

GENESIS CHAPTER 4

Verse 1

"knew" - "yada"-used in many senses: to know both by experience and intellectually. Context here is in reference to connubial intercourse. The modesty of the language is especially suited to the veiled manner of the text.

"his wife" This specific is added to guard against any notion of promiscuity on the part of the man or women.

"Cain" - "gayin"-spear, cp 2Sam. 21:16. Cain was probably so named because Eve imagined that he was that promised seed who was to smite the serpent's head. Instead, he smote his brother.

"I have gotten a man from the LORD" Every word of this sentence is difficult: the verb "qana" (get, acquire, gained) is just as unusual for the birth of a child as is the use of "iysh" (man) for a new born boy. The rest of the sentence, "eth Yehovah" has also provoked quite a problem for translators ignorant of the meaning of the Yahweh name. (see notes Gen. 2:4,5) A direct translation of the Hebrew is: I have gotten a man, THE Yahweh." (see notes, Gen. 1:1 re the Hebrew particle "eth") Rotherham translates:
Now \\ the man \\ having come to know Eve his wife, -- she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a Man, even Yahweh!" Obviously Eve anticipated that Cain was to be the promised seed that would crush the serpent's head. Eve had not remained in her sin but had come to repentance and a knowledge of God's promise of redemption, and here shows her faith. (See Gen. 3:15,20,22 showing that Adam and Eve were well aware of the promise of redemption.)

Verse 2

"And she again bare his brother" The fact that it is not again recorded that Adam knew his wife and she conceived does not in any way indicate, as has been frequently thought, that Cain and Abel were twins. (the following examples mention conception without the suggestion of twin births: 4:20,22,25; 5:4; 22:20-24; 25:2; 30:10)

"Abel" - "habel"= emptiness, vanity, transitory. The very meaning of this name, in contrast to that of Cain, is a strong indication that they were not twins. Certainly here the parent's philosophy had changed, and somehow the vanity of human existence had impressed itself upon them. It may be due to the fact that the tree of life was barred to access or that with the birth of Abel, our first parents realized that Cain may not be the one to bruise the serpent's head.

"bare" - 3205 "yalad" = to bear young. (i.e. Gen. 4:20,22,25)

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Verse 3

"offering" 4503 "minchad" - to apportion, bestow, a donation. This word is used in its broadest sense, covering any type of gift.

"fruit of the ground" 6529 "periy" - fruit. 127 "adamah" - redness, from the Hebrew root "adam". (see Gen. 1:26) Just as to what is the exact nature of this offering from the ground, we are not told. It appears that there was nothing wrong with the offering itself, only that under the circumstances, that of Abel's was more excellent, (cp Heb. 11:4 - "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain...") but verse 5 says that God didn't have respect for Cain's offering. The offering is not described as first fruits or as having any special quality other than being from the ground. The answer may well be that if our attitude isn't right, the offering will not be either. (see notes, v.5)

Verse 4

"And Abel, he also brought" - Hebrews 11:4 states that this was done by faith - which is the by-product of hearing the word of God, (Rom.10:17) and the essential ingredient of justification. (Rm.3:28)

"firstlings of his flock, and of their fat" Obviously here is the distinguishing feature of Abel's offering. Under the Mosaic system, both the first born and the fat are noted to be God's portion. (Exo.13:2; Num. 18:15; Lev. 3:16) There is no problem as to why God chose the "first born", but why the "fat" which is superfluous and unsightly. The reason is found in Lev. 1:8,9 in connection with the Burnt Offering. Here the order in which the animal was laid upon the altar is significant. Remember the Burnt Offering is symbolic of complete and utter dedication to God. (See 2 Chron. 7:1; 29:31-33; 1 Chron. 21:24; Exo. 29:25) First the head (intelligence, spirit) then the fat (inner man, soul) and last the complete physical body was laid on the altar to then be completely consumed. When this principle is applied to the spiritual man, as in Deu. 6:5, the intelligence is first given upon the Christ Altar, then the inner man, and then his body in complete service to God to be utterly consumed in dedication.

"And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering" The words "had respect" signify to look at with a keen earnest glance, to inspect. What God saw was a display of faith on the part of Abel. (See Heb. 11:4) To show Divine approval, probably the offering was consumed by fire upon the altar.

Verse 5

"But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." It is significant that God's displeasure is directed both against Cain

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and the offering itself. Note too, the order -- first against the person, then the offering. God first weighs the attitude of the individual, and then the offering itself. Both certainly are important, but with the right attitude, the content of the offering will naturally follow. If a person is anxious to please the Almighty, God will open the way. We have the Bible to tell us; in cases like Cornelius, God provides a way. (Acts 10:31)

"And Cain was very wroth" - "wayyichar legayin" = "and it burned for Cain" paralleling our modern expression "burned up". Why? -- he was full of envy towards his brother. Wishing to avoid any outward display of violence, he drops his face. (cp. Gen. 31:2)

Verse 6

"Why art thou wroth? -- Why is thy countenance fallen?" Again the questioning approach shows God's gentleness and mercy. Instead of saying "you should have known better" or outright condemning him, God instead uses gentle questioning, to cause Cain to evaluate the situation himself. Note, the psychological effect, causing him to self-examine rather than deny the fact. These questions should have aroused in Cain the realization that the one justified in becoming angry was the Almighty Himself! It really is quite amazing that this logical approach of the Almighty was to be so ineffective. Why? -- Certainly the only answer that can be given, points to the power of human emotions which come from anger, hate, and pride. (See Jer. 17:9)

Verse 7

"If thou doest WELL, shalt thou not be accepted?" In the Hebrew, the accent (pashta) is on the first "well" and on the second "if". This would naturally emphasize the important alternatives. God here was warning Cain with a searching question: Have you forfeited your acceptability by doing evil? -- as long as you do right you are acceptable, not in any sense of meriting forgiveness, for nowhere does Scripture teach that forgiveness is achieved by doing right, but rather in the sense that if Cain heeded the warning and did well, he would be accepted.

"And IF thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Because of differing interpretations, it's important to carefully note the context. The approach is one of gentle questions with assumptive logic -- "if thou doest ..." with the resulting alternatives.

"sin" 2403 "chattath" - subst. fem., to miss the mark, an offense.

"lieth" 7257 "rabats" - kal. part. poel masc., to crouch (on all four legs folded, like a recumbent animal)

Note that "sin" here is feminine while "lieth" is masculine - therefore rendering the KJV translation as incorrect. The Hebrew reads -- "sin - at the entrance (a male) is crouching." The idea

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being that "sin" is personified as a wild beast crouching as if ready to leap upon Cain as soon as he departed from God's presence. What is described is an image of Cain's barely suppressed emotion of hot anger. Being human ourselves, we know how Cain felt.

"and thou shalt rule over him" 4910 "mashal" = to govern. The NAS, RSV, and Berkeley version all translate this phrase: "but you must master it." This admonition applies not only to Cain, but to us as well, for when we sin, we often experience consequences which can make us angry. We need to understand what is happening so we might "rule over" our anger. The example of Cain shows what can happen if we give our anger free rein for sin is like a crouching lion and we must act quickly to save ourselves.

Verse 8

"And Cain talked" Heb. - "amar", a word which is always followed by the words spoken. However, what is said is omitted in every manuscript of the Pentateuch now known, with usually a small space left in the Hebrew to indicate something is missing. However, the Samaritan, Syriac, Septuagint, and Volgate versions all supply, "Let us go into the field". Rotherham translates: "And Cain said to Abel his brother [let us go into the field]" Thus Cain, far from heeding the Divine warning, has gone to the point of planning to remove his brother from the scene of action. He induces him to go "out in the field" where he would be safe from observation. (cp 1 Kings 11:29)

"Cain rose up against Abel his brother" - note the repetition of "his brother", further emphasizing the horrible nature of the deed. Within human nature lies great potential for evil. Cain's sin in reference to his brother was primarily jealousy -- a sin that seems comparatively weak and insignificant, but which carries the seeds of great evil.

Verse 9

Again God asks a question, trying to bring Cain to confess his deed, and rouse him to repentance. But mark the defiance brought on by sin as Cain is cross-examined. In comparison, Adam and Eve were humble, though at first they were given to fear, evasion and excuses. Here, Cain is hardened and boldly lies, saying he doesn't know where Abel is.

"Am I my brother's keeper? Rotherham translates -- "the keeper of my brother am I?" In the Hebrew, the predicate stands first giving the question a slightly different force, like: "Am I suppose to watch him all the while?"

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Verse 9

Again God questions, and then proceeds to directly charge Cain with this crime. "What hast thou done? Cain here is completely startled from any preconceived security regarding his cover-up and made to realize the enormity of his misdeed.

"the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." Scripture shows that the death of God's saints is precious in His sight (Psa. 116:15) and to be sought out and avenged. (Gen. 9:5; Eze. 33:6; Psa. 9:12) By virtue of Abel's faith, "he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4; Rom. 4:17) God personifies the blood, as persistently crying aloud from the ground. Judgment! Judgment! and God must judge because He is righteous. Now contrast this with the blood of Christ, which goes beyond, offering mercy. (Heb. 12:24)

Verses 11,12

** The disobedience of Adam and Eve in regard to the forbidden fruit is followed by the more deadly sin of Cain in the murder of his brother; and as the sin is worse, so was the punishment. Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden to an existence of hardship and death, yet this fate was not without God and hope. Cain is driven from the land that he had known to become a fugitive and vagabond, far from the saving presence of the Almighty. This judgment is not a description of nomadism, for the nomad was no fugitive or aimless wanderer. Rather, it describes a completely isolated and estranged existence from which Cain's descendants began to rise again only some generations later in the time of Jabal. (see v. 20)

** God states two parts of Cain's punishment: (1) The ground was cursed, so that it would not yield readily to Cain's hard work, and (2) he was to be a fugitive and vagabond having no place in which he could dwell with comfort or security. Note how appropriate: If Cain's sin began in pride in his ability as a farmer, that source of pride was now forever removed. If Cain buried Abel in the ground to try to cover his guilt, now the ground would not yield to him, forever reminding him of his guilt. The precious human blood was spilled upon the "adhamah", - the tillable soil. Cain is cursed "min-ha'adhamah", away from the ground. The Hebrew conveys the meaning -- "so that there is no ground for you". Also the Hebrew accent (athnach) after "cursed" suggests "more than the ground" (cp Gen. 3:17) Thus, not only would the ground not yield to Cain as readily as to others, but he would not be permitted to settle down in areas easily cultivatable. The second part of Cain's punishment, in addition to being designed to bring him to repentance, also had the purpose of impressing the sanctity of human life and the enormity of his sin. Cain would be well-known by report to the rest of mankind and doubtless would be seen by some in his unhappy wanderings.

"opened her mouth" -- "blood crieth" GROUND is personified giving

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weight to what was done. Also the Hebrew word ("eth") is used. (see Gen. 1:1)

Verse 13

"punishment" 5771 "avon" - perversity, i.e., (moral) evil; translated: fault (2X), iniquity (218X) mischief (1X); punishment (6X); punishment of iniquity (4X); sin (1X).

"bear 5375 "nasa"- to lift, in a great variety of applications, lit. and fig., translated: accept (11X), bear (156X) bring (21X), carry (25X), forgive (16X), lift up (137X), pardon (4X); set up (10X), take (116X) ... etc.

Cain's statement is translated two main ways: as it is here in the KJV, and -- "Is my iniquity too great to be forgiven?" in the Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, Arabic, Samaritan Pentateuch, and Greek and Latin Fathers versions. As we see above, the words have a variety of meanings, depending on the context. No doubt the words were uttered with a feeling of hopeless despair. But the next verse indicates whether Cain is feeling sorry because of his sin or because of the mess he is in now. Verse 14 gives no indication of repentance or any realization of the enormity of his guilt, but rather Cain's reaction is psychologically one of a whining, fear-laden sinner, thus supporting the KJV translation ... "my punishment is greater than I can bear."

Verse 14

"Behold" indicates agitation on the part of Cain, and is used similarly to our "look" or "see". There is complaint in the words: "Look, you have this day driven me off the ground," as if to say "see what you have done to me!"

"and from thy face shall I be hid:" It appears that Cain was expelled from the particular place where God had manifested His presence. Cain and Abel appear to have brought their offerings to the same spot, which might be East of the Garden, where the symbols of God's presence were displayed. (cp. Gen. 3:24)

"That everyone that findeth me shall slay me." Critics use this phrase to show the non-historical and mythical character of this whole narrative with the charge that Cain speaks as if he were living in a world full of people. To this assumption of the skeptic, there need be no difficulty, for a number of logical explanations can be presented. Of these, most are based on the following: (1) The book of Genesis is not an account of the history of all humanity, but rather centres upon the seed of the woman. (2) The Divine Law regarding the avenger of blood - whose duty and right was to slay the murder. (Gen. 9:6; Num. 35:19,21,27) (3) The fact that Adam was 130 years old, when Seth was born, (Gen. 5:3-5) leaves lots of room that many sons and daughters were

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born in this period. It is estimated by Dodd that the world's population at the time of Seth was well over four hundred thousand.

"Supposing Adam and Eve to have had no other sons than Cain and Abel in the year of the world one hundred and twenty-eight, yet as they had daughters married to these sons, their descendants would make a considerable figure on the earth. Supposing them to have been on the earth and married in the nineteenth year of the world, they might easily have had each eight children, some males and some females, in the twenty-fifth year. In the fiftieth year there might proceed from them in a direct line sixty-four persons; in the seventy fourth year there would be five hundred and twelve; in the ninety-eighth year, four thousand seven hundred and sixty eight: if to these we add the other children descended from Cain and Abel, their children, we shall have, in the aforesaid one hundred and twenty-eight years, four hundred and twenty one thousand one hundred and sixty-four men capable of generation, without reckoning the woman either old or young, or such as are under the age of seventeen." See Dodd.

Verse 15

"Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold" Many reasons have been suggested as to why God should have spared Cain. Among those that have some merit, the following stand out. First, the example of Cain's punishment as a "fugitive and vagabond" would serve to be a potent warning to the seriousness of murder in the sight of God. Second, this curse with its banishment from God's presence would accomplish a punishment more severe than death itself. Then too, it's closely allied to the Scriptural principle of allowing the tares and wheat grow together till the harvest. (Matt. 13:30) Third, there was the possibility that Divine punishment would humble the heart of Cain and in time bring about proper repentance.

"sevenfold" denotes spiritual perfection. This suggests that nothing more need be added.

"And the LORD set a mark upon Cain ..."

"mark" - 226 - "owth" - a signal (lit. or fig.) as a flag, beacon, monument, omen. (KJV) "sign" (60X), "token" (14X), "ensign" (2X), "miracle" (2X) "mark" (1). (See Gen.1:14;9:12)

"upon" - "le" translated "for" but never "in" or "on" to which the Hebrew is "be".

Rotherham - "So Yahweh set for Cain, a sign, that none finding him should smite him."

Although some have suggested that Cain was physically branded, the

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Hebrew suggests rather that God appointed for Cain some type of refuge that protected him from the avenger of blood. This could be a place, like a city of refuge (Num. 35) but since Cain was to be a fugitive and a vagabond, it was the "land of Nod" and Cain wandered therein.

Verse 16

"And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD"

"presence" - 6440 - "paniyim" the face. (variety of applications, see Gen. 3:8; 16:12; Ex. 33:14; 2Kings 13:23).

"and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the East of Eden."

"Nod" - 5113 - "nowd" = exile, wander. Some think this verse should be rendered, "And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, from the East of Eden, and dwelt a wanderer on the earth". This expression fits closely verse 14, but doesn't fit verse 17 where he builds a city for his son, Enoch. However, since Cain doesn't call the city after his name, but his son's, he may have had many possessions but wasn't allowed to enjoy them. Cain therefore lived up to his name. (Cain - 7014 "Qayin" = "possession") obtaining wife, children, city, riches, arts, crafts but no continuing city.

Verse 17

"And Cain knew his wife" This phrase raises the natural question, where did Cain's wife come from? The most probable answer is that since the genealogies do not mention the birth of daughters, Cain naturally took his wife from one of Adam and Eve's offspring, consequently she was his sister; and Scripture not desiring to establish this precedent does not give the details.

"Enoch" 2585 - "chanowk" - to initiate or discipline: (trans. dedicate, train up) It appears that Cain promised himself a new beginning as initiated in his son and the city he was building.

"And he builded a city" 1129 - "banah" - to build: (began to build). The Hebrew simply indicates that " he was building," but says nothing of its termination. Rotherham translates -- "but it happened that he was building a city, so he called the name of the city after the name of his son // Enoch \\". The construction of a city by Cain ceases to be a problem since it merely indicates the commencement and progress of the building but not its termination or that Cain lived therein. The city may have been finished and others may have inhabited its walls but not Cain, for he was to be a fugitive and vagabond.

Verse 18

Below are listed two genealogies which trace the development of the

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human race through two fundamentally different lines, headed by Cain and Seth. A progression is first seen in the family, which then extends to society in general. It will be observed that Enoch and Lamech appear in both, which would indicate that these two branches were in immediate contact with each other. These genealogies may well have important significance in their numerical and Hebrew construction. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure about the meaning of many of these names since each is the direct equivalent of the original language of the human race. (A study showing how languages change with time and area will demonstrate the problems involved in interpreting the meanings of these ancient names.)

CAIN	SETH
1. Cain - "Qayin" - possession	1. Seth - "Sheth" put, set
2. Enoch - "Chanowk" - dedicate	2. Enosh - "Enowsh" - mortal
3. Irad - "Iyrad" - fugitive	3. Kenan - "Qeynan" - fixed place, nest
4. Mehujael - "Mechiyyael" smitten of God	4. Mahalaleel - "Mahalalel" praised of God
5. Methushael - "Methuwshael" man of God	5. Jared - "Jered" - to go downwards; descend
6. Lamech - "Lemek" powerful	6. Enoch - "Chanowk" dedicate, initiate
	7. Methuselah - man of a dart
	8. Lamech - powerful
	9. Noah - rest, quiet

Verse 19

"And Lamech took unto him two wives" With this simple statement, the ethical aspect of marriage as established by God has been perverted to favour the lust of the eye and of the flesh. The names of the two women are indicative of their sensual attractiveness which may well have been a governing motive in Lamech's disregard of this Divine institution.

" Adah" --- 5711 - "Adah" - ornament

" Zillah" - 6741 - "Tsillah" - shade, shelter

Verses 20-22

Lamech's three sons are the originators of inventions which show how the Cainites were directed towards the beautifying and perfecting of the earthly life.

"Jabel" --- 2989 - "Yabal" - stream, flowing. Jabel is described as the "abh" (father) or originator of nomadic life with emphasis on the breeding and managing of many types of animals.

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"Jubal" - "Yuwbal" - to bring with pomp; the blast of a horn.
He was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ
"harp" -- 3658 - "kinnowr" to twang.
"organ" - 5748 - "uwgab" - in the original sense means to breathe;

Verses 23,24 - LAMECH'S SWORD SONG

"I have slain" - 2026 - "harag" - to smite with deadly intent.
"man" - 376 - "iysh" - a man as an individual. Taken from an
unused Hebrew root meaning to be extant.

This sword song of Lamech has caused commentators untold difficulties due to a number of reasons. Some are misled by the Jewish fable of the accidental slaying by Lamech of old Cain and a youth who guided him through the forest. Others found the perfect tense used here in this first piece of poetry a source of much difficulty, while still others bogged down trying to fit it into the context. Of the many interpretations, the present-day approach pictures Lamech handling one of the weapons manufactured by his son Tubal Cain and swinging it boldly, uttering this unholy song. In support, the perfect tense ("harag" - I have slain) is expressive not of a deed accomplished, but of confident assurance. The Hebrew supports the following translation: "I can kill a man for wounding me, And a young man for hurting me." (Companion Bible)

Verse 24

"If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold." This climax of the ungodly song reflects the arrogance of the worldly mind as openly displayed by Lamech, the sixth generation. What Cain initiated when he undertook the erection of a city is now culminated in the earthly culture of a civilization degenerate and apart from God, trusting in its own self-glorification and reflecting the brutal power of its own might. No doubt Jesus framed his statement in Matt. 18:22 about forgiving seventy times seven with conscious reference to this passage.

Verse 25

"And called his name Seth" It is evident that Eve received on some occasion Divine communication with respect to this particular son - that he was to take the place of Abel through whom the Messiah was to come. She gives her son a name indicative of this fact.

"Seth" (Sheth) - put; set in place of, substitute

"for God, (said she) hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel" It is noteworthy that when Cain was born she associated his birth with Yahweh, ("He who shall be" -- Gen.4:1, see notes Gen.2:4) At first Eve thought Cain was to be Messiah, but now at Seth's birth she realizes that it is through Seth's seed that Messiah would come.

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"Who Cain slew" This explanatory remark is obviously not inserted by the writer, the fact being too evident to require explanation. But as spoken by Eve, it definitely connects and further shows that the substitute was Seth and certainly not Cain who was the first born.

Verse 26

"Enosh" 582 Enowsh - a mortal, and so translated in Job 4:17. Certainly the character of Seth is revealed by the name he gave to his son. The name Enosh demonstrates Seth's realization of human weakness, frailty, and mortality, as contrasted by the pride and arrogance displayed by the family of Cain.

"Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD" Call - 7121 "bara" - the idea of accosting, a person met, to call out, to address by name. The identical phrase in the Hebrew occurs in Gen. 12:8; 26:25; here no doubt it signifies the use of prayer. This phrase probably means that now men began to communicate with the self-existent, eternal God in the form of prayer as distinguished from the earlier form of worship and communication. (Gen. 3:8-19; 4:1-7)