

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 5, Cain

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This is Dr. Kenneth Mathews in his teaching on the book of Genesis. This is session number five, Life Outside the Garden, Cain and Abel, Genesis 4:1-26.

For session five, we will continue the garden story.

Last two lectures have been about what is taking place inside the garden. And now we move more so outside the garden, looking at what became of the human family as a consequence of their expulsion due to disobedience. And we will discover that there is a trajectory.

As time passes, the intensity of sin grows. There are not only more occasions that sin occurs and disobedience, but also that it becomes more severe in its nature and eventually leads to the need for God to bring about a cataclysmic flood. In chapter four, we have the account of Cain and Abel.

And although there is a murder that occurs, there is procreation. So, even within the episode that describes the wickedness of Cain and how this has been influenced by his parents, Adam and Eve, who produced the next generation, there is a glimmer of hope. There is procreation.

Chapter three, verse 15, speaks of a future deliverer. In the opening verses of the chapter, we are told that Eve commented, with the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man. And then she gave birth to Cain's brother, Abel.

So, with the help of the Lord reflects, I think, her renewed confidence in God's word, her faith and trust in what God had promised, as we read it in chapter three, verse 15. Now, Abel kept flocks, we are told, and Cain worked the soil. He followed in the steps of his father as a cultivator.

And after some time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel, notice the contrast in verse four, but Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, he did not look with favor.

So, Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. When we look at the offerings brought, the natural question is, why is one favored, and why is the other not? There's been some strong suggestion, a common suggestion, that whereas Abel brought a blood offering, Cain did not. And on that basis, God chose the preferred offering of an animal sacrifice.

However, I think that that is probably over-reading the passage because in the context, we find the word offering occurring. The word offering in verse three is the word that is used in the sacrificial system described in Leviticus. And there in Leviticus, you do have the legitimacy, even the requirement, of offering a meal offering or grain offering, it's sometimes called.

The word for offering here in my New International Version is the same word that's used repeatedly in the sacrificial system as it's described in the Pentateuch. The Hebrew word is mincha, m-i-n-c-h-a. This is the language used in verse four and verse five.

So, what is the difference? I think the difference has to do with the motivation and the inner life of each person. The motivation on the part of Cain was to offer the minimum in his act of worship, whereas the act of Abel was to give his best. Now, when it comes to how this is discerned, notice the difference in the fruits, some of the fruits of the soil, whereas the best would be the first fruits.

That's not said of Cain. Abel brought the fat portions. The fat portion in the Levitical system of sacrifice was the sweet portion and considered the best portion to give to the Lord.

The firstborn, of course, was also considered the best. And the firstborn was the child or offspring that best represented the father. And in this case, the offer of the flock.

The result was not repentance on Cain's part; rather, what we find is his anger. So, chapter four, verses one through our reading of verse five, pertains to the first formal act of worship on the part of Adam's family, which also is a commendation and an indication of Abel's repentance and renewed faith and trust in the commandments. And when we look at the end of the chapter, verse 26, the second half of that verse, at that time, we're not told precisely, of course, what that means, but it does indicate that men began to call on the name of the Lord.

The language begins to reflect a turn or a change that occurs in the direction of the beginning. And so here we have a turn toward a broader act of worship on the part of the people. This is a formal worship beginning to develop in the life of the human family.

This follows on the heels of the birth of Seth, who takes the place of the murdered Abel. And it is through the Sethites that God will work out his intended plan of blessing. And this blessing will be conjoined with a rise of a deliverer.

And so, after speaking of Seth introduced in verse 25, right on the heels of that, we read that there is a sort of a mass or group turning to the Lord in worship. And I think that would have been the Sethites, the descendants of Adam Seth that are described now by genealogy in chapter five, verse one, through the end of chapter five. When we look at chapter four, we discover that Cain murders his brother.

He does so out of anger, and we could spend some time talking about how anger does often lead to Owen acting out. What is striking about this is not every time does anger result in murder, but anger is often a motivator for murder that would follow. In the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, he brings us out in the Sermon on the Mount.

He brings to the that one can have an anger that is so deeply bitter that that anger is tantamount to committing murder. You do not, Jesus says, have to act out to be guilty of the sin of murder, but rather, it can be something that is birthed in your own heart and grows and becomes obsessive and, very unfortunately, becomes a murderous act. So, the language that's used here about the face that is downcast in verse five, and then again in verse six, this is a figure of speech.

It just simply means a looking down or away from God or a superior or somebody in your presence because of disappointment, maybe rage. And I think that's what's occurring to Cain is that there is a jealousy, there's a bitterness and the harvest of that and still of repenting and dealing with it. Instead, sin, we're told in verse seven, masters him.

And in this explanation, there's an admonition here that repent, Cain, and then you become the master of your passions as opposed to your passions becoming your master. This is actually an excellent example of the difference between desires and will because we all have human desires given by God to be used for the good that God has in mind and has bestowed on us. For example, a good desire for food and sustenance, a good desire for sexual relations, a good desire for living in the community, and a good desire for work and achievement.

But these desires have to be within the context of God's will and purpose for those desires. You might think of it this way. You can use a pizza cutter for cutting your pizza and that's what it's designed for.

Or you can attempt to use a pizza cutter for cutting towel, putting towel in your bathroom. Well, here we have the difference between what God wills for your desires and that's what he's designed for you. And that is to be practiced within the circle of his will.

Whereas when you move outside of his will and purpose for these desires, and they become selfish and self-serving, and you try to use your desires to serve your own selfish interests, you will discover that your desires then do not match God's will and

your desires become the controlling factor in your life. And you will discover that your desires will not be satisfying. It's an illusion and is a surreal, false way of looking at reality and how to live out your life.

And this is what is illustrated by Cain who desired in some way the approval of God in his jealousy and envy with his brother. Perhaps there is also something that is behind the scenes. This is my speculation that this would have meant disappointment because of his father Adam and Eve would have been disappointed.

So, Cain does in verse 8 in some way convince his brother to set him aside outside of the eyes of his parents, and he murders him. It's a premeditated murder. And in the law, we are told that Cain, I should say it this way; in the law, we are told that when you have premeditated murder, then there is the consequence of capital penalty that your life is taken.

Now, this is spelled out as a creation ordinance in Genesis chapter 9 because murder must be dealt with the harshest penalty because of the killing of the image of God. Not only is an attack against that person and that person's family, but an attack against the whole realm of society because if there are murderers who are free to continue their murderous treason and betrayal of family and of society, then no one is safe. And there's a breakdown in the community, a breakdown in the community's solidarity because the chain of procreation and inheritance you see would be broken.

Not only is that the case, but this is an affront, an attack on God himself because God himself created men and women in his image. So as a consequence, Cain has become an iconic figure for a murderer, and this is described to us in two passages in the New Testament. Hebrews chapter 11 verse 4, where Abel is described as a man of faith who is murdered by his brother, and this is described in 1 John chapter 3 verse 12.

Now, the Lord is going to point to Cain again, eliciting from Cain a response preferably of repentance, just as he elicited responses from Adam in the garden sin. So, he raises the question, where is your brother Abel? And now we have denial on the part of Cain where he says, I don't know. Of course, he very well knew.

Am I your brother's keeper? And the response is yes. Again, this has to do with a kinship mentality and frame of worldview is that especially in the context of community in the ancient world, you had a responsibility toward your family, toward your clan, toward your tribe, a responsibility toward your neighbor because you were seen as both created in the image of God and also as we progress through Genesis there is a covenant connection that those who have entered into covenant with the Lord are co-covenanters and there's a responsibility toward one who also has a covenant, an agreement relationship with God and that means you have a relationship with one another. So that's what's in mind when it speaks of a brother's

keeper, and the answer, of course, is yes, and as a consequence, there needs to be a response on the part of God to deal justly.

He does choose in the midst of this treacherous betrayal against Abel, he does choose, however, to offer this sinner, this murderer, a remarkable act of grace because instead of taking the life of Cain, he chooses to preserve the life of Cain. And so, verse 11 says, to Cain, you are under a curse and driven from the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. Now, this is an important response, and we can unpack it a bit.

First of all, this is the first time a human has been cursed by God, and the curse is connected, as it was in chapter 3, with the ground. When human beings commit sin and fall under the judgment of God, over which they are responsible, namely the terrestrial sphere of the land and animals, all of that breaks down as well. And so, there is a connection between human sin and all of that under the responsibility of man, all of creation.

And you'll recall in Romans chapter 8, the Apostle Paul brings this point forward. He's simply relying on what we find not only in the Genesis account but also what you will discover in reading the law, the instruction given to Israel by God through Moses having to do with our accountability as stewards over the animal world. And so, I might mention in passing that, for example, the Sabbath observation.

Observing the Sabbath not only meant a succession of work on the part of the native Israelite, but also the immigrant or alien, and the animal as well. Giving the animal, creating an environment of humanitarian attitude toward all life precious to God, including animal life. With reference to the ground, we also see that that is the wherewithal for the life of Cain.

His livelihood was dependent upon the productivity of the ground. And that reminds us of the penalty having to do with Adam, who, yes, could produce food, but it was by the sweat of his brow. Here, it's an even more severe penalty because of the murder.

And because of the murder, then, he is actually exiled and driven away from the harvesting of the fruit of the land. Of course, exile and expulsion remind you of what occurred with Cain's first parents. So, we were told that he would be a wanderer.

Now, the response of Cain is something, it depends on how you read Cain and if you think he's saying, poor me, or if he is having a sense of reconciliation, of repentance, seeking God's renewed favor. But however you read it, the consequence is the same. When he says in verse 13, I can't withstand this punishment.

Verse 14: you are driving me, says Cain, from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence. In other words, hidden from the favor of God, the blessing of God, Cain, even in his decadent life, recognizes the need for God to give blessing and fruitfulness to the land, to the family, and also the herd. I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.

In other words, he will develop a reputation, and I take it that his lineage is in view as well. As it is described in verse 17 and following, the lineage of Cain is subject to Cain's punishment because if someone kills Cain or kills someone associated closely with Cain, that will be a breakdown, a cessation of inheritance and lineage through his family. So, he says, I will be killed.

In other words, this is such a grave penalty against me that it's going to impact generations. So, I think he's pleading in some sense that God might relent. Of course, the common question that's raised is, well, in light of the narrative, who else is around that could possibly kill him? Well, remember now that the lifespan of these early patriarchal figures at the beginning is quite long, and there would have been rapidly numerous offspring born.

So, for example, if you look at chapter 5, it says of Seth, verse 4, after Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. So, there is an explosion of population, and it may well be that those who are connected with the Sethites could have decided to exact vengeance against Cain for killing the innocent Seth, who is, of course, a deceased brother of Seth, because Seth is born to Adam and Eve also, as found in chapter 4, verse 25. Now, in verse 17, we move to the birth of the beginning progeny.

And you'll see by virtue of that progeny, again, God is showing blessing, procreation. Now, ahead of that, we have a mark, it is said, on Cain. Exactly what that mark is, we don't know, but it marks him out with the purpose, with the view of preservation.

With a view of not taking out personal vengeance against Cain. Again, why would God do this? It may well have been God's desire to establish a strong procreation in those early years of the development of human society. We might even see another act of grace on the part of God, in that in verse 19, the offspring of Lamech produces founders and entrepreneurs of the arts and the sciences, beginning in verse 19 through verse 22.

So, there is evidence of God's gracious response to Cain. Perhaps that should be an argument in your thinking that there is, in some sense, a repentant spirit on the part of Cain. Now, when it comes to Cain, he is said to be expelled east of Eden.

You will find repeatedly east throughout the early chapters of Genesis as an orientation of expulsion, driving the people toward the east. We will see this again

when it comes to the Tower of Babel. Of course, it was also expulsion to the east that we have the expulsion of the man and woman Adam and Eve.

Many commentators, I think rightly, have shown that the garden description reflects what is described of the tabernacle in terms of its adornment. In the language that's used for the service and work that takes place in the garden. The suggestion is that the tabernacle was a representation of the garden and that just as God was in the garden with his presence, he was also present in the tabernacle in this tent that was in the community of Israel and around which the twelve tribes established their tents, their dwelling places so that he was dwelling among them.

Or you might reverse this and say, these twelve tribes of Israel were set up dwelling in God's neighborhood. Now, so the tabernacle faces east. And interestingly, then expulsion toward the east would be seen as geographically pushing people away from the presence of God because of their wicked attitude toward God and human life.

As a result, then, this is something of a theology of geography, a way in which the author, in a number of ways, uses figurative language, uses imagery, in this case a geographical marker that the family of Cain has inherited the sin of their parents, Adam and Eve, and that this trajectory, which began with Adam and Eve, is growing in number and also in its intensity. In the lineage that we find here, we are told that an offspring of Cain was Lamech, verse 19. Notice it says that he married two women, and this would have been understood by the readers of Genesis in Moses' community as an act that produced problems within the family because they knew this so well from Jacob, who married the sisters of Laban.

And there is actually a prohibition found in the law specifically against marrying sisters. In this case, Lamech is named in the scripture as the first polygamous, and notice the rhyming and naming of the two wives, Adah and Azillah. Now, after naming their progeny and their occupation, we are told that, in verse 22, Azillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron.

And you have to wonder if these tools were used by Lamech, giving him a technological advantage, and he used them not for good, but for evil. And so we have Tubal-Cain here having provided for Lamech these weapons. And, of course, it doesn't say so.

That's just simply a possibility, a speculation on my part. So Lamech then speaks in a poetic way about his killing a young man, we're told. Now, this is poetry, and when it comes to poetry, you're going to have this kind of parallelism in reputation taking place.

So, an example of this right off the beginning of verse 23, Adah and Azillah listened to me, and then the repetition, wives of Lamech, see that renames Adah and Azillah. Hear my words, would also be a repetition of listen to me, and that's typical of poetry. I have killed, or it could be translated in the future, I will kill a man for wounding me.

So, his response is to kill, to commit murder. And so, was it justified? Well, the way in which Cain describes this murder in verse 24 indicates that his response is not equal to, not accountable for, the wounding he experiences. So, you know of the principle of lex talionis, where you have the law that pertains to a just response, an equal response to the crime that is committed.

In this case, he exceeds that out of vengeance, out of probably his rage and anger for someone who would have reason and motivation; it could have even been unintended wounding. In the last part of that verse 23, it says a young man. Now this may be just the way that poetry works.

You choose a word, and then you choose a parallel word. It doesn't have to be precisely the same. But it is, I think, something for us to consider that the man he kills is, in fact, a younger man who was subject and vulnerable to the stronger Lamech.

Now, there is a reference here to Cain and his reputation. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech 77 times. So, there is a boasting on the part of Lamech, a very sad commentary on the lineage of the Cainites.

And we can see now a development of the severity, the intensity of the sin that is being harvested now in murder. And then, earlier, we talked about polygamy. Now, with verse 25, we move into a brief paragraph describing how God provides for Eve a replacement for the murdered Abel.

And that's why she named him. It's a play on the Hebrew word that means to give, or in the New International Version it says, God has granted me another child in place of Abel since Cain killed him. And then we see that Seth procreates.

So, you have this idea of continuing blessing on the part of God for the Cainites. And she attributes both at the beginning of the chapter the birth of Cain and Abel to God and here again to Seth. Now that fits very well within the worldview of the Hebrew people who understood that children were a blessing from God.

It's a part of God's intended purpose for humanity. That is what I should caution us to remember: that this is speaking of God's plan and purposes for humanity in a general sense. Not every couple can have children, and as a result, it's a very trying and difficult thing for many married couples who want children.

And that does not mean that if that's your case or another's case that you know of in your family, that doesn't mean that they're under a curse or God is not going to bless them. That being single, in fact, we are told in the New Testament, is a lifestyle that the apostle Paul thought better for the community within the church because this person who is single and, of course, not married to have children can serve the Lord more freely and industriously. A couple could do the same, but there are always those options that have the favor of God, and that would be adoption.

We've got to remember that even Jesus Christ our Lord was single. So the blessing of God then is a blessing having to do with one's relationship with God first and foremost, which has been provided for us through God himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. And I have already commented on the end of the chapter and that is a flourishing of worship and devotion.

Notice it says, call on the name of Yahweh, the covenant name of the Lord. And when it comes to interpreting the language of the name of the Lord, there is what is identified as name theology. And what is meant by that is that the theology tells us that the language name is indicative of presence.

And so here we have the idea of calling on the presence of the Lord. Now, in this context, I think it has to do primarily with worship. This is the language that's used later in Genesis for prayer and for worship.

So, when it comes to looking at Genesis 4, we have a genealogy of Cain and the Cainites that results in murder. And then we have this brief birth or report of Seth that results in worship. And so, we begin to see a significant contrast between the descendants of Cain and what we will discover when it comes to the descendants of Seth.

That brings us to chapter 5, where we have a superscription introducing the next section. It begins in chapter 5, verse 1, and you will have a genealogy that runs all the way through verse 32. Then you have two paragraphs that work together, and this is found in chapter 6, verses 1 through 8, that transition from the genealogy and return to the narration and prepare the reader for the flood.

If you'll notice verse 8 of chapter 6, but Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. And then, in verse 9, we have the next superscription, the superscription that introduces Noah. So the translation is that this is the account of Noah and what will become of him as a deliverer.

By virtue of the juxtaposition between chapters 4 and 5, it will be very helpful to us when it comes to interpreting who the sons of God are. I'm looking at chapter 6, the

identity of the sons of God in verse 2 and the daughters of men. So, we want to keep this in mind: the contrast between the two.

Now, when it comes to what's emerging, coming to the surface in chapters 3 and 4 and will continue as a pattern, we'll want to keep in mind that there is an occasion of sin that threatens God's purpose of blessing, his plan of enrichment, which we had said last time, arose out of his character, God is love, out of his character to bless, out of his character to love, out of his character to give himself. And so, there's this sin that threatens all of that. And then there is a penalty or a judgment which curbs that rebellious sinfulness, that wickedness and therefore its consequences.

It curbs it, it restricts it. Then, God intervenes to save a remnant, a portion that preserves the human family. So, the pattern is sin and judgment and then grace.

We see the same thing taking place when it comes to genealogy in chapter 5 and verse 32. So, we can say that the message putting together life outside the garden is that the garden sin resulted in Christ, or I should say, Cain, in his genealogy, which would be murder, and that there is a progression in the breadth and severity of sinful depravity affecting all creation leading to the catastrophe of the flood, however, as in the previous events of Adam and Eve and Cain, God intervenes, Cain and Abel, by God intervening, by showing his grace and preserving a lineage that will receive the blessing.

And we have to understand now that God will direct his saving intention through the family of the replacement of Abel, as he's identified in Hebrews chapter 11, Abel, who is righteous. Seth and his descendants will be depicted as the righteous lineage through which God will bring about the deliverer, the deliverer of the flood, that is, Noah. Then the descendants of Noah will include his son Shem, who is the father of Abraham, the deliverer of all people groups through the creation of a new people group, that is, Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people.

So that is what God has promised. That is what God is working out. There is that struggle between the offspring of the serpent, the Cainites, and the wicked lineage, which results in murder. Then, there is the offspring of the woman perceived and understood as righteous offspring, practicing obedience, worship, and loyalty to the Lord God.

Then, we begin with the genealogy of chapter 5. What we will see here is that we have evidence of a written account. This word written is actually a word book, an account that must have been written down at some early point and was appropriated by the author of Genesis. The headline reminds us of Genesis chapter 1, when God created humanity, chapter 1 verses 26 through 28.

And then in the garden account, the creation of Adam and Eve, when God created humanity, he made humanity in the likeness of God. So that is a clear echo of chapter 1, verse 26. He created them male and female and blessed them.

Now, of course, this is verse 27 of chapter 1, and has to do with the procreation that will follow. And when they were created, now this is new, he called them humanity. A naming then, as we saw earlier, was a recognition on the part of the person naming the presence or status.

We might think of it as the identity of the person who is named, or in the case of the Lord, recognizing his presence and his identity as the Lord God. Now, when it comes to the structure, what we discover is that the structure follows a regular structure. In other words, a predictable structure.

And you'll find that it gives us the number of years of the father, and then the birth, and then the number of years after the birth of the descendant. And then there's the recalling of other sons and daughters, that's routine. And then at last, and then he died.

When you trace this genealogy, you will find that there is much to be found in the genealogy that speaks to how we are to understand the narration that surrounds us. Now, genealogy would have been very critical to the readers because of the whole concept of inheritance and the gift of God to the nation at large and then to each family that participated in inheritance. The notion of a firstborn son, the notion of the perpetuation of the blessing of God through family, to the clan, and then to society, the whole.

There is that sense of community ideology and community identity. But first, we want to recognize in verse three, when Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness and in his own image. So, what we discover from this is that human beings born to our ancestors are also recipients of the likeness in the image of God.

So, this is passed down from parent to offspring, from parent to offspring. Now, granted that Adam and Eve are sinners. Nonetheless, that does not destroy the image of their offspring. They, too, in this case, Seth, are created in the image of God and should be recognized as valuable as Adam and Eve, who were created in the image of God, as valuable in the eyes of God, and should be treated so.

Then we see that, and then he died. At each point, and then he died, tells us, reminds us, rather convincing, that God has brought about the death knell against human life as he had foretold and promised in Genesis 2, verse 17. So even though the man and the woman in the garden ate, we will find that all the successors to the man and the woman, Adam and Eve, are born outside the garden.

So, the family outside the garden has been infected by Adam and Eve's sinfulness. This is why original sin comes into play in describing the grave condition of men and women who are separated from God, and it is necessary for God to step in and bring about reconciliation. When we return next time for session six, we're going to look at chapter six, verses one through eight.

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