

GENESIS

A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

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CAIN AND ABEL: TRUE VERSUS FALSE WORSHIP (GENESIS 4)

Since the Bible is primarily concerned with the relationship between God and man (our own histories would have no doubt focused on more “interesting” subjects concerning the beginning of mankind!), the story immediately moves to what is of uppermost importance to God. God is not slow to address this problem of sin and death; he has definite things in mind to deal with it, and he wants to get to work on it right away.

As God “builds his House” (Psalm 127:1), he lays down a spiritual foundation that will be used throughout the rest of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. And surprisingly, he not only works on the solutions that will be of eternal benefit to his own Family, he also works out the way the rest of the world, in its wickedness and rebellion, will continue through history. He leaves nothing to chance; the wicked, though they think they’re getting away with murder (quite literally in this story!) are only living on borrowed time. It’s true that “he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45); but the mark of Cain is upon them all, and at the end they will all be gathered together and judged for what they are. “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” (Jude 14-15)

So this story shows the source of the two great rivers in human history – the people of God, and the rest of humanity. It also shows us what God thinks of each one, and what he has in mind for each.

The elder son – We are going to see a consistent theme in Genesis, and it starts here in the story of Cain and Abel. Most cultures in the world’s history have assigned varying degrees of importance to the eldest son – the firstborn son of the family. In our day, it may be a cause for rejoicing but it doesn’t mean extra privileges; democratic principles demand that every child get a fair share. But in the times of the Bible, the firstborn son not only had preeminence among his siblings, he was also responsible to take care of the rest of the family when his parents died. For this reason he was given a double share of the inheritance (see Deuteronomy 21:15-17) and he was made the “executor of the estate” – responsible to take care of the family members who needed help, like his mother, sisters, servants and the family business.

But in the Bible, we’re going to watch God put together a new Family based not on genetic or biological descendants but on spiritual descent. One’s physical family will too often prove to be a major disappointment; they will themselves fail God repeatedly, and be of no help spiritually (even hostile) to those members of the family who want to follow the LORD. Jesus, for example, was harshly realistic when it came to the family. “A person’s enemies will be those of his own household.” (Matthew 10:36)

Here with Cain, we will see not only the eldest son rejected by God, but also Cain’s hatred for his holier brother. Being the elder doesn’t guarantee that he has any wisdom, as far as God is concerned; nor does it mean that he has rights in God’s eyes. There are going to be *two* family lines in the earth

from now on, not one family (even though we are all of Adam's race). And God will almost inevitably choose the younger sibling, the brother who – in the world's eyes – should have no rights or priority.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

An offering to the LORD – This is the first recorded worship in the Bible. Man never had any problem believing that there *was* a God; between family traditions (with Cain) and the inner promptings of the Spirit of God (with Abel) we all know that God is real, and that we owe him some kind of service. The question, however, is what that service must look like.

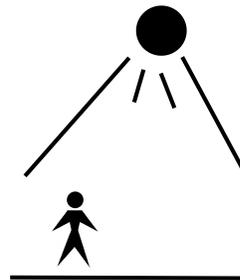
There has been a lot of debate about whether Abel brought the right sacrifice (from his flock) and Cain brought the wrong one (from his harvest). The problem with comparing one against the other like this is that the Law of Moses later specifies both types of offerings: for example, offerings from flocks and herds (Leviticus 1) and grain offerings (Leviticus 2). *What* was brought to God wasn't nearly as important as *how* it was brought.

In this case, however, we could probably say that Cain would have been better off bringing an animal sacrifice in light of what we are going to see concerning his heart. He had some spiritual issues that could only be satisfactorily dealt with through the kind of offering that his brother Abel had.

We are about to witness the birth of two different kinds of worship. Almost everyone believes in God,¹ but how they worship God follows either one line or the other – Cain's methodology or Abel's.

Abel's faith – Many students of the Bible have wondered why Abel's sacrifice was accepted but Cain's wasn't. Some believe that Adam and Eve taught him the right thing to do; some think that he had the right "heart" and attitude, which impressed God and caused God to accept him.

But Hebrews tells us what the correct answer is: "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts." (Hebrews 11:4) Faith is a special ability, given by God, to see "what is invisible" – in other words, God's spiritual world. ***Faith is walking in the light of God's world.***



Faith isn't something that we can do on our own. God has to turn the light on for us, because otherwise we wouldn't be able to see spiritual realities. But when God's light (the New Testament calls it the Logos) shines down on us from Heaven, we can see

¹ Atheists are a rare breed, notwithstanding all the noise they make. They get away with their arrogance only when the level of technology and supporting culture give them the kind of life and protection they need without having to go to God for it. When they lose their supports in this life, suddenly they take God seriously. Even Voltaire, the great atheistic French philosopher, shook his fist in God's face on his deathbed.

things like God himself, his glory and power and wisdom. We can see ourselves in a new light now – sinners in need of grace. We can see the world around us for what it really is: a dark world of death and suffering, emptiness and vanity, with spiritual dangers and temptations surrounding us and threatening us everywhere.

We can also see by faith the answer to our spiritual problems – which is the eternal Son of God and the special work he does for our sake, rescuing us from sin and death. That pathway to life, from this world to the next, becomes clear to see in God's new light.

That's what Abel saw so clearly in his faith. He saw the elements of the only true sacrifice that God will accept from sinful man.

The *first step of faith* – the Word of God that brings light to the soul – is, of course, God's part of the transaction. If that isn't there, faith is impossible. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) We aren't told *when* Abel was shown the right way to worship God, but all the Bible stands as a testimony that the only way he could possibly have done the right thing which would satisfy God's requirements is if God (the Spirit) showed him first. How would Abel have known unless God first showed him? These are eternal realities from another world. We will learn later in the story of Abraham that faith always begins with the Word of God, never with the opinions or desires of man. Revelation is the foundation for true faith.

The *second step of faith* is to act according to what we see in God's Word. If what God tells us is true, then "what sort of people ought you to be?" (2 Peter 3:11) Believers walk by the light of another world; they live by principles that this world

doesn't understand. Christians look strange when they do so – "With respect to this they [*the wicked*] are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you." (1 Peter 4:4) What believers see, and what the wicked don't see, is the road to God, the way out of this dark world of sin and death. The road was made by God, the Spirit gives light and power to walk the road, and so the believer naturally starts out on his journey going to a place that this world has no conception of.

So Abel brought a sacrifice in light of what he saw in God's world.

God accepts true worship – What Abel saw was the fundamental principle of true worship: *the sinner throws himself on God's mercy.*

- He sees the glory of God, the holiness of God, the pure righteousness of God – in full, he sees the "consuming fire," the power and terror of the Law of God and why men must fear him. And whatever this God gives us is grace, a gift undeserved.
- He also sees his own worth – not only is he just a creature, but he is also a sinner in God's eyes and deserves death, not life. The standard for righteousness is God's Law, not man's. We have fallen short in ways that we cannot fathom. It is certain that God owes us nothing, especially in the light of all the trouble we've been to him.
- And he sees that God has provided a way of escape from sin and death – an act of sheer grace and mercy. One who takes this offered route will find life.

So Abel brought a sacrifice that addressed those spiritual realities.

- An animal from the flock for a substitute
- The firstborn

- The death of the offering
- An atonement for his sin

Here is a profound insight into what makes up acceptable worship. *First*, he knew his own guilt, and what the Law of God requires – the death of the guilty sinner. *Second*, he could see God’s grace in his willingness to accept a substitute to die in Abel’s place. *Third*, being able to see all the way into the Holy of Holies in Heaven where the Trinity dwells, Abel brought the firstborn of his flock. After seeing the obvious, this new insight of the Firstborn brought Abel into the presence of the Christ himself, the only Firstborn whose death would be an acceptable substitute for man’s sin. “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn over all Creation.” (Colossians 1:15) “The Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.” (Revelation 13:8, *NIV*; see footnote in *ESV*) And to see that the Firstborn had to be killed, by God’s decree, and that his death would be accepted by God as a substitute for the deaths of the faithful, is to get hold of the very heart of the Gospel of Christ.

The result was that “the LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering.” The simplest way to translate the Hebrew phrase here is this: “The LORD gazed upon Abel.” It’s as if Abel’s faith suddenly brought him into the presence of God, where God looked upon him with love and grace and mercy – indeed, as a Father loves one of his own sons. To God, it was a beautiful sight to see his son come back to him. To enter into God’s presence by means of a sacrifice means nothing less than what the rest of the Bible explains it to be: he entered into the Temple of God, the House of his Father, all the way into the Holy of Holies, and is now accepted as part of the Family. We can better understand the full import of God’s accepting Abel by the remark he made later

to Cain in contrast: “If you do well, will *you* not be accepted?”

The reason this sacrifice worked, and that Abel became acceptable to God, is that there is absolutely no manipulation of God here (in contrast, again, with Cain’s approach). Abel is putting the whole matter of his soul in God’s hands and accepting what God graciously gives him, like a child in the hands of his Father. He came to God’s throne to take care of his *sin*.

“And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.” (Hebrews 11:4) What Abel did became the foundation upon which all acceptable sacrifices in the Bible were built. The kind of sacrifice that God seeks from us 1) reveals our sinful state, 2) puts forth a substitute, chosen by God and based on God’s graciousness, and 3) involves the death of the substitute. All the sacrifices that we read about in the Mosaic Law adhere to this pattern; the great Sacrifice of Christ follows the same steps. There is no reason, therefore, for modern students to think that our Christian faith is “new” in any way – Abel’s sacrifice was following the *only* pattern by which God has dealt with his people from the very beginning of the world.

Cain’s false worship – In contrast to Abel, Cain came to God with his own agenda. We know this because God wasn’t fooled with what Cain was really doing. “But for Cain and his offering he had no regard.” Cain came without faith. But it’s not the lack of faith *per se* that crippled him, it’s the lack of what faith provides. Without faith he couldn’t see the real spiritual issues involved, and so his sinful heart was laid bare before the Judge without the benefit of an atonement, or the “covering over” of his guilt.

If we can put it in a nutshell, when people worship God without faith, *sin is not what’s on their mind*. It’s always on God’s agenda when dealing with man (for him it’s

always the first order of business), but it is never the real issue to the wicked. Cain's sin loomed large in God's eyes; note what God said to Cain in this regard: "Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." But Cain, evidently, had no intention of mastering his sin. He came to manipulate God. And here is the essence of false worship:

*Here is the best of what I have – I
give it to you, God. Now you owe me
something.*

Their intention is to manipulate God into doing what they want. They're bargaining with God: *I'll do this for you, now you do something for me.* If a person has taken the time to worship God (and in every culture there are many forms and methods of "worship") then surely God will honor him in return and bless his life. It's a matter of performing the ritual, the ceremony, of saying the right formula to trigger a response from Heaven that God acknowledges my efforts for his sake – so he *owes me something* in return. All false religion is based on this premise. And the church, unfortunately, is full of worship like this.

Notice that this kind of worshiper has already formed an idea in his mind of what God is like, and it doesn't match what the Bible says about him. If he had true faith, he wouldn't dare to come to God with such an arrogant attitude. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom* – and of all true worship.

What is frightening about this, what Cain seems to miss completely, is that God rejects this kind of worship. People get nowhere with him by doing it this way. In Cain's case something evidently happened that made God's rejection plain for even Cain to see; unfortunately, his pagan descendants don't usually get the picture explained so clearly to them (probably

because God thinks that one warning is enough), and they are worshiping God in vain without knowing their danger. The "Glory has departed" and they're worshiping in an empty building. Perhaps God personally set fire to Abel's sacrifice and ignored Cain's; we don't know for certain. But whatever happened, Cain immediately realized he was rejected and *then* the true state of his heart came out: he was still an unchanged sinner, and he was determined to get revenge. His "worship" did nothing for his soul.

War in the family – Cain, instead of showing any sign of repentance (which would have been the proper thing to do when confronted by God) instead got angry – at both God and Abel. "So Cain was very angry, and his face fell." This, if nothing else, shows that he was trying to manipulate God and, when it didn't work, resented the "injustice" shown toward him – that God favored Abel instead of him. His attitude revealed that he *did* expect some reward in return.

His anger only grew over time. There would be no reconciliation with God or with his brother. In fact, the deeper problem here is that Cain would never see that *he* was the problem. His blindness to spiritual realities – or another way of putting that, his lack of faith – meant that he would blame everyone except himself for what doesn't go his way. He will never understand the truth about God.

And he will in no way accept his brother's religion, because that would require an admission of guilt. *There will always be war between God's children and the children of darkness.* What seems so obvious to a believer is offensive and nonsense to the wicked; there simply isn't any possibility of reconciliation between the two. And when believers are forgiven, blessed and fulfilled because of their faith,

that just makes the wicked even more jealous and angry.

The lesson is that there really are two forms of worship among men, and they are totally alienated from each other. A person is either on one side or another. One is accepted by God, and the other rejected. So there will always be war between the two camps; false worshipers won't be satisfied until we believers are destroyed.

The first murder – And now we come to the inevitable conflict between the two parties. This issue about relating to God is not just a philosophical discussion. The righteous are an irritating testimony to the wicked concerning their perversions and empty lives – the righteous deal with sin, and the wicked don't. If Cain would have let Abel live, he would have had to endure the humiliation before the entire family that he was rejected – and the reason for his rejection (his sin) would have been an ugly topic for public discussion. Nobody likes being looked at as a reprobate, even if they are one. We all have “good” excuses for our behavior – justifications, good reasons, extenuating circumstances, disadvantages, genetic “dispositions” – we get quite creative explaining away our ugly actions and thoughts.

So the only way for Cain to get rid of this irritating testimony is to kill his brother. When righteousness is swept away, wrong then rules unmolested; in fact, wrong becomes right. The old saying, “might makes right,” describes what Cain is really doing here: he is pushing God aside, and setting up the circumstances to suit himself (which includes the justification and promotion of his life of sin).

That he would actually kill his brother over this issue is shocking, but we need to understand the reality of the animosity of the wicked toward the righteous. The righteous are a living condemnation of the wicked:

there will never be peace; there will always be war. There will never be understanding between the two, let alone reconciliation, short of God's transforming power.

The end result is that the *righteous* man died. That seems so counterintuitive to our desire to see a “happy ending” for the faithful! Does God take care of his people?

Responsibility – Cain's reaction to God's demand about his brother's whereabouts was insolent to the extreme. This is God he's talking to with such arrogance. God, of course, knew exactly what happened to Abel; he expected some sort of remorse, or at least a semblance of fear, from a criminal caught in the act. Instead the sinner comes out in startling defiance against him.

The real tragedy is not only that a murder was committed, but that the heart of man is so hardened against God and righteousness. Man is truly dead to God; there is no conscience at all. If God would confront all the rest of humanity about the crimes they have committed (see Romans 1:18-32 for a pretty complete list), he would encounter the same defiant attitude, from the least offensive little grandmother to the most seasoned murderer. A dead heart has no love for God, no concern for his glory, no interest in the Law, and certainly no intention to “do to others what they would have done to themselves.” (Matthew 7:12) In fact they have no interest at all in fixing their spiritual problem.

Cain's remark was, of course, a ploy to see if he could lie about the situation first, acting as if he didn't know where Abel was. That was a stupid (but characteristic) thing to do with God, who “discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4:13) The wicked always try this though, because they

believe the Enemy's lie that "nobody will know."

But God is not satisfied with anything less than the truth. Since sinners can't be trusted to be honest and plain about their actions, God provides the correct interpretation of what we've been doing. Statements like the following are what's called "plain speaking."

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. (Romans 3:11-12)

When God told Cain that "the voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground," he called Cain's crime *murder*, and brought it out for all the world (including us, who are reading this account of God's court action) to see. Only God's interpretation of our actions counts; and then he will proceed to a course of action based on the way *he* sees this. He is not interested in our barefaced lies and skewed opinions.

The confrontation between God and Cain is definitive for all the wicked. Remember this story.

A curse on Cain – The curse that God pronounced upon Cain has often confused students of the Bible because it almost looks like leniency instead of punishment. He let Cain go; all he did was 1) made sure Cain couldn't make a living by working the land, and 2) sent him away to be a wanderer. But not being able to live off the land was definitely a hardship, since it's by the land that we get food, the essential of life. Sending him out to be a wanderer forced him to look to another way of supporting himself – thereby setting the stage for the "civilization" of his descendants in the following verses. Whatever we might think about the benefits of culture, the real wealth

and power is with the land; all the rest depends upon this.

Cain was worried that someone would kill him for his crime, out of fear that he would do it again. But God put a mark upon him (we don't know what kind) to warn others away. This mark was not a blessing. It's as if God were saying to the rest of the world: "Leave this man alone; I myself will deal with him the way he deserves." And God's intentions are best described in the book of Revelation.

If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name. (Revelation 14:9-11)

What God was really doing with this mark was "keeping" Cain on hold until Judgment Day. The sinner will definitely be judged.

The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:9-10)

There's nothing so sobering as to realize that, for as hard as life is for us right now, the worst is yet to come. Prolonging the prison sentence until the condemned is executed only increases the agony; it empties life of its meaning and joy. In everything we do, we keep looking at the

clock and waiting in fear for the final moment.

And yet Cain is not the only one carrying this mark. The lives of the wicked are a foul stench to God; there is no mistaking them in the crowd. To him, they are like weeds in the wheat.

Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn. (Matthew 13:30)

People should be aware that God has already formed his opinion about them; and while they may have freedom right now to live as they please in God's world and commit whatever crimes they want to get ahead, their day is coming. As God gathers all souls before his Throne at the end of time, the descendants of Cain will be set apart – unmistakable for the sin stain upon them, without any necessity to question them further – on his left. (Matthew 25:31-46)

The line of the unbelievers – From here the story talks about the descendants of Cain. There are two important things to note.

First, his descendants spread through all the earth. They did great things; they grew skilled in the kinds of things that make culture and life important to the masses of humanity. They became powerful and renowned, and built empires. This is, in fact, the great desire of sinful man – to change God's creation and make the world something that will feed his lusts for materialism, power, enjoyment, knowledge. It's a world without God, though it looks glorious on the surface. The truth is that it's empty and superficial, and doesn't address the needs of the human heart at all. It's a replacement for what man ought to be doing. But the great majority of humanity are

fascinated with their culture, and it takes up their whole lives from dawn to dusk – and then the next day they're back at it, hoping to achieve what they didn't get done yesterday.

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

There's no denying, for those who value such things, that there is great profit in all of this; but as Jesus pointed out, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26) Here in Genesis we are taught where this whole business of "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" (1 John 2:16) actually started: the world is full of the descendants of Cain, the worshipers of false gods, the builders of civilizations.

But as the Apostle tells us, the wise avoid the rat race: "The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:17) It's the spiritual descendants of Abel who will win in the end, not those of Cain.

Sin rules – Sin breeds more sin, and new generations are often more wicked than their forefathers. Lamech referred to "Cain's revenge," evidently taking his forefather's precedent as a model for his own actions. Things are now to the point where the wicked will kill whoever gets in their way, for whatever trivial reason, as if human life was of little value. There is little opportunity for peaceful solutions of problems when revenge (which is driven by

greed and self-centeredness) is so viable an option in society.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. (James 4:1-2)

This is the first example of “the futile ways inherited from your forefathers.” (1 Peter 1:18). The damage that sin causes is multi-generational.

A new family line – Let’s go back to the tragedy of Abel. The question still stands: does God take care of his people? Cain certainly did not get what he wanted; he ended up with a cursed life and the threat of doom looming up before him on Judgment Day.

Abel won the day even though it may not appear that way. For one thing, God accepted him because of his sacrifice brought in faith. And that faith was specially designed to show Abel a new spiritual world, which Paul talks about at length in Romans 8. The Apostle tells us that “hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:24-25)

Therefore death became the doorway to life. What Abel wanted was the next world, not this world. So God gave it to him.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-30)

Abel was entered into the roll of those who had faith – Hebrews 11. And there we are told that “they desire a better country, that is, a Heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.” (Hebrews 11:16) So Abel was the first person to be listed among the faithful in that chapter, and he became the first one to enter into his new home.

Persecution is always the inevitable effect of our living among the wicked. But the realization that “for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28) will cause us to praise God even for persecution.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in Heaven. (Matthew 5:11-12)

One more note to make here is that Adam and Eve had another son, Seth, whom Eve considered a replacement from the LORD for the loss of Abel. As the story showed us the beginning of the great natural river of humanity stemming from Cain (and his godlessness), so we see the spiritual river starting again in Seth’s line. It’s among his descendants that we will eventually reach Abraham, the Father of the faithful, the Patriarch who is the beginning of the Family of God culminating in the birth of Christ.

The Name of the LORD – We are told that “At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.” When we see this word in capital letters, it represents the Hebrew word יהוה, or in English letters, YHWH. This is a special Name of God that is experienced only by his own people; the significance of the Name was revealed to Israel during and after their Exodus from

Egypt. You can find a definition of this Name in Exodus.

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6-7)

Much of what this name describes will come out in detail as we progress through the stories of Genesis. It is mentioned here because we are about to trace the "scarlet thread" of God's plan to use a particular genealogical line in humanity for his solution to sin and death. Seth is the forerunner of the genealogies of Genesis 5 (leading to Noah) and then Genesis 11 (leading to Abraham). This verse is like a road sign letting us know ahead of time that Israel's God is guiding the process of the Covenant, and forming Abraham's Family, from the beginning.

The Point – There are two family lines forming in this story: the natural man, who worships God in the wrong way; and the spiritual man, who worships the true God in faith. The characteristics of the natural man are plain to see – an utter disregard for his sin, trying to manipulate God into doing what he wants, focusing on recreating this world to fulfill his lusts, living with doom over his head, filling his life with war and emptiness and destruction.

The spiritual man sees the way to Heaven. He humbles himself and puts his soul in the hands of a just and merciful God. His reward is full acceptance as a son of God, holy and righteous. This is the first step to becoming a member of the Covenant Family. That's why Paul, talking about the

Inheritance, starts out with the forgiveness of sins.

Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:12-14)

The two family lines will continually interact with each other throughout the rest of history. In fact, Cain's descendants will continually persecute Abel's spiritual descendants.

They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. (Luke 21:12)

All through the Bible, Old and New Testaments, we see them warring with each other for dominance. On the surface it will appear that the wicked almost always wins, but that's only an illusion. The "older brother," the ones with preeminence in this world, the ones who are in charge – their "victory" will turn into bitter defeat, while the righteous will be resurrected from the dead to eternal life. All the problems that the wicked cause will turn upon themselves.

When the story switches to Abraham and the Covenant in chapter 12, we will once again return to the spiritual man and see the world of God that Abel saw by faith, only more fully. Then the LORD will create the Family from Abraham's loins that will turn into a great Nation, all living by the faith that their forefathers first taught them.

And through his faith, though he died, Abel still speaks. (Hebrews 11:4)

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