Sunday, January 2, 2022

**Lesson**: Genesis 4:1-15; **Time of Action**: Unknown; **Place of Action**: Unknown

**Golden Text**: “And he (God) said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10).

**I. INTRODUCTION**. We don’t know what the world was like when Cain killed Abel, nor do we know what the state of religion was. How long had it been since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden? We simply don’t know, nor do any of these things really matter. What we do know is that Adam and Eve’s actions in the garden brought devastating results. Through Adam and Eve sin entered the human race. The sin nature would be passed on to all their descendants which is all of humanity. Imagine the anguish of the first parents as they witnessed the cruel effects of sin on their own children. Soon Cain also would learn that sin has its own terrible price tag. His selfishness and jealousy blossomed into an act of violence. The effects of that act of violence would follow him to his grave. This week’s lesson will remind us that sinful behavior always carries a heavy price tag.
II. BACKGROUND FOR THE LESSON. The biblical writer’s purpose in Genesis chapter 4 was to trace the spread of sin and rebellion from the first family into general human society. The sin of Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3:6) was followed by God’s curse (see Genesis 3:14-19). The couple experienced a twofold separation. They were separated geographically from the garden and spiritually from God (see Genesis 3:23-24). Adam and Eve had lived happily in innocence and fellowship with God in the garden. After they sinned, they felt guilty (see Genesis 3:7-10) and sought relief by placing the blame on others (see Genesis 3:11-13). Then God cursed the serpent for the part he played (see Genesis 3:14-15), pronounced sorrow and pain in childbirth on Eve (see Genesis 3:16) cursed the ground, and declared that Adam would have to till the ground in sweat in order to provide food for him and his family (see Genesis 3:17-19). In Genesis 3:20-21, we have Adam naming his wife Eve and God making them coats of skin to replace the fig leaves they used to hide their nakedness. Genesis chapter 3 ends with Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden, and God provided Cherubims and a flaming sword to prevent anyone from entering the garden (see Genesis 3:22-24). Our lesson begins with chapter 4.

III. THE BIRTH OF CAIN AND ABEL (Genesis 4:1-2)

A. The birth of Cain (Genesis 4:1). Our first verse says “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from
the Lord.” God commanded our first parents to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (see Genesis 1:28), and they obeyed (see Genesis 5:4) for Moses wrote here “And Adam knew Eve his wife.” This statement is explained by the words “and she conceived” which was the result of sexual intercourse between the first couple. Sexual intercourse is the most intimate of acts, sealing a social, physical, and spiritual relationship. This is why God reserved it for marriage alone (see Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6-8).

“Eve” later gave birth “and bare Cain.” Of course, this was their first child, but “Adam” and “Eve” had many sons and daughters (see Genesis 5:4). The name “Cain” means “possession” and it sounds like the Hebrew word for “acquired.” It is commendable that “Eve” gave God credit for her son for she said “I have gotten a man from the Lord.” In the Hebrew, the true meaning of this statement is “I have gotten a man even the deliverer.” We don’t know for sure, but it’s quite possible that with that statement, “Eve” may have thought that Cain was the seed that God had promised her (see Genesis 3:15).

B. The birth of Abel (Genesis 4:2). This verse says “And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.” Eve’s second pregnancy brought “Abel” into the world. His name can mean “breath,” “vapor,” or “emptiness” and is the word translated “vanity” at least thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes. “Cain’s” name which means “possession,” reminds us that life comes from God, while “Abel’s” name which can mean “vanity” tells us that life is brief (see Job 7:16; Psalms 144:4). This verse also says that “Abel was a
keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.”

Two occupations are represented by these brothers. “Abel” was a shepherd; he kept the “sheep,” and “Cain” was a farmer, he tilled the land. Their occupations probably reflect their different interests and skills, but both are admirable professions. Undoubtedly, Adam certainly taught “Cain” and “Abel” why they had to work (see Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 9-10), so they joined the family in working to meet its basic needs. Work was not a punishment from God because of sin. We know this because Adam was given work to do in the garden before he and his wife yielded to Satan’s temptation (see Genesis 2:15). Although not mentioned in this lesson, when Adam was 130 years old, he and Eve had another son whose name was Seth. They had other children (see Genesis 5:4), but Seth is their only other child who is named in the Scriptures (see Genesis 4:25; 5:3). Jesus Christ was a descendent of Seth (see Luke 3:23-38).

Note: A great deal of what has been taught about the two brothers and the tragedy that unfolds in our lesson is based on assumption and not Scripture. For example, it is assumed that the career choices made by the two brothers reflected their temperaments. Since “Cain” worked “the ground,” it is assumed that he was the more vigorous of the two. “Abel,” as a “keeper of sheep” is assumed to have been a gentler individual. But in reality, both occupations required hard work. So it is best to see their choices of occupations as based on nothing more than a simple division of labor, like when parents assign jobs in the home to their children.
IV. THE WORSHIP OF CAIN AND ABEL (Genesis 4:3-7)

A. The two offerings (Genesis 4:3-4).

1. (vs. 3). This verse says “And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.” The Scriptures don’t tell us where “Cain” and Abel got the idea to bring any kind of “offering.” Nor do the Scriptures say these were sin offerings. The various kinds of offerings (see Leviticus 1:1-7:38) were not known at this time. It’s quite possible that God gave Adam and Eve unrecorded instructions regarding worship that they passed on to their children. But since the Bible does not say, whatever we think would only be speculation and assumption. The words, “And in process of time it came to pass” probably does not mean that worship began in the home of Adam and Eve at this time. It is more likely that the first family already had the habit of regular worship due to instructions God may have given them that are not recorded here. We have no idea how much “time” had passed from the Fall (Adam and Eve’s sin) up to this point. What we do know is that some “time” had passed. After an unknown period of “time” serving as a farmer, we are told that “Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.” If this was an act of worship, since Cain tilled “the ground,” he “brought the LORD an offering” from what he grew. There was nothing wrong with that, for that’s what he had to offer.

2. (vs. 4). This verse says “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.” For his “offering,” we are told that “Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof,” meaning the “fat” that covered the internal parts of the animals (see Leviticus 3:9, 14). Much later, in the Mosaic Law, the Israelites were forbidden to eat this “fat” (see Leviticus 7:23), which was reserved as an “offering” to God, especially as a sin “offering” (see Leviticus 4:8, 26, 35; 9:10; 16:25). The fact that “Abel” brought “the firstlings of his flock” may give us some insight as to why “the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering.” He honored God with the first fruits of “his flock” and God approved of it. Later in Israel’s history, God gave instructions concerning the various offerings and the giving of the “firstlings” of animals (see Exodus 13:11-13; Numbers 18:17-18), and the firstfruits of crops (see Leviticus 2:12-16; 23:10-11; Deuteronomy 26:1-11). There is no evidence that Cain brought the first fruits of his crops, only that he brought the fruit of the ground (see verse 3). **Note:** At this point, we probably need to deal with another assumption. It is often assumed and taught that Cain and “Abel” were bringing sin offerings to the LORD. This is based on the fact that God made clothes from animal skins for Adam and Eve, demonstrating that sin should be atoned for, or covered by the shedding of blood (see Genesis 3:21; Psalms 32:1; Hebrews 9:22). It is also assumed that God gave Adam and Eve some basic instructions concerning the ways and means of approaching Him through sacrifice, instructions that Adam passed on to his children. If clear instructions concerning sacrifices were given, “Abel” chose to obey
them, but Cain did not and what followed is understandable. Again, these are all assumptions. But let’s consider something else that seems more likely. Instead of a sin “offering,” maybe the brothers were bringing another type of “offering.” Perhaps the “offering” mentioned earlier was a thanksgiving or first fruit “offering.” But again, this is based on the assumption that Adam and his family were acquainted with several types of “offerings.” The kinds of “offerings” presented by Cain and “Abel” related to their work. Cain offered vegetables and “Abel” offered an animal. The point is we really don’t know what kinds of “offerings” were being presented, so we can’t conclude that they were either sin “offerings” or first fruit “offerings.”

B. The anger of Cain (Genesis 4:5-6).

1. (vs. 5). This verse says “But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.” The word “But” presents a contrast and introduces God’s disapproval of “Cain” and “his offering.” This verse says “But unto Cain and to his offering he (God) had not respect.” In other words, God didn’t accept Cain’s “offering.” But what was the difference? The answer must be in the condition of their hearts. Abel came to God by faith (see Hebrews 11:4). If God had given both brothers a revelation about offering Him the firstfruits of their labors, it appears that Abel obeyed and “Cain” did not. This was because “Cain,” the older brother was “of that wicked one” (see I John 3:12) or the devil. When
referring to the faithlessness and godliness of unbelievers in his day, Jude wrote that they were going in “the way of Cain” (see Jude 1:11). Because God didn’t approve of his “offering,” we are told that “Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.” The words “very wroth” pictures “Cain” as being extremely angry. He was burning with anger. The word “countenance” means “facial expression” and the phrase “and his countenance fell” means that “Cain’s” facial expression grew dark with fury. In other words, as we might say today, “Cain got an attitude!” His anger could easily be seen on his face.

2. (vs. 6). This verse says “And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?” Even though “Cain” had treated God improperly with his offering, the LORD was still sensitive to his situation. These two questions that God asked “Cain” indicate that He desired to counsel him concerning what it meant to give a proper offering. It was as though God was counseling His wayward child. The word “wroth” means “full of wrath or anger.” With the two questions, “why are you angry and why do you look so down?,” God was giving “Cain” a chance to consider his anger and realize that a good conscience is indicated by a countenance or facial expression that is lifted up (see Job 11:14-15). Note: This should remind us that God takes notice of all our sinful desires and discontents. There is not an angry look, an envious look, nor a fretful look, that escapes His observing eye. If “Cain” answered God it is not recorded. Apparently, he refused to answer the LORD which reveals how deep his attitude problem was.
C. The divine warning (Genesis 4:7). This verse says **“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.”** For whatever reason Cain’s offering was rejected, God was willing to give him another opportunity to offer an acceptable sacrifice. God said to Cain, **“If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?”** Using the form of a question, God was telling Cain that he could still make a decision to engage in proper worship in the future. Here, we see God extending grace to Cain. In Hebrew, the word translated **“be accepted”** means **“to be lifted up.”** So, the context here suggests that Cain’s countenance, or facial expression would be lifted up if he came to God in faith. 

**Note:** In essence, God was saying **“Cain, if you do well and come before me in faith as your brother did, you will be accepted just like he was.”** God is no respecter of persons (see Acts 10:34); He doesn’t hate anything that he has made. He only denies His favour to those who are disobedient, and He is an enemy to only those who by sin have made Him their enemy. Therefore, if we come short of acceptance with God, we only have ourselves to blame; the fault is totally our own. Cain was at a crossroad. If he chose not to come to God with the right attitude, the LORD warned him of the consequences saying **“and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.”** This expression pictures **“sin”** as a wild beast crouching and ready to spring through **“the door”** of Cain’s life to overpower him. God was telling Cain to be very careful, because his **“sin”** of anger was getting ready to finish him off. God also said **“And unto thee shall be his**
(sin’s) desire.” This was another consequence of not living by faith. The Hebrew word for “desire” means “to strive strongly.” It indicates that “sin” would strive strongly to control Cain as it does all of us (see Romans 7:18-20). Yielding to the power of “sin” would also result in Cain being consumed by lust (see James 4:1-3). In the last phrase of this verse, God added “and thou shalt (or must) rule over him (sin).” This means that Cain still had time to get his head straight. God was encouraging him to get his head in order and “rule over him (sin)” instead of letting “sin” control him. All was not lost yet. Note: God’s point is clear. Anger is a dangerous animal that can devour us, but it does not have to be that way. We can control our anger and not allow it to fester and cause us to hurt others (see Ephesians 4:26). Unfortunately, Cain’s anger and disposition were so strong that nothing could keep him from expressing what was in his heart; not even being encouraged and warned by God Himself. Sadly, as we shall see, this story ends tragically with Cain killing his brother, Abel. Truly, it did not have to be that way.

V. THE MURDER OF ABEL (Genesis 4:8). This verse says “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.” Undoubtedly, an unknown amount of time passed between verses 7-8. The first part of this verse says “And Cain talked with Abel his brother.” We don’t know what they “talked” about, but their conversations seem to indicate that “Cain” tried to act
civil toward “his brother” talking with him freely and with familiarity until the time was right to do what was really in his heart—kill “his brother.” The phrase “it came to pass” indicates that over a period of time, “Cain” gained “his brother’s” confidence, but soon the time had arrived for him to complete his plans. This verse also says “and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.” As time went on, “Cain’s” anger grew to violence and while “they were in the field,” with “Cain” either forgetting or not caring that God was watching (see Proverbs 15:3), he killed “Abel his brother.” So the first murder on record was premeditated. “Cain” showed his loyalty to the devil, the father of everyone that God opposes (see John 8:44). Note: The murder of “Abel” was another in a series of regrettable “firsts” in human history. “Abel” was the first to die and the first to suffer from a crime of passion. The overriding lesson from this incident is that sin brings death (see Romans 5:12; 6:23). “Cain” proved what the prophet Jeremiah later wrote: “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (see Jeremiah 17:9).

VI. THE PUNISHMENT OF CAIN (Genesis 4:9-16)

A. Cain’s interrogation (Genesis 4:9-10).

1. (vs. 9). This verse says “And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?” Of course God
knew that “Cain” had killed “Abel.” But God gave him the opportunity to confess his sin and be forgiven (see I John 1:9) when He “said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?” In addressing “Cain,” God referred to “Abel” as “thy brother,” undoubtedly to stress how unnatural and atrocious his crime was. In fact, the “brother” relationship between “Cain” and “Abel” is mentioned at least seven times in this chapter. Notice how sin begets sin. “Cain’s” sin of murder was bad enough, but he made things even worse and compounded his guilt by lying to God when “he said, I know not” or “I don’t know.” He tried to cover up his deliberate murder with a deliberate lie. “Cain” was driven by the power of sin. His lying to God demonstrated sin’s corruptive power. We must realize that we too are susceptible to sin’s influence. It is ludicrous to assume that we can get away with any sin (see Numbers 32:23). After lying, “Cain” asked God “Am I my brother’s keeper?” The basic idea of the word “keeper” as used here is “to guard or watch over someone or something.” “Cain” was basically asking God, “Do you really expect me to keep track of my brother Abel?”

Note: “Cain’s” question to God indicates that he expected God to agree that he was not responsible for Abel’s well-being. But how wrong could he be! “Cain” did not seem to be aware of God’s omniscience (see Psalms 139:1-12). God knew exactly what had become of “Abel.” God saw it all and He knew it all (see verse 6). “Cain” despised the thought of having a responsibility to his “brother.” However, God is concerned not only with how we deal with Him, but also how we treat others. We are making a grave mistake if we disregard the commands of God regarding our
responsibilities to one another (see Leviticus 19:17; Romans 15:1-3; Philippians 2:3-4). Even the Ten Commandments emphasize our relationship to God (see Exodus 20:3-8) and to our fellow man (see Exodus 20:12-17). “Cain” failed in both areas.

2. (vs. 10). This verse says “And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.” God now took on the role of a prosecutor. He asked Cain, “What hast thou done?” To prevent Cain from making things worse by lying again, God let him know that He already knew what he had done to Abel. He had clear and undeniable evidence of Abel’s murder when He said “the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.” In other words, God was saying “The voice of your brother’s innocent blood is crying out to Me from the ground for justice.” In the Bible, “blood” is the symbol for life. Leviticus 17:11 says, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood.” God is the only One who can avenge spilled “blood.” Abel’s “blood” that Cain spilled to “the ground” was calling out to God for vengeance, because “vengeance is mine saith the LORD” (see Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30).

B. Cain’s curse (Genesis 4:11-12).

1. (vs. 11). This verse says “And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand.” Here, the word “earth” has the meaning of soil or ground. Cain had misused “the earth” or the soil by willfully polluting it with
Abel’s “blood.” God now made “the earth” the means for punishing the first murderer as we shall see in the next verse. God could have taken vengeance with an immediate stroke from heaven from the sword of an angel, or by a thunderbolt; but He chose to make “the earth” the avenger of “blood,” allowing Cain to continue upon “the earth,” and not immediately cut him off. This is another instance of God’s grace and mercy.

2. (vs. 12). This verse says “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.” The soil or “ground” had been forced to drink Abel’s innocent blood, so now the “ground” or the soil would be in rebellion against Cain. God declared that “When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength.” In God’s sight, Cain’s punishment fit the crime he had committed. He had been a tiller of the soil. His jealousy had arisen when God had not accepted his vegetable offerings. Now the “ground” would no longer “yield unto thee (Cain) her strength” meaning that the earth or soil will never again bring forth any crops whenever he “tillest the ground.” As another part of Cain’s curse, God said “a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.” The Hebrew word for “fugitive” can mean “to move to and fro,” “to vacillate,” or “to be seized with terror.” The word “vagabond” means “to be moved,” “to be agitated,” or “to be a fugitive.” This curse upon Cain, a farmer, banished him to a hard life of wandering. Wherever he went, and whenever he cultivated the earth, it would resist him reminding him of his sin.
C. Cain’s lament (Genesis 4:13-14).

1. (vs. 13). This verse says “And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear.” “Cain” is typical of many sinners in that he had not considered the consequences of his actions. Now that the deed was done and the consequences had been revealed, “Cain” showed remorse. But he wasn’t sorry for what he had done. He was sorry for the price he had to pay for sin as seen in his words “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” Note: What “Cain” says is a reproach and affront to the justice of God. He doesn’t complain about the greatness of his sin. He complained about the harshness of his punishment, as if he deserved less. Instead of justifying God in the sentence He rendered, “Cain” condemns God by not accepting the punishment of his sin, but by quarrelling with it. He is a man who should be overjoyed that he is still living, and yet he complains about the punishment he will receive (see Lamentations 3:39). He thinks that he has been harshly dealt with when the truth is that God has treated him favorably. He cries out that he is being wronged when he has more reason to wonder why God didn’t kill him.

2. (vs. 14). This verse says “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.” As Cain saw it, his punishment consisted of deprivation and danger.
Cain would be deprived of two things. First, he would be deprived of the land in which he lived. He said to God “Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth.” The phrase “the face of the earth” refers to the land in the vicinity of Eden. Cain’s home and livelihood were being taken from him. Second, he would be deprived of God’s presence as he also said to God, “and from thy face shall I be hid.” Although no one can be hidden from God, Cain feared losing personal contact with God. Not only did Cain’s punishment consist of what he would be deprived of, it also consisted of danger. He expressed this when he said “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.” As a wanderer of the land, Cain saw himself as living among enemies who would try to kill him. Wherever he wandered, he would fear for his life. At this time, the only people who were living were his relatives; yet he is even justly afraid of them. Seeing himself thrown out of God’s protection, Cain viewed every human he met as coming against him to kill him. It’s true; unpardoned guilt fills men with continual fear (see Proverbs 28:1).

**D. Cain’s mark (Genesis 4:15).** Our final verse says “And the LORD said unto him (Cain), 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.” God was sensitive to “Cain’s” remarks, so our gracious and merciful God tempered His judgment with mercy. “Cain’s” life had been spared and would continue to be spared as God said
“Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” In His mercy, God assured “Cain” that anyone who killed him would suffer His “vengeance...sevenfold.” The term “sevenfold” may describe God’s “vengeance” as complete and lacking nothing, or it may refer to a penalty seven times greater than what “Cain” would suffer. The fact of the matter is it would be a foolish attempt for any man to play God and take judgment out of His hand by taking “vengeance” upon Cain. Anyone who did would pay a cost seven times greater than “Cain’s” punishment. To assure his protection from potential avengers, “the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.” We don’t know anything about this “mark” except the purpose for which it was designed. For reasons known only to God, He chose to preserve “Cain’s” life and this “mark” would prevent anyone from killing him. Note: This “mark,” whatever it was, would distinguish “Cain” from the rest of mankind and notify them that he was the man that murdered his brother, and nobody should kill him. God stigmatized “Cain” and put a visible “mark” of infamy and disgrace upon him so that he would never be anything more than a fugitive and a vagabond (see verse 12).

VII. Conclusion. The birth of Cain no doubt brought much hope and joy to the first parents. However, the seed of sin had been planted. In a jealous rage, Cain killed his brother Abel. As a result, God drove Cain from His presence (see Genesis 4:16), a fugitive under a curse. Cain’s murder of
Abel was the result of following his sinful nature instead of God’s way (see Proverbs 14:12). There is a natural inclination to sin in all of us. We need to be aware of this inclination and listen to God instead of the prompting of our old, sinful flesh.

***The Sunday School Lesson; The International Sunday School Lesson Curriculum***