

## The First World

*Genesis 4:1-6:9*

### **Cain and Abel**

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Genesis 4 does *not* begin something new. According to its contents it forms a unity with the preceding. For this reason we do not find a new heading above 4:1, nor above 3:9, but everything is still considered under the heading of 2:4.

From 2:4 to 3:24 the Scriptures reveal to us: the creation of man, covenant, fall into sin, punishment, and preaching of the Gospel. Chapter 4 continues with the revelation of how terrible the working-through of sin was, even though it could not destroy the progress from the promise to the fulfilment (4:26).

In this way Genesis 4 preaches the total depravity of human nature, the depth of our misery, and the impossibility of self-redemption. It intends to illustrate the bitter fruit of the sin in the garden and its destructive action, although that action is not unlimited due to the promise of salvation. The Scriptures show the bitter fruit of sin in the most shocking happening of those early days, when Cain slew his brother Abel and went his own way without repentance.

In accordance with the blessing of creation, the multiplying of the human race started from the first parents. When we read that man “knew” his wife, this does not necessarily mean that this was the first time, as if it were a result of sin. It is a common introduction when a birth is announced.

Eve gave birth to her first son, whom she called Cain. We know the meaning of this name from the added explanation: “I have gotten a man with

the help of the LORD.” This may refer to the pains of giving birth (“with the help of the LORD”), but is especially an indication of maternal joy. Some people are also of the opinion that Eve expected salvation from this child; hence the use of the word “man.” When she gave birth to her next son, she called him Abel, which means futility, vanity. Was this to give expression to her disappointment in Cain, who in his growing up showed that he was not the saviour? We do not know. It is also possible that the names describe primarily the difference in stature; Cain, it has been suggested, had been a big child, and Abel was a small, slight boy. In this connection some even assume that they were twins. No doubt there are many questions, also about what follows, but the Scriptures do not answer them. The Bible is concerned with the main thing, the message which is preached.

Similarly the Scriptures do not mention the age of the parents when these children were born, and how old they were when Cain slew his brother. All that we read is that Abel became a shepherd and Cain a tiller of the soil. It is further mentioned in a few words that Cain brought an offer of the fruits of the field as a gift to the LORD, and that Abel followed this with firstlings of his flock, of which he offered the fat, as the best part. How, where, why?—we do not know. We also read that the LORD had pleasure in Abel and his offering, but not in Cain and his sacrifice. It is obvious that God first regarded the heart and that the inner disposition was decisive for the acceptance of the gift. But again, we do not know how this was evident to both; did God Himself light Abel’s offering by heavenly fire, as was the case with other sacrifices of which we read later on in the Scriptures? We do not know. The author hastens to reveal Cain’s evil nature in spite of external religiosity. Later on the Scriptures say frankly that Abel acted through faith and was righteous, whereas Cain was of the evil one, that is, that he was of the seed of the serpent, and that his works were wicked (Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12). God judged Abel according to his faith, and Cain according to his works.

Then Cain became angry, so much so that he became depressed and his face fell. Did he consider himself passed by as the first-born and did he fear that not he but Abel would act as head of the family after his father’s death? Was the idea of the birthright already a problem in those days?

However it may be, it is apparent that he went bowed down as if under a heavy burden and contemplated revenge.

It should be noted that at that time the LORD revealed Himself to Cain with a strong warning against the sin which was lying in wait like an evil beast to spring on him, and with the declaration that he could joyfully lift up his head again if he acted rightly (4:6, 7; cf. Micah 6:8). The LORD showed His love in that speech. Also when *this* covenant child wanted to follow his sinful way, the LORD did not let him go unwarned and He spoke to him with a human voice, as He later spoke in the sending of His Son and is still speaking to us in the Scriptures.

But Cain did not regard it. After a time of separation, he on a certain day addressed Abel again in a so-called friendly manner (cf. *Statenvertaling and Kanttekening*, verse 8), and the latter, not realizing the false intentions, allowed himself to be brought along to the field. There the vindictive one stood up against his brother Abel and killed him without cause. There was no conversion, not even when the LORD called him to account. His rude answer to the question, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ was ‘I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?’ Adam had confessed, although hesitantly, but Cain assumed an insolent and rejecting manner.

Accordingly the punishment was heavier (4:10-12). First the LORD pointed to the crime and then He spoke that terrible word which He did *not* speak to Adam: “now you are cursed.” And the curse wherewith Cain was cursed away from the fertile vicinity of paradise and out of the home of his parents, would stay on him in a wild area where the ground would not yield its full yield and where he would wander as an exile, shunning the people and fleeing from the LORD. His life would be unprofitable like the land where he would reside, and the unfruitfulness for the messianic future would typify all his posterity, which in the days of Noah would be destroyed as weeds. The curse makes unfruitful!

Apparently this made a deep impression on Cain, although it did not lead to conversion. He cried that his crime was too great to bear that burden with his punishment, and in his fear he lamented that anyone who found him would kill him. Concerning the latter point, however, the LORD

assured him that this would not happen because of a sevenfold revenge. As a confirmation of this promise the LORD gave a sign meant only for him, so that every time he saw it, Cain would be reminded that he would not fall by the hand of a murderer. It is not revealed in the Scriptures what this sign was.

Also in this extension of life we see sparks of God's love. How great was God's mercy even toward Cain and later toward his descendants (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). Nevertheless, we see here also the severity of the righteous judgment, already in this earthly life, upon the murderer of his brother, over whom so shortly after the time of paradise sin had such a terrible dominion and revealed such a deep intensity of corruption. It is remarkable that the Lord showed the greatness of His grace, before the sacrifice of reconciliation was completed on Golgotha—to a murderer (Luke 23:43, cf. Hebrews 12:24): disclosure of God's good pleasure.

### **Cain's Generation**

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Cain journeyed east to the land of Nod (place of exile) which is unknown to us. He married and had a son, Enoch. Doubtlessly for protection he thereafter built a fortified dwelling (city) which he named after his son Enoch, and which became the birthplace of his generation. And then the figure of Cain disappears from history. The events of chapter 4, however, continued to be known by tradition, as appears from 4:24. Had Cain told them to Adam? We do not know, but it is certain that they were also remembered by the godly generation, as everything else which is related in Genesis was handed down, and written down by Moses, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Then follows a brief recital of the history of Cain's generation, where evil only increased. The Scriptures still show the working-through of sin! After Enoch three more fathers of a generation are mentioned with whom the genealogy continued, and then follows the name of Lamech, the violent one who, considering the average age of those days, could have been a contemporary of Noah. We may call him the example of the "modern man" of that age. The world-centred way of life received the stamp of the revolutionary breakthrough of the traditional norms and morals, of an unlimited desire for freedom, of lust for power and immorality,

wherewith the “new” age is introduced, the age of the maturing for the world judgment (cf. Genesis 6:1-8; 2 Peter 2:5; Jude 14, 15).

First of all we are told that Lamech broke the still-existing rule of monogamy by taking two wives, Adah (“the elegant, adorned one”), and Zillah (“she who is full of shade”?). One reason why the Scriptures relate this is probably because Lamech was the first to act in this way. This act is undoubtedly qualified as a mark of a disrupted life. It is true that polygamy occurred often later on, also among the devout, but although God tolerated it, its sinful character should not be denied. Still a third name is mentioned, Naamah (“charming one”), who was a daughter of Zillah.

It is remarkable that (whereas in the list of the righteous from Eve to Sarah, women of special significance, no other woman’s name is mentioned), three names occur here, which indicates that the bearers thereof had gained publicity for their importance. Although the meaning of those names (about which there is no absolute certainty, however), might point to a sensual way of life directed to the cult of beauty and gracefulness, we probably have to seek the significance of these women for that time in something else. It is to be noted that the three sons of Lamech, Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain, are mentioned not in connection with their father but with their mother. The importance of this is emphasized when we see that Naamah is not called the daughter of Lamech or of Zillah, but the sister of Tubal-Cain. The glory of these women lay in the sons, that of Adah in her children Jabal and Jubal; that of Zillah and Naamah in Tubal-Cain, Zillah’s son and Naamah’s brother. If for this reason these women gained such notice how famous must the three sons of Lamech’s wives not have been. These men were the powerful pioneers of cultural life and wrought a change in that age. Jabal was the first to make long journeys with self-made tents and herds of cattle through foreign regions; he was the founder of the roaming Bedouin way of life and the life of exploration, regardless of how primitive the beginning may have been. Jubal discovered music and invented lyre and pipe, which also must be regarded as primitive, but nonetheless he can be called the first musician. And Tubal-Cain stepped out of the stone-age into that of copper and iron, which he discovered and knew how to melt into objects. The original text can be interpreted here to say that he was the first to make cutting

instruments, whereby we have to think of the first primitive sword. He laid the basis for the metal industry.

In this connection the Scriptures tell of the Sword Song which Lamech, in bragging pride, sang before his listening wives (4:23, 24). He felt himself strong in battle as a result of the invention of his son Tubal-Cain. Habakkuk's words about the Chaldean people: "whose own might is their god" Habakkuk 1:11), could be applied to him. God would avenge Cain's murder seven times, but he, Lamech, avenged himself with his sword seventy-seven times; he killed a man for an inflicted wound and a young man for a stripe.

It is no exaggeration to say that because of Tubal-Cain's invention violence increased terribly and led to blood feuds which killed off whole families. Thus through discoveries and inventions life entered a new era, which finally culminated in the destruction of the first world. It is not so that cultural development by itself was sinful; we have to regard the development of culture in connection with the God-given work program to subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28) and to take out of it the treasures and powers and possibilities God had placed in it. However, the fragment of history about Lamech and his family is set in the framework of Genesis 4, which shows the working through of sin, also in the development of culture. The apostasy from God makes it so that culture takes the place of religion and leads to the glorifying of man. So it is placed in the service of sin.

Yet, all this does not nullify the promise.

Good seed also sprang up.

For Eve bore a son after Abel's death, whom she called Seth, expressing thereby that she had received another in Abel's place. And to Seth also a son was born, Enos. In his day "men began to call upon the name of the LORD," indicating joint sacrificial and prayer services. In that small circle of Adam's house church life came into being, which in all its varying forms through the different dispensations of time has been maintained till today as the service of the *one* church (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21).

Verses 25 and 26 show God's faithfulness. In the spiritual desert of the first world the LORD has kept the road open along which He wanted to proceed with His revelation to the incarnation of the Word.

This is the end of the first part (2:4-4:26); the beginning was glorious, but how sad was the development of life after Adam's trespass in the garden.

### **The History of Adam**

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With chapter 5:1 begins "the book of Adam's toledoth," which word we will again translate by "history." Here is related the history of Adam and his generation in the line of Seth and Enos until the time of the flood. It is no direct sequence of what is written in 4:25, 26. Chapter 5 has its own character.

In this connection it is important that once more it starts with the creation after the image of God, and the blessing of creation over our first ancestors and all their descendants; we also read here for the first time that God gave them the name "man" and thus distinguished them *in fact* from all other creatures, notably animals (e.g., apes).

It is also significant that Adam's sin is not mentioned here. For God's work had not been destroyed by it. Even though man had destroyed God's image, the grace of God had restored it in its beginning, and therefore in its essence, through faith, by which man already at that time was counted in the Christ Who was to come. For this reason it is of such importance that Adam and his generations in the line of Seth and Enos are characterized in chapter 5 as a devout generation, which feared God. All these men listed up to Noah were holy to the LORD. As such they are distinguished here from the other sons and daughters which Adam begat. Nevertheless, God maintained the verdict of death which He pronounced over the human race. We therefore read in connection with Adam and his devout generation the sad refrain "and he died."

But with one exception—Enoch. We read of this man, the seventh from Adam, and a contemporary of the godless Lamech, that in the group of the devout he was respected because of his godly life (walking with God)

and that he received the good attestation that he was pleasing to God. This hero of faith was, as we read later, a prophet, who proclaimed the approaching judgment of God over the ungodly. This Enoch did not see death. When people missed him and looked for him but failed to find him, the godly rightly believed that God had taken him. We may say it in this way because the Scriptures themselves declare that he was taken up (translated) by God into a better life. By the facts God revealed here for the first time that even though the road to the tree of life was closed, death does not have the last word, but that He has prepared the glory for His own, in which glory the body also shall share. Judgment and grace, death and life, destruction and deliverance are revealed through and in Enoch (cf. 5:24; Hebrews 11:5; Jude 14, 15).

Sixty-nine years after he had been taken away, his grandson Lamech became the father of a son whom he called Noah, for, he said “Out of the ground which the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.” According to the original text the emphasis is on “*this* (one).” Many attempts have been made to explain what Lamech meant by this. Some believed that Lamech saw Noah as the promised Deliverer, just as Eve has been said to regard Cain, and then Lamech would have been mistaken, just like Eve. However, in view of the positiveness of this statement of Lamech as written down, and also in view of the fact that no further explanation is mentioned for any other name in this list, we must assume that the author of the Bible gave it a special significance. We therefore assume that we are dealing here with a prophecy of the Holy Spirit—regardless of the question how far Lamech understood the word or what he himself meant by it. We are here concerned with the witness of the Spirit. And then we hear the prophecy that “this” one, Noah, will show the comfort of the light of deliverance which is breaking through in a world which lies under the heavy burden of the curse, namely, when the judgment preached by Enoch will be executed. But this prophecy has a still wider perspective. The complete fulfilment of the prophecy of Enoch and of Lamech awaits the future of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the God of history joins the beginning of history to the end, and already in the earliest times He gave the revelation of blessing and curse, destruction and deliverance, to make known His ways among which He proceeds to the last day.



Noah had lived 500 years before he begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth. What is told further (6:1-8) belongs also to the history of Adam. It shows us how that pious generation, except for Noah and his family, also fell into apostasy, so that it seemed as if the fulfilment of God's promise about the Seed, Christ, would no longer be possible. This happened when the people began to increase on the earth. We think here of a process which especially in Noah's day took on terrible proportions. The church mingled with the world in mixed marriages, a well-known evil in the history of all times! The sons of God (as indication of the seed of the church) paid attention to the daughters of man (indicating the daughters of the Cainites) and became enchanted by their beauty, by which is meant their physical beauty. They were, therefore, interested in outward charm. It turned into a walking after the flesh (cf. 2 Peter 2:10). A Jewish book called "Henoch," written about a century and a half before the birth of our Lord, and widely propagated, speaks about a fall of angels, because angels married the daughters of man. Also some of the church fathers were of this opinion, and even Luther, yet this is definitely incorrect. Angels know no marriage, and the word "flesh" in chapter 6:3 refers especially to the before-mentioned "sons of God."

And when the church disappears and the Word of God no longer can find a passage, the world is ripe for judgment. The Spirit of God, Who is the Spirit of life, would, according to the Word of the LORD, not always remain in man (mankind) to maintain life, for man is mere flesh (referring here to mortality), and thus God set a time for mankind of only 120 years, which already indicates the judgment to come. Although some bonds between men remained, the bond with God was broken. It became a world without God. The only interest of the people was in the sensual and the material (Matthew 24:38ff.).

One other characteristic of that world is given. There were not only before but also during that time of terrifying apostasy giants on the earth, terrible ones, men of renown. The very long life span gave a powerful physique along with bodily strength. They were terrible, mighty and powerful, and well-known. In the service of sin, this would mean that crime and terrorism (Lamech!) were not lacking; yet these men must also have accomplished much so that they made a name for themselves. Even after




the flood there were still giants (Deuteronomy 1:28; 2:10, 11; 2: 20, 21; 3:11; Joshua 14:15; 1 Samuel 17:4; 1 Chronicles 11:23; 20:4-8.

Because of the evil of man the LORD was sorry that He had created him, and it grieved Him to His heart. This expresses in human terms how much grief God suffered because of the human race which had fallen so deeply, so that He intended to sweep the earth clean. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, not because he was without sin, but because He counted him in the Christ Who was to come (cf. Hebrews 11:7). Because of Christ there was still a future for the world. Here the light of the gospel breaks through.

### **Questions**

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1. When the outline mentions God's long suffering with Cain, what is meant by this?
2. Why would God not immediately have brought the death sentence over Cain (cf. Genesis 9:6)?
3. What does it mean when Hebrews 12:24 says that the blood of Christ speaks more graciously than that of Abel?
4. Where did Cain get his wife?
5. Are there examples in the Scriptures of high cultural developments among the Israelites?
6. What does it mean in Genesis 5:3 that Adam became the father of a son "in his own (Adam's) likeness, after his image"? In what ways did Seth resemble Adam? Did this appear at birth or when Seth was growing up?
7. Are there many clear examples of mixed marriages?
8. What are some of the results of being married to a worldly person?

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9. What does 1 Corinthians 7:14, 16 mean in this connection? May this be used as a criterion in our *choice* of a marriage partner?
  10. How should we consider an inter-church marriage? Can this be combined with a spiritual unity in marriage (cf. Ephesians 5:31, 32)?
  11. When choosing a partner may one make the choice of a church dependent on it?
  12. What was the sin in just regarding beauty when choosing a marriage partner?
  13. What resemblances to the old era do we see in our time?