

## **Beginning of Early Humankind (Creation to 2100 BCE)**

### ***First Three Sons of Adam and Eve***

### ***Descendants of Adam to Noah***

**Readings: *Genesis 4:1-5:32***

### ***Reflections:***

- The first of the comparisons begins with Cain and Abel. What is acceptable worship to God? It is interesting that Cain offers fruits and vegetables and Abel offers animal sacrifice. Some commentators have suggested that this could be viewed as a foreshadowing of animal sacrifice. This is unlikely the point of the story in that future law around offerings will include offerings from a person's crops. The main point is that Cain offered "some" and Abel offered "fat portions" or his best. This is the key distinguishing mark. Abel offered God his best, or first fruits. Cain offered God what was left-over after keeping the best for himself. Cain was living out of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." He was deciding for himself what was right and wrong, what was good for him and what was not.
- Cain is corrected by God. A key insight into sin is given in Genesis 4:7. "If you do not do what is right, self-centeredness (sin) is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must master it." This characterizes sin with a visual portrayal of a wild animal ready to pounce to devour you. Yet also it is something that can be tamed. Self-centeredness has the power to master us but God indicates at this very early stage that he desires we master it.
- Cain does not master his own selfish drives but rather is consumed with anger. He murders his own brother out of jealousy. Talk about escalation: from biting an apple to murder in one generation, from "coveting" or selfish desiring and doing something very small and innocent to murder. We will see this actual progression from coveting to murder illustrated in the second half of the Ten Commandments. As we will see, God organizes the Ten Commandments to help those who follow him grasp how our own selfish sin starts in our hearts and then starts to work its way outward as we begin to act in a way that is increasingly self-centered and destructive to our relationships. This shows the power of sin to escalate very quickly.
- It also shows that fear, which seems innocent at first, has a way of escalating into anger. Yoda in Star Wars said it this way, "Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering."

Even non-Christians, Buddhists, and psychologists can identify this basic progression. You find it first right here in the Bible.

- This helps us understand why God will make it his priority to cast out fear through perfect love. Self-indulgent sin is not the first and biggest problem with the human heart. It is a problem but it is actually a symptom, not the root problem. The real issue is whether we live in fear or are we secure in God's love? Are we obsessed with self-protection and preservation or are we free to be truly other centered and trust God to take care of us? Are we our own saviors or are we believing God will take care of us? This we will see is the core question of humanity. Religion, war and injustice are all the inescapable outcomes of a heart driven by fear and focused on saving one's self. Religion is the human systems we create to demonstrate to ourselves that we are right with God. It is the system of rules, regulations, rituals or magical incantations that we create and manage to demonstrate to ourselves and others that we are right with the spiritual world. War (the destructive use of power – killing and murder) is the way we use physical force to provide for our needs and protect our interests. Injustice is the consequence of us preferring our own needs over the needs of others. All of these manifestations that will be prevalent throughout human history find their roots and foundations in fear.
- Cain is asked the question by God, "Where is your brother?" He replies, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer to that question is, "Yes, you are your brother's keeper." The point here is that God's heart is towards interdependence and mutual care. Learning to love other people and serve their needs is God's desire for all people.
- The significance of blood is also highlighted when God says Abel's "blood cries out." In the future, Jesus' blood will be shed and will bring with it the power to forgive and heal. Just as Abel's blood cried out for justice, Jesus' blood will cry out for mercy.
- Cain is now at odds with his calling (e.g. crops do not yield) and becomes a wanderer and is isolated from community. This all happens because he refuses to repent, to turn away from the wrong he did and seek forgiveness. It is interesting that God still shows him mercy even without repentance and graciously gives him protection. It indicates the depth of God's grace and love. Cain goes on to start a community but they end up being messed up long term. Through his descendents we see the impact of sin as it is passed through the generations.
- Seth is born and so the blood line that will bring a savior continues, "...the seed that will crush the serpents head." This reminds the reader that God always finds a way to complete his will. At that time people begin to call on God. There is a greater awareness of God.
- We can not complete our reflection without noting a number of problems with the text:
  - Where did the other people come from?
  - Why are people living to almost 1,000 years old?

- These are not answered anywhere in Scripture. They may have counted years differently. This may be the easiest explanation for number of years people lived. For example if the counting was based on the lunar cycle, then this would be a normal life span. In terms of the other people, did Cain and Abel marry their sisters or did God create more people? The great thing is that God worked and never gave answers to why or how he worked. God used writers to capture oral tradition and all of these questions are left unanswered. It appears God simply expects us to read these stories to understand what they are teaching us about our own humanity and about him and to allow the other answered questions to remain a mystery. Like other relationships, there are some things we will never know and for those things, we simply learn to trust the person.