

## WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

The events of Genesis chapter 3 raise the obvious question. What happened next? In Genesis chapter 2 God gave Adam and Eve a command (verses 16–17). ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’

In chapter 3 the devil questioned that command (verses 1, 4). ‘The serpent ... said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” And then he said, ‘You will not surely die.’

Then we read (verses 6, 7), ‘When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.’ And she died – no. ‘She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.’ And then they died – no. ‘Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.’

It looked very much as if the devil was right. They were still alive, more alive than they had ever been before. So what happened next? The Bible answers that question in chapter 4 by focusing on a man, Cain. The first thing we are told about him is

### 1. His name

Verse 1. ‘Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”’

The name Cain in Hebrew is connected to the verb meaning to bring forth. It’s not obvious in English but that’s the significance of Eve’s words in verse 1. When she gave birth to Cain she said, ‘With the help of the LORD I have *brought forth* a man.’ Surely this must be the fulfilment of what God had said to the serpent (3:15). ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.’ It was the promise of a saviour who would crush Satan.

Eve thought, ‘Here he is. He’s come. I have brought him forth.’ He represented the hopes of Adam and Eve. He was their firstborn son, the eldest. This must be the son of the promise. But how wrong they were.

### 2. His work

Verse 2. ‘Later [Eve] gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.’

There was nothing wrong with what Cain did, but as it turned out it made it more difficult for him to please God. I wonder if that’s your experience. For many people today there’s a conflict between the demands of work and the demands of God.

### 3. His offering

Verses 3–5. ‘In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour.’

The two brothers each brought a different offering. God accepted one but rejected the other. Why? The Bible does not spell it out here but God must have revealed the way of forgiveness. There’s a hint of that in the sequel to Adam and Eve’s sin. When they realised they were naked ‘they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves’ (3:7). But in verse 21 we read, ‘The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.’

Behind that provision is the very first sacrifice in the Bible and it was God who made it. He brought garments of skin to replace those pathetic fig leaf creations. In this way God established the principle that sacrifice is the way of atonement. Blood must be shed, innocent blood, before sin can be covered.

Abel grasped that principle and brought an acceptable offering but Cain either didn't get it or refused to follow it. He was prepared to worship God but on his own terms.

#### **4. His anger**

Verses 5–7. 'So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 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."' "

Cain was angry, very angry. He sulked. It was bad enough having his offering rejected but what made it worse was that his brother's offering was accepted. In Luke chapter 11 verses 50 and 51 Abel is described as a prophet. A prophet is someone who hears from God and speak for God. It's hard when the prophet is your brother.

Cain could have reacted in several ways. He could have been humble and teachable. He could have listened to God and changed his ways. Or he might just have been indifferent. That's how many people react to God today. But he was angry.

God challenged him and he challenged him with the question why. Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? This reminds us that ultimately it's not God who is on trial; it's us.

God's challenge was in terms of two options and two consequences. If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? That's the first option: do what is right. And the consequence? You will be accepted.

But if you do not do what is right. That's the alternative. And the consequence? Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it. You cannot play with sin. You must master it or it will master you. Sin is at your door. You don't have to let it in. There's still time to say no.

Cain was angry and there was still time to control that anger, but he didn't. So what happened next?

#### **5. His crime**

Verses 8–9. 'Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"'

The narrative suggests that Cain's action was deliberate and premeditated. In 1 John 3:12 it says that he 'butchered' him. It began with anger and it ended with murder. Sin crouched at the door. He didn't master it and sin got in and took over.

Once again God challenged Cain. 'Where is your brother Abel?' Again, Cain could have reacted in several ways. He could have repented and confessed his sin. Or he could just have remained silent. But instead of that he lied and turned on God. 'I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?' He should have been his brother's keeper. He was the older brother. Failing that, he might just have left his brother alone. But instead, he killed him.

In Cain's question there is an underlying accusation. Am I my brother's keeper? In effect he was saying to God, 'You are asking too much.' Instead of humbling himself and admitting his sin he became even more proud and tried to put the blame on

God.

## 6. His punishment

Verses 10–12. ‘The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”’

Cain’s punishment was twofold. He was under a curse. The work which he had enjoyed before became a trial and a burden. Secondly, instead of being settled he became a restless wanderer.

It was more than he could face (verses 13, 14). ‘Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”’ Suddenly frustration and dissatisfaction and fear gripped him like a vice.

Yet even in judgment God showed mercy. Verses 15, 16. ‘But the LORD said to him, “Not so ; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.’ The mark of Cain was not part of his punishment but a way of limiting his punishment.

## 7. His legacy

Things are not always what they seem. Verses 17 to 24 of this chapter describe the flowering of civilisation. Agriculture, art, industry all began to flourish. It looks like progress rather than problems, in fact a blessing rather than a curse. Verse 17 seems to contradict the threat that Cain would be a restless wanderer on the earth. ‘Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.’ It looks like a scene of domestic bliss, doesn’t it.

But when we look a little deeper into the verses which close this chapter we see that all was not well. We read about violence, fear and revenge.

Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and they didn’t die. Cain killed his brother Abel and seems to have got away with it. Maybe those things weren’t all that serious after all.

But look at chapter 5. At first glance it’s a record of life: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, and so on. But look a little closer and you’ll find that it’s more a record of death. ‘Adam lived 930 years, and then he died. ... Seth lived 912 years, and then he died. ... Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died. ... Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died. ... Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died’ ... and so on. It tolls through the chapter like a funeral bell: he died, he died, he died, he died, he died.

Who was right, God or the serpent?

It seemed such a small thing, such a little sin – Adam and Eve eating the fruit, Cain losing his temper. But it left a legacy, the legacy of a curse, a cancer on the world that grew and grew and grew, squeezing out love and purity and kindness, destroying peace and joy and hope.

We are still at the beginning of a new year. What is going to happen next? In your life? 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.