

Finer Grounds

Genesis

Lesson 3: Wickedness and Hope

Read Genesis 4:1-7

Last time we learned about the first sin in creation, and this time we are going to study the first murder of mankind. In Genesis chapter 4, we read of Adam and Eve's first two sons, Cain and Abel. As the text reveals, Abel was "a keeper of flocks" and Cain was "a tiller of the ground". We are not told when God instituted offerings or the details of those offerings, but we are told what Cain and Abel present to the Lord. What we are told is that Abel gave a living sacrifice (flock) and it was the firstlings, or firstborn. More importantly, we know that God "had regard for Abel and for his offering". In other words, God was pleased with Abel and accepted his offering. On the other hand, we are simply told that Cain's offering was "the fruit of the ground" and God had no regard for it. Cain went wrong somewhere and becomes angry. The text says "his countenance fell", which basically means his face or demeanor changed negatively, perhaps we would describe it as an angry, upset, or depressed disposition.

I love God's response to Cain. If only I could parent this way consistently. He asks Cain three questions, all of which center around Cain's attitude or actions and no one else's. God asks him questions that he should be asking himself if he wants to resolve his problem. He asks, "Why are you angry?" "Why has your countenance fallen?" "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?" He guides Cain in how he should think by asking questions instead of just lecturing, which is my immediate nature. God tries to help him see that it is his sin that has

caused the problem, and ultimately he is the only one able to correct it. Then, after three questions prompting Cain towards understanding clearly what has transpired, God then uses one simple, but profound statement to direct Cain into what he needs to do to make it right.

What a warning for us in verse 7 when God says, "sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Isn't this so true? The temptation of sin always seems to be lurking in the shadows right behind us, ready to claim us at the first dropping of our defenses. God seems so tender and fatherly in this advice. He tells Cain that his countenance will be lifted up if he does well. That is so true as well, is it not? When we do what we know is right, it brings great joy and satisfaction to our spirit. The Hebrew word for "master" means "to rule, have dominion, or reign". God is warning Cain, and all of us, that we must reign over sin. We cannot permit it to have power over us, but rather we "must master it" and that requires sobriety and diligence.

Think About It

What were some possible problems with Cain's sacrifice?

Can you think of examples in Scripture, in the Christian community, or in your own life where things have been "offered" to God

Finer Grounds

without His approval?

How do we react when we are “corrected” by God’s word?

Have you ever seen someone sulk or get angry when presented with truth from God’s word?

What should our response be to God’s word? (James 1:21)

Can you think of any examples from Scripture or from your own life of someone humbly allowing the word of God to correct and change them?

Read Genesis 4:8-16

Apparently Cain ends up telling Abel about his encounter with God. We are not told how Abel responded to the information, perhaps because it does not matter. Whether Abel was sympathetic and encouraged Cain to do better or he ridiculed and scolded him, Cain’s actions should still have been the same – humility and repentance. Maybe when he told Abel it angered him to remember the incident, or maybe he let jealousy and pride have mastery over him. It can be hard to feel inferior to someone else, especially

a younger sibling, as anyone with kids can attest to. How we handle that emotion is vital in whether or not we stumble. Despite God’s plea, Cain does not master sin this time.

Again, God begins with questions for Cain. Unfortunately, sin begets sin, and Cain’s very first answer to God’s questions is a lie. Then, he seems to take on a defensive attitude with the, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Of course, God already knows, but He asks Cain, “What have you done?” I don’t know about you, but when my kids have committed some offense, I really just want them to confess, show some remorse, and repent. If they do, I am all too eager to forgive. There still may be consequences, but I assure you they are greatly reduced when I see ownership and repentance coming out of them. However, if they lie to me in an attempt to cover up what they have done or they try to blame someone else for it, the door on mercy gets slammed shut. Sin is like quick sand and instead of stopping and carefully finding the right way out, we just keep flailing around until we find ourselves deeply entrenched in it.

Cain’s punishment is to be “a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth”. He says in verse 14 that he is driven “from the face of the ground” and he is going to be hidden from God’s “face”. Cain is scared. He obviously is no longer going to have the blessings or protection of God and he knows it will put his life in very grave danger. God is still somewhat merciful to Cain and at least offers him some protection against the hands of men who would take his life. We are not given any clues in the text as to what the “sign” was that Cain received, but we do know that Cain “went out from the presence of the Lord”. It must have been a very sad day for God, Cain, and all of his

family. It reminds me of losing a brother or sister to the world. Sometimes when I read this I forget the great sorrow that must have been endured. Sin hurts.

Think About It

Have you ever, openly or in your heart, justified your sinful response by someone else's actions?

If you have ever felt inferior to someone else, how did that make you feel?

Were your words and/or actions toward or about the person righteous?

Count the number of times God refers to Cain ("you" or "your") in Genesis 4:9-12.

What, if any, do you think is significant about that?

List all the hurting that you think may have been experienced from Cain's sin.

Read Genesis 4:17-5:32

We are not told who Cain's wife is, but she must have been a sister. We need to remember that the genetic pool at this time was clearly more diverse, which would have made incest plausible without all of the genetic problems that come with it today. We are told a little bit about Cain's descendants, including Lamech, who seems kind of unsavory. He is the first recorded polygamist with two wives and we are told about three of his sons. It is probable that mankind's main housing up to this point was caves. Perhaps that is why we are told that Jabal was the "father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock". It would make sense that someone with livestock would want a nomadic way of life. His brothers Jubal and Tubal-cain seem to also show us some progression in the culture as well with musical instruments and the wielding of metals.

At the end of chapter 4, we have the line of Christ being recorded as Seth is born to Adam and Eve. After Seth's son, Enosh is born, "men began to call upon the name of the Lord". In this chapter we have seen Cain and his descendants moving away from God, and now we are beginning to see Seth's descendants moving toward God.

Chapter five begins with one of the "generation of" statements that we find throughout Genesis. It is the account of Adam's descendants and the longevity of their lives. If you like math, it is a fun exercise to see if Methuselah, the longest recorded living man at 969 years old, would have died before or during the flood. Of course we have to mention Enoch

because “he was not, for God took him”. I do not know exactly what that looked like, but it had to be awesome. I just hope it can be said of us some day that we “walked with God”.

Read Genesis 6:1-8

At the end of chapter five, we are introduced to our next major character in the Bible, Noah. We find out in the first few verses of chapter six how very unique Noah was at that time. There is a very difficult topic in verses 2-4 of this chapter concerning the “sons of God” and the Nephilim. I do not have a definitive answer to this topic, but I will share with you the most debated thoughts on it.

The three major schools of thought are that the “sons of God” refer to wealthy men or princes, fallen angels, or they are the descendants of Seth. There seem to be pros and cons to each choice. The first option of it simply meaning aristocrats doesn’t seem to make a whole lot of sense when you read the context and God never really points out mixed social class marriages as huge news. The term “sons of God” is often considered to be referring to angels in passages like Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7, which happen to be the only other places we find the same Hebrew term that is in Genesis 6, BENE ELOHIM. The belief that these are fallen angels is the traditional Jewish view. However, Matthew 22:30 is clear that angels are not given in marriage, which seems to pose a problem for this interpretation. Lastly, the thought that the “sons of God” refers to the descendants of Seth is based on the contextual view that Cain’s descendants were falling away from God (“bad” = “daughters of men”) and Seth’s descendants were seeking after God (“good” = “sons of God”).

Now remember from verse four, we are told that the offspring of these unions, the Nephilim, “were on the earth in those days, and also afterward”, probably referring to after the flood. This is confirmed in Numbers 13:33 when we indeed see that the Nephilim, often described as “giants”, are in the land of Canaan. The obvious problem with the first and last options are that all mankind except for Noah and his family were destroyed in the flood. Therefore, how could the “sons of God” refer to just mere men? If they were men, they would have to be descendants of Noah, which does not appear to have any scriptural backing. Could the “sons of God” have a completely different meaning than any of these options or do we just not yet understand some aspect of the details? There is a plethora of more information to study on this subject which we simply cannot entertain in this study. However, I know from experience and history that God’s word is not in error. If I cannot reconcile a topic yet, there is a problem with my theology, not the text. I will continue to study this and highly encourage you to study this more deeply on your own.

In our last section, we finally find out why Noah was so unique. Everyone else was wicked. The way it is described is difficult to imagine. In verse six, we read what may well be the saddest statement found in Scripture: “And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved to His heart.” If you do the math, you will see that man had only been on the earth a little over 1,500 years, and they had fallen completely away from their Creator.

Our old preacher in Pittsburgh, Karl Wester, use to say, “thank God for the ‘buts’ of the Bible” and that is so true. We end this lesson with hope

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from one of those wonderful “buts”: “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.”

Think About It

Did God sanction Lamech’s avenging?

Do you think Lamech’s avenging was honored like Cain’s?

Do a study on giants in the Bible (Nephilim, Anak, and Anakim are some key words to use)

Get ready for next time by reading the flood account!