abhorrent and acknowledged his wrongdoing to God. He did not making the sin far worse.

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD said, 'What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! <sup>11</sup> And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.'

### Genesis 4:10-12

What have you done? God, of course, knows what Cain has done. He almost certainly knew of it long before creation itself. But did Cain really know. In this early world Cain had no law enforcement agency to concern himself with. He might have to face his parents if they ever determined what he had done but how would they have punished their first born son? Also, his heart was against God and he clearly felt no fear before him over his crime.

God, however, is just and Cain's punishment is linked to his crime. He will no longer be able to cultivate the soil because his brother's blood cries out to God from the ground and God would later declare: *<<For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life>>* (Genesis 9:5), as well as: *<<You shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and no expiation can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it>>* (Numbers 35:33). There may have been no human witness to the crime yet this one had a witness that spoke out not just at the time but continues to cry out in all ages. Cain's sentence adds to the alienation between man and the ground that has already been introduced in 3:17-18. Underlying these punishments is a principle that recurs throughout Scripture: human sin has a bearing on the fertility of the earth. Whereas God intended humanity to enjoy the earth's bounty, sin distances people not only from God himself but also from nature; refer to the comments on 3:17-19. Genesis 4:10 is the likely background for the NT's use of the phrase 'the blood of Abel' as the paradigm for an innocent victim crying for justice: *<<Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of*

*Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar*>> (Matthew 23:35), which is recorded also in Luke 11:51, as well as: <<*and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel*>> (Hebrews 12:24).

When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength. Until then Cain had earned his living farming the ground. Now his efforts would be fruitless and he would have to wander around trying to scrape a living. The passage also implies that, no matter what he tries to achieve in life, he will never know success or inner peace.

<sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear!  
<sup>14</sup> Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.’ <sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to him, ‘Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.’ And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.  
<sup>16</sup> Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

#### Genesis 4:13-16

Cain is immediately conscious of the severity of his punishment. He is to be alienated from both the ground and God. While this may seem like a very lenient sentence, it meant that Cain would become a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth; alienated from the rest of human society other than his wife and the children she would bear him, Cain fears that others will have such a dread of him that anyone finding him may kill him. The reader is not told who those others might be. By way of reassuring Cain, the Lord states that a sevenfold vengeance will come on anyone who would kill him.

The LORD put a mark on Cain. In spite of much scholarly speculation, the precise nature of the mark is uncertain. It must have been something visible, but that is all that can be said. Like his parents, who were sent out of the garden, Cain is forced to move away from the presence of the LORD, and Moses seems to be implying that this is true of Cain’s offspring as well, since vv.17-24 lack any mention of God. This eventually happened during the flood as well as to all the Israelite people, although they were all descendants of Cain’s youngest brother Seth: <<*Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone*>> (2 Kings 17:18), <<*And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim*>> (Jeremiah 7:15).

During one of the worst periods of British history, men who professed to be Christians, took black African slaves to the New World, where they were treated like sub-humans. One of the excuses they gave was that black skin was the mark of Cain. However, this could never be the case because all of Cain's descendants were destroyed in the flood. They clearly ignored the Gospel message when treating their African brothers in this way: <<Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these'>> (Mark 12:29-31), and: <<There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus>> (Galatians 3:28).

Presumably Cain moves farther to the east of Eden. Cain settles in a region that is appropriately known as the land of Nod, the location of which remains unknown, and which in Hebrew means 'wandering.'

#### 1.b.iii.2. Genesis 4:17-26 - Beginnings of Civilisation

These verses provide selective information about Cain's descendants, concluding with a description of Lamech (v.19), who boasts of having taken revenge 'seventy-sevenfold' by killing a man who wounded him. Seven generations on from Cain, Lamech resembles his ancestor, but seems to be worse.

<sup>17</sup> Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch.

#### Genesis 4:17

Cain knew his wife. No explanation is given as to the origin of Cain's wife. As is often the case in Genesis, the limited and selective nature of the account leaves the reader with unanswered questions. Presumably, Cain married one of his sisters, a reasonable assumption, since the whole human race descends from Adam and Eve, and the laws later forbidding this practice, such as in Leviticus 18:9, would not have been relevant at this stage; as confirmed in Genesis 5:4.

He built a city. The precise identity of the city-builder is open to debate. While Cain would appear to be the builder on the basis that he named it after his son Enoch, the Hebrew text could also be taken as indicating that Enoch was the builder. Although the opening two chapters make no specific mention of any city, the early readers of Genesis would have automatically assumed that the instruction to fill the earth implies that humanity would establish communities in villages, towns and cities around and then spreading out from Eden. While this was

part of God's design for the earth, Genesis observes that some people engage in city building without any reference to God, refer especially to 11:1-9.

<sup>18</sup> To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. <sup>19</sup> Lamech took two wives; the name of one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. <sup>20</sup> Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock. <sup>21</sup> His brother's name was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe. <sup>22</sup> Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

### Genesis 4:18-22

Five generations after Cain, Lamech is born. His immediate descendants are associated with animal breeding, music and metalwork, all of which are noteworthy cultural and technological developments. It is specifically referenced that Lamech took two wives, the first case of a polygamist marriage in the bible. Although it has not been recorded to this point that such marriages were forbidden by God, it was made clear that his intention was for one man and one woman to be together, which Jesus confirms: <<*“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate*>> (Mark 10:7-9). Yet there are many instances of key leaders having several wives including the father of the Hebrew nation Jacob and the great man of God, King David.

Whereas Abel is linked to sheep (v.2), the herds of Jabal also include cattle, donkeys, and possibly camels.

Pre-flood genealogies are well attested in the ancient Near East, in particular, in Mesopotamian texts. The Sumerian King List records lists of monarchs who ruled the land before the 'Great Deluge.' The founding of cities was one of the primary industries of these pre-flood rulers. Such parallels confirm the historicity of the biblical pre-flood account.

<sup>23</sup> Lamech said to his wives:  
'Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:  
I have killed a man for wounding me,  
a young man for striking me.

<sup>24</sup> If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.'

#### Genesis 4:23-24

The new developments of vv.20-22 are overshadowed by Lamech's boast of having killed a man for wounding or striking him. Lamech's response is out of proportion to the injury, showing his inordinate vengefulness. This, like his bigamy (v.19), reveals his depravity. His behaviour reveals that the line of Cain is dominated by those who have no regard for the lives of others or respect for the principle of monogamy that 2:23-24 endorses. Later laws in the Pentateuch insist on proportional punishment: in the case of murder, a maximum of life for life: <<*If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe*>> (Exodus 21:23-25).

If Cain is avenged. Had his ancestor Cain been killed by someone seeking human justice for the death of Abel then God had promised to deal with such a person for: <<*A jealous and avenging God is the LORD, the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies*>> (Nahum 1:2). God would make final judgement against Cain at the appropriate time.

Sevenfold, seventy-sevenfold. Lamech is boasting that his vengeful passion makes him safer than Cain (v.15), who had protection only from God. Seventy-sevenfold is a picturesque statement for extravagant excess, as confirmed in a discussion between Peter and Jesus on forgiveness: <<*Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times*>> (Matthew 18:22). However, the two statements are at the opposite ends of the grace spectrum.

<sup>25</sup> Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for she said, 'God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, because Cain killed him.'<sup>26</sup> To Seth also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke the name of the LORD.

#### Genesis 4:25-26

The final verses of this section suddenly jump back to Adam and Eve in order to report the birth of their third son, Seth. Eve's remark, God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, is clearly an allusion back to the offspring of the woman in 3:15. The potential of Seth's birth is immediately underlined by the observation: At that time people began to invoke the name of the LORD, i.e. to seek him in public worship. Details are not given, but the implication may be that this calling on the Lord's name began in Adam's own family circle.