

Unit I: The Genesis of Altars and Sacrifices

Gift Giving that Matters

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 20:45–21:4

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 4:1–25

PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 4:1–16

KEY VERSES

The LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? (Genesis 4:6–7a, KJV)

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The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?” (Genesis 4:6–7a, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Evaluate God’s choice of Abel’s sacrificial gift over Cain’s gift.
- Empathize with Cain’s anger that his gift was rejected.
- Design a practice of giving that deepens your connection of giving with worship.

*Key Terms

Brother (verse 11)—Hebrew: *ach* (awkh): brethren; brotherhood; relative; fellow.

Countenance (verse 5)—Hebrew: *panim* or *paneh* (paw-neem’): “face” (NIV); appearance; face (surface) of ground; one’s expression.

Cries Out (verse 10)—Hebrew: *tsaaq* (tsaw-ak’): cries; calls; appeals to; cries aloud; “crieth” (KJV).

Keeper (verse 9)—Hebrew: *shamar* (shaw-mar’): one who keeps, watches, preserves (another); bodyguard.

Offering (verse 3)—Hebrew: *minchah* (min-khaw’): a gift, tribute; sacrifice; present.

Sin (verse 7)—Hebrew: *chatta’ah* (khat-taw-aw’): a sinful thing; an offense; to miss the mark.

Tiller (verse 2)—Hebrew: *abad* (aw-bad’): worker; laborer; slave; “worked” (NIV).

***Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2**



The Biblical Context

The title “Genesis” originates from the Greek word meaning “beginning,” and was taken from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Genesis’ Hebrew title is *Bereshith*, meaning “in the beginning” or “head.” Authorship is traditionally attributed to Moses, Israel’s esteemed lawgiver and deliverer whom God used to lead them from Egyptian bondage and through their wilderness wanderings. Given the difficulty in knowing Moses’ exact lifetime, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint when it was written. Two distinct themes frame Genesis’ content: primeval history (see Genesis 1–11) and patriarchal history (see Genesis 12–50). Primeval history reveals the universe’s origin and humankind’s “first” experiences and institutions, while patriarchal history explains how the nation of Israel came into existence. Genesis 1–4 is pivotal in establishing God’s purposes and how they unfold throughout the rest of this book of beginnings. Chapter 4, this lesson’s immediate context, reveals the beginning of history after the Fall separated humanity from God and the consequences of their sin: envy, rebellion, arrogance, and the first premeditated murder when Cain killed his brother Abel.

Introduction

Universally, gift giving is a significant gesture in maintaining mutual social relationships. However, the foundational purposes are the same: celebrating special occasions, showing appreciation for assistance, and expressing one’s love and affection in interpersonal relationships. Gift giving is not restricted to our social lives but is also a vital part of our relationship with God. When we give back to God, we acknowledge Him as the sole owner of everything, demonstrate complete trust in Him, and express God-centered worship and our desire to honor Him for who He is and His gracious gifts to us. However, the essential question becomes how or when our gifts please Him. The answer depends on the condition and motive of our hearts. Our gifts do not impress God. He does not need them. What moves Him to appreciate and accept our gifts is whether or not they are offered because of our sincere love for and devotion to Him. Consequently, gift giving that matters to God is a matter of the heart. A tragic but significant example of this biblical truth is the account of Cain and Abel’s sacrificial gifts to Him in Genesis 4.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A Rejected Gift (Genesis 4:1-7)

KJV

AND ADAM knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.

4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?

7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

NIV

ADAM MADE love to his wife **Eve**, and she became pregnant and gave birth to **Cain**. She said, “With the help of the **LORD** I have brought forth a man.”

2 Later she gave birth to his brother **Abel**. Now **Abel** kept flocks, and **Cain** worked the soil.

3 In the course of time **Cain** brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the **LORD**.

4 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,

5 but on **Cain** and his offering he did not look with favor. So **Cain** was very angry, and his face was downcast.

6 Then the **LORD** said to **Cain**, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?

7 “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Genesis 4 details the spread of sin and a godless society after Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve conceived and gave birth to a son named Cain (**verse 1**). The name *Cain* is derived from the Hebrew *qa'yin*, meaning “obtained” or “gotten.” Thus, Eve acknowledged Cain's birth as a gift from God. Later, Eve gave birth to a second son and named him Abel, meaning “vanity,” “breath,” or “vapor” (**verse 2**). The narrative moves forward to these brothers' occupations, setting the stage for their contrasting destinies. Abel became a shepherd, and Cain became a farmer—both respectable and necessary professions. **Verses 3-5** suggest that Cain and Abel had a relationship with God, attested by their bringing offerings to Him as an act of worship. Cain's offering was the fruit of the ground, and Abel's was the fat portions from a firstborn lamb from his flock. Subsequently, God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's. The Scripture is silent regarding whether God had prescribed the type of offering or gift to be brought to Him in worship. Therefore, no identifiable reason for God's response to either of these offerings is given.

Most likely, God rejected Cain's offering because of his insincere motive and the spiritual condition of his heart, which is affirmed by his angry response and disposition after its rejection (see 1 John 3:12). Any gift giving that matters to God must always reflect that an inner transformation has occurred and continues in the worshipper's life. In Cain's case, God allowed

him the opportunity to explain why he responded as he did because his gift was rejected (**verse 6**). The underlying purpose of God's questioning Cain was to get Cain to acknowledge and own the cause of his ungodly response, offer him an opportunity to redeem himself, and issue a warning if he refused (**verse 7**).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How would you explain to a prospective worshipper that the spiritual condition of his or her heart is more important to God than the value of any offering that he or she brings?

A Forfeited Opportunity (Genesis 4:8-16)

KJV

8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

9 And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

13 And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

14 Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

15 And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

16 And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

NIV

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

10 The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

11 “Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.

12 “When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

13 Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear.

14 “Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

15 But the LORD said to him, “Not so; 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.

16 So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

God warned Cain that his refusal to “do right”—that is, release the anger he harbored against his brother—would result in losing the battle against sin. Regrettably, despite God’s display of grace, Cain allowed sin to win. Cain talked Abel into going with him to an unidentified field, attacked him maliciously, and killed him, the first recorded murder in the Bible (**verse 8**). Cain ignored and rejected God’s warning against nursing his anger and chose to follow the way of sin, marking a significant escalation of humanity’s sinfulness after his parents’ original sin. God confronted Cain and questioned him about his brother Abel’s whereabouts, similar to His confrontation with their parents after their sin (**verse 9**). Arrogantly, Cain highlighted his denial of any wrongdoing by lying about his knowledge of where Abel was and having any responsibility for him. God’s question was not for information but an opportunity for Cain to confess his sin. But Cain forfeited another chance to repent.

In **verses 10-12**, God reveals that He already knew what Cain had done. God told Cain that Abel’s blood cried out from the ground where it was spilled. God then cursed Cain to a life of wandering, unfruitfulness, and punishment that mirrored that of Cain’s father’s. God drove Cain away from his family and His presence, and forced him to encounter continuous difficulty in securing life’s basic necessities. However, even amid God’s judgment, Cain showed no remorse and made no apologies for killing his brother. Instead, he complained that his punishment was too severe, listed all that he was about to lose, and expressed his fear of being killed by others in retribution for his crime (**verses 13-14**). Although we are not told who those killers might be, some speculate that by this time, Adam and Eve had other descendants populating the earth. Yet again, God responded to Cain with great mercy and grace by promising to take sevenfold vengeance on anyone who killed him (**verse 15**). God solidified this promise by marking Cain with an unspecified sign. Commentators are divided regarding what this mark was, but the message is clear—Cain the murderer was under divine protection. Oh, the depths of God’s grace and mercy! Interestingly, **verse 16** informs us that Cain remained arrogant and unrepentant. He defied his punishment by going to the land of Nod east of Eden and building a city that became the seat of humanity’s sinful depravity.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can believers guard their hearts and prevent sinking to Cain's level?

A Closing Thought

Although God's reason for accepting Abel's offering and rejecting Cain's is not revealed in the printed Scripture passage, it is elsewhere in Scripture; it was because Abel's heart was right with God (see Hebrews 11:4). The message to believers is that God evaluates the hearts of those who approach Him in worship (see 1 Samuel 16:7-8; Psalm 51:16-17; Proverbs 21:2; Matthew 15:8). Gift giving that matters to Him is more about a *pure* heart than a *priceless* gift.

Your Life

God's initial response to Cain—urging him to do right so that his gift of worship would be acceptable—challenges us to focus on preparing our hearts to worship God in spirit and in truth. Therefore, before we show up for communal worship, we must prioritize focusing on who God is more so than what He does, so that we approach Him with contrite hearts totally dedicated to Him.

Your World!

Casualness in communal worship has become more of a norm than an exception. The spiritual danger in this attitude is worshippers' being present with their hearts being far away from God. Hence, it is vital that despite "come as you are," believers who desire to give the gift of worship that matters to God prepare their hearts before entering His presence. They do this by acknowledging any sin, confessing it, seeking His forgiveness, and submitting to the Holy Spirit's transformative presence and power in their lives.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, we acknowledge our propensity to sin if we fail to seek the Holy Spirit's power to help us resist and master sin's desire to control us. Therefore, we commit to presenting ourselves as living sacrifices daily so that we can approach You with acceptable worship. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week, we explore the proper response to deliverance from harrowing experiences—worship. Read Genesis 8:13-22; 9:11-13.