

The First Dysfunctional Family

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Cain and Abel were, presumably, the first 2 sons born to Adam and Eve. Throughout the Old Testament are stories of brothers at odds: Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau are the pairs that come immediately to mind. In each case, it's the younger of the two who has the heart for God, and the older who eschews any spiritual blessing in favor of self-centered, worldly pursuits.

When Eve gave birth to Cain, she seemed to think that he was the son of whom God spoke when He issued the prophecy in Genesis 3:15. Maybe Eve favored Cain and taught him about the prophecy, which fostered a sense of entitlement in Cain. Who knows, but for whatever reason, Cain sure seemed to harbor resentment, anger and bitterness common to those of us who crave the easy life, yet suffer the life we have — you know, the one that, whether we wish to accept the truth or not, we have made for ourselves.

But, it's so much easier to blame someone else!

Abel (which means 'frail') grew to be a shepherd, while Cain became a farmer. Remember that God cursed the ground so that production of food would be difficult.

I can just picture Cain's resentment growing against God with every push of his plough. Apparently the ceremony of sacrificial offering was in place, because the Bible tells us that the brothers were going to present their offerings to God. Abel, with a heart for God, presented the choicest of the firstborn of his flock, while Cain offered God his leftovers.

This is particularly convicting to me. How often do I simply offer God my leftovers; leftover money, leftover time, leftover energy?

There's a wonderful and hilarious story in 1Kings 18:16-45 in which we see that the fire to burn the offerings comes from the sky, sent by the Lord. I can picture a great bolt of lightning burning up Abel's offering, while Cain's is left untouched.

What was the mind of Cain? Had he toiled, day in and day out, blaming his mom and dad for being banished from the paradise Garden of Eden? Did he blame God, maybe whining that the punishment was too severe? Farming is hard work! Why did God have to make life so hard? It seems that the rejection of his offering was the last straw.

Can you hear it? This is the voice of all the people who despise God by blaming him for the suffering on earth, or who simply deny the existence of God because of all the suffering, as though we are wiser than our Creator.

God knows what's on Cain's heart and goes to Cain to speak with him. God asks why he is so sad, why his face is downcast. Then he tells Cain, '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 master it.' It's your choice, Cain. Do the right thing.

Instead, Cain gives in to his anger, his pride, his self-pity; he lures Abel out to the field and kills him.

We see Cain's further insolence when God comes looking for him, offering a chance for confession and forgiveness. Cain's response to God's question, 'Where is your brother, Abel,' is 'I don't know, am I my brother's keeper?' Whoa! That attitude would earn a BIG TIME OUT for my boys!

And a BIG TIME OUT is what Cain receives. Cursed again and banished again, Cain, like his parents, still can't bring himself to confess or beg forgiveness. He instead complains to God that his punishment is more than he can bear. He's afraid that he will be killed. So God protects his life and sends him away, to the Land of Nod, east of Eden.

I mentioned before that I subscribe to the belief that Adam and Eve were not literally the first 2 human beings on the earth, but rather, were the first 2 in the line of Christ. I'm not saying that Cain didn't marry his sister – maybe he did. It's also possible that the people Cain was afraid of were his own brothers and sisters who might seek to avenge Abel's death. The Bible doesn't explain, so I guess it's not important to God's message.

Do the right thing.

Scripture from NIV:

“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 master it.” Genesis 4:7

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” – Isaiah 55:8-9

“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith, he still speaks, even though he is dead.” Hebrews 11:4

“But King David replied to Araunah, ‘No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing.’ So David paid Araunah six hundred shekels of gold for the site. David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He called on the Lord, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering.” 1 Chronicles 21:24-25