

BEGINNINGS: Lesson Six,
Creation: The Beginning of Two Lines of Humanity
Genesis 4:1-5:32

Subject: Following Abel’s murder, the Bible records the emergence of two hereditary lines with opposite bents.

Main Idea: Our life choices impact generations.

Principles:

1. *Our true characters are revealed in crises.*
2. *Specific sins can become generational unless they are submitted to God.*
3. *We each have the opportunity to leave behind a legacy of faith.*

Introduction

Eventually, most adults find themselves to be more like their parents than they ever would have imagined, in both good ways and bad. Just as parents, grandparents, or other key figures have had a profound influence on each of us, we are influencing others, especially those younger than we are: our children, a younger person in our church, a younger co-worker, and so on. Whether we have children or not, each of us will leave a legacy comprised of our attitudes, character, and life choices that will impact others.

In the last lesson, we learned of God’s judgment on Adam and Eve. Eventually, they would return to dust. Genesis 4-5 indicates that that was exactly what happened: Adam and Eve’s son Abel was murdered (chapter 4) and the phrase “then he died” is repeated through Adam’s genealogy.

But there is something more going on in these chapters. Genesis 3:15 prophesied that two seeds would emerge: that of the woman (Eve) and that of the serpent (who represents Satan). The verse also predicts the crushing of the serpent’s head by the seed of the woman, an event Jews and Christians alike have understood as a messianic prophecy. *Genesis 4-5 traces the early development of this prophecy through two emerging lines of humanity with opposite bents.* Cain and his descendants are the seed of the serpent. Cain “*belonged to the evil one*” (1 John 3:12). After Abel was murdered, Seth replaced him as progenitor of the woman’s seed. Seth’s descendants “called on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26). These two brothers left legacies that impacted their descendants, legacies of character and attitudes.

From that time forward, two lines of humanity have always existed: those who are true God-worshippers and those who live in rebellion against Him. “The seed of the serpent” is the line of faithless, godless, fallen humanity. The “seed of the woman” is the line of faith-filled, regenerated, redeemed humanity.

I. Cain and Abel's Inner Lives Revealed - Genesis 4:1-16: Cain and Abel's characters were surely developing during the years they were growing up. Genesis 4 tells of an event in which specific life choices revealed their true nature.

A. The Births of Cain and Abel – 4:1-2: Cain and Abel were apparently the first of many sons and daughters of Adam and Eve (5:4).

- i. Cain and Abel's Birth: Some have suggested that Eve had God's promise of a deliverer in mind when she bore her first child Cain, and that perhaps she spoiled Cain by making him the center of her hopes and dreams. This can't be proven, but since many parents spoil one or more of their children by making them the central focus of their lives, it wouldn't be surprising if Eve made this mistake. Sometime later, Abel was born. From what Genesis 4 indicates, Cain was selfish and Abel was not.
- ii. Cain and Abel's Occupations: Cain worked the soil while Abel kept flocks. Some try to take spiritual meaning from this, such as that Cain's work with the soil associated him with the Curse, while Abel's work with the animals associated him with life before the Curse. But we cannot say with any certainty that one occupation was better than the other; Adam must have had both roles.

B. Cain and Abel's Offerings – 4:3-5

- i. Purpose of the Offerings: After a period of time, Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord. Cain brought some fruit, while Abel brought fat portions from his flock's firstborn. Why were they bringing offerings? In the time of Moses, who recorded Genesis, God clearly mandated a system of animal sacrifices to atone for sin. Prior to Moses' time, there is no conclusive evidence that any such mandate had been issued. Cain and Abel's offerings may have simply been expressions of worship.
- ii. The Lord's Response to the Gifts: God was pleased with Abel's offering but not with Cain's. The Bible does not say exactly how Cain and Abel knew this, but the more important question concerns *why* only one of the offerings was acceptable. Some have suggested the problem lay with Cain's offering, but the text says, "On Cain and his offering [the Lord] did not look with favor" (4:5). The problem must have involved both the man and the offering.

1. *Abel and His Offering*: Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. In ancient times, the fat was the premiere portion of the animal. The fact that Abel chose the best portion from the firstborn, the dearest of the flock, suggests that his gift was costly. To offer one's best requires faith that God will provide for our needs. Hebrews 11:4 indicates that Abel is still relevant speaks today as an example of faith. This is true worship.

2. *Cain and His Offering*: By contrast, Cain merely brought “some” of the fruits of the field. He selfishly kept the best for himself and brought the Lord what was left. This is a description of formalistic worship. It was what Cain felt *obligated* to do. His inferior offering was a reflection of an inferior attitude toward God. The Bible repeatedly shows heart attitude to be the determining factor in the acceptability of worship.

C. The Lord’s Warning to Cain – 4:6-7

i. Cain’s Crisis

1. The Lord’s rejection of Cain and his offering forced a crisis upon Cain. Verse 5 tells us Cain was very angry, and his sullenness was written on his countenance. Rebellion was about to overtake him. God knew Cain’s unchecked anger would result in sinful actions. He was gracious and eager to assist Cain in his crisis. The Lord encouraged Cain that he had equal opportunity with Abel to be accepted. God graciously offered Cain room for repentance. The Lord warned Cain that sin was like an animal that crouches to pounce on its prey. Cain needed to master this temptation. Finally, the Lord God set a *choice* before Cain to turn from resentment, lest it consume him and he act further on it.
 2. Cain could have driven his thoughts into positive channels. He could have chosen to focus on his work until his temper cooled. He could have dwelt on God’s good promise to his family and many provisions. He could have humbled himself in recognition of his need.
- ii. Our Choice: We have the same choice: Sin crouches at the door of our hearts waiting to pounce on us, if we open the door to it. Jesus also stands at the door of our hearts waiting to fellowship with us (Revelation 3:20) and deliver us from temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). *We choose to whom we will open our heart’s door.*

D. The Lord’s Judgment on Cain – 4:8-16

- i. Abel’s Murder: Cain failed to heed God’s warning. He attacked and killed Abel. 1 John 3:12 tells us that Cain murdered Abel because Abel was righteous and that Cain chose to align himself with the Evil One. Those who live in opposition to God have always resented the good ways of God’s people, whose righteous deeds stir up their guilty consciences.

ii. God's Challenge Regarding Abel's Murder

1. The Lord came to Cain in divine judgment. First, he gave Cain an opportunity to confess his sin by asking where his brother was. Cain lied and denied that he knew what had happened. His response ("Am I my brother's keeper?") revealed his underlying bitterness and defiance. God told Cain his brother's blood cried out to Him from the ground. Abel's blood cried out for justice! A life for a life! Blood for blood!
2. In the face of a Holy God, justice is what we deserve for our sin. We deserve God's wrath and vengeance. The penalty for sin is death. Hebrews 12:24 contrasts the cry of Abel's blood with the better word spoken by Jesus' blood. It proclaims that God's demand for justice has been met; the penalty for sin has been paid!

- iii. Cain's Curse: God put Cain under a two-fold curse: the failure of the ground to produce crops for him and a life of restless wandering. Rather than contemplating the severity of his sin, Cain complained about the severity of his punishment: "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" (4:13-14). Such is the response of the person who has already convinced himself that God isn't just.
- iv. Cain's Mark: In response to Cain's complaint, the Lord put a mark of some kind on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. Although many people have ventured guesses about Cain's mark, the Bible does not say what it was. Cain's fear of being killed was reasonable, since family members of a murdered individual want vengeance. Genesis 5:5 says that Adam and Eve had other sons and daughters. Over the course of Adam's 930 year lifespan, the total number of family members would have quickly grown; some estimate to as many as 10,000. Quite a few of these might have sought vengeance.
- v. Cain's Banishment: The land of Eden was larger than the parameters of the Garden, and apparently, the family continued to dwell in Eden after being cast out of the Garden. It was still a region where God had some manner of unique presence (4:14). Cain was banished from Eden altogether and went to live in the land of Nod, to Eden's east. As far as the scripture records, Cain never again returned to the Lord's presence.

Summary Statement: Cain's response to the Lord's rejection of his offering revealed his inner character.

One set of parents can raise two children who choose very different attitudes in life. Abel chose to love God. Hebrews 11:4 calls him a man of faith. It was “*by faith he offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.*” It was because of his “*faith (that) he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings.*” By contrast, Cain harbored a root of bitterness.

We don’t know all that transpired in Cain’s life, prior to his unworthy sacrifice. We can, however, fairly assume that both Cain and Abel were well aware of their parents’ fall and banishment from the Garden. Surely their parents had told them of the former glory of the Garden and their life with God. The knowledge left Cain and Abel with the same choice their parents faced, a choice of attitude toward the hard work and frustrations in life that resulted from the Fall. They could accept the deserved judgment or resent it.

It seems reasonable to assume that Cain had struggled with inner resentments, prior to bringing his offering. We choose our attitudes and responses to situations, and those choices are reflective of our inner character. Cain, it seems, had chosen resentment and bitterness. All the attitudes Cain had indulged up to the point of his sacrifice were revealed by his response to the crisis that occurred when God rejected him.

Principle: *Our true characters are revealed in crises.*

Cain had a sullen, resentful attitude. Crises don’t create attitudes; they merely expose them.

Illustration: Well-known pastor and author Chuck Swindoll has this to say about attitude:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes.ⁱ

Application: When was the last time you inventoried your own attitude and character? Is there an underlying attitude of superiority toward a difficult person? An attitude of resentment, sullenness, and self-pity over your circumstances? Eventually, some kind of crisis will reveal our characters for what they truly are.

What is especially concerning is that those watching our lives will be influenced. Which bad attitude will you ask God to help you permanently change, before it leads you and those over whom you have influence into serious trouble?

Transition: The remainder of chapter 4 indicates that Cain's rebellion influenced his descendants for generations.

II. **Cain's Line: The Seed of the Serpent** - Genesis 4:17-24

A. Cain's Wife: Verse 17 unexpectedly mentions Cain's wife, without explaining where this wife came from. Up to this point, the Bible has only mentioned the existence of four human beings: Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel. Some suggest God created other people not mentioned in Scripture after He created Adam and Eve, but modern scientists defend the unity of the race. Apparently, Adam and Eve were the sole originating parents of humanity. Although God certainly could have created a wife for Cain without mentioning it in the Bible, it seems unlikely that He created anyone other than Adam and Eve. This means Cain's wife could only have been another descendant of Adam and Eve, probably his sister. Close inbreeding apparently did not create genetic/biological issues until later in history. Abraham married his half-sister (Genesis 20:12) and Moses' father married his aunt (Exodus 6:20).

B. Cainite Culture: Although God had told Cain that he would be a restless wanderer, Cain defiantly built a city for himself, refusing to wander. Perhaps it was a self-styled attempt to fill the void of living away from God's presence and provide security for his growing family. Without God, Cain turned his attention to earthly matters. His descendants apparently did the same. At first, it may be surprising to learn that Cain's descendants were responsible for cultural and technological advances (musical instruments, Bedouin life, and the forging of tools, in addition to city-building) – all seemingly good things. However, in light of the clear contrast that is made between the lines of Cain and Seth in Genesis 4-5, the point of mentioning these accomplishments seems to be that like their forefather, Cain's descendants sought temporal pleasures. They put God's gifts in a place that belonged to God alone: culture and the arts were their gods. The same can be said about the great empires throughout history: education, culture, the sciences, and the arts have been, and continue to be, their gods.

C. **Cain's Descendants**

- i. No Ages Given: Unlike chapter 5's genealogy of Seth, chapter 4 does not list the number of years Cain's descendants lived. Perhaps the inference is that while their lives seemed productive in human terms, they amounted to little in God's eyes.

- ii. Lamech: The first thing we learn about Cain's descendant Lamech is that he married two women. Lamech was the father of polygamy. Furthermore, Lamech boasted of vengeance killing (or at the very least a murderous spirit). William Reburn renders Lamech's poem:

*Adah and Zillah, listen to me.
Pay attention to what I tell you, wives.
I would kill a man because he wounded me.
I would even destroy a child for bruising me.
So if killing Cain costs seven lives,
kill me and it will cost you seventy-seven.ⁱⁱ*

Apparently, Lamech considered himself too powerful for retaliation by others for his murderous deed and arrogantly concluded that he could do whatever he wanted with impunity. He needed no one's forgiveness. By contrast, Jesus told Peter that a God-follower should be humble enough to forgive endlessly (both used the number 77 as a symbol of "endless"). The point is that Cain's selfish, defiant, and rebellious attitude was handed down to subsequent generations.

Summary Statement: Cain handed down a legacy of resentment, pride and rebellion against God. We might call this the Cainite Culture, the culture of the Seed of the Serpent!

Principle: *Specific sins can become generational unless they are submitted to God.*

Scientific and sociological research, as well as personal experience, confirms that certain tendencies, for both good and for evil, are handed down within families. Most adults would not need to think very hard in order to identify a particular sin they struggle with that also plagued one of their parents or grandparents. In some cases, genetics play a factor. In other cases, the sociological influence of family plays a larger role. But it may also be that demons, who are cunning, intelligent, and have lived throughout human history, study the character of our forefathers and look for similar weaknesses in us, even from the time we are young.

Application: Satan is a defeated foe and has no claim on Christians. Nevertheless, God has permitted him limited power to try to mislead us. What must we do? It does little good to merely pray the next generation won't inherit our weaknesses. We must allow God to change *us*, as an example to our children of what God can do when our weaknesses are submitted to Him. We must show our children and those over whom we have influence what it looks like to keep growing in Christ, even into the last years of our lives, and continually set aside specific sins.

We can begin by identifying the specific sin and the lies we feed ourselves to justify it. We should then seek Scriptural truth to combat our rationalizations. Finally, we should seek practical help, such as the accountability of a friend or counselor and the replacement of former habits with new ones (for example, reading, scripture memorization, or serving others to fill idle moments, going to bed and rising at a different time, or spending our free time with healthier people). With God’s help, which generational sins will you determine to end?

Transition: The last verses of chapter 4 and the first verses of chapter 5 contrast the wickedness of Cain’s descendants with the righteousness of Seth’s.

III. Seth’s Line: The Seed of the Woman - Genesis 4:25-5:32

A. The Births of Seth and His Son, Enosh - 4:25-5:3

- i. Seth in Place of Abel: With Abel dead and Cain disqualified as the “seed” who would crush her enemy’s head, Eve delighted in the birth of her son, Seth (probably meaning “grant”). When’s Seth son Enosh was born, it became all the more certain that God was raising up a new line “in place of Abel” (4:25), through whom He would fulfill His promise to Eve (Genesis 3:15).
- ii. Calling on the Name of the Lord: “At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord” (4:26). Most scholars understand this to refer to worship, probably corporate worship. The same phrase, “called on the name of the Lord,” is later used when Abram built an altar to the Lord (12:8; 13:4).

Keil and Delitzsch conclude: *While the family of Cainites, by the erection of a city, and the invention and development of worldly arts and business, were laying the foundation for the kingdom of this world; the family of the Sethites began, by united invocation of the name of God of grace, to found and to erect the kingdom of God.*ⁱⁱⁱ

- iii. Toledot – 5:1-2: Notice the new toledot (“*This is the written account of...*”) in 5:1. An account of Adam through Noah’s descendants (5:1-6:8) begins with a reminder that man was made in God’s image (5:1) and ends with an announcement of the destruction of God’s creation (6:7).
- iv. Seth was “in Adam’s image”: While Adam had been created in God’s image (purely), Seth was born in Adam’s fallen image. Like Adam, Seth was mortal and would die. Surely this grieved Adam. Seth must have shared many of Adam’s positive qualities as well. He was in Adam’s own likeness (5:3).

B. The Longevity of Ancient People: Genesis 5:5 tells us Adam lived 930 years. The longest recorded life in the Bible is that of Methuselah, who lived 969 years! What do Bible scholars have to say about the length of life attributed to these ancient people? Several theories have been proposed.

- i. A Different System: One idea is that the years in Genesis 5 are based on another system of arithmetic.
- ii. Years of a Tribe: A second thought it that each patriarch is intended to represent an entire tribe of people and that the years given are the years of the tribe.
- iii. Symbolic: Yet another suggestion is that “the genealogy is contrived simply to say that the distant past is so far removed that no present means can account for their antiquity,” though it makes a theological point about God’s blessing.^{iv}
- iv. Literal View: The traditional view is that the ages are literal and reflect an antediluvian (pre-flood) era in which the climate allowed exceptional lifespans, the full effect of sin had not yet taken its toll on the human body, and “life was much more simple and uniform.”^v Longer lifespans would have contributed to a rapid increase in human population.

C. Seth’s Descendants

- i. The Significance of Genealogies: New Bible students often wonder why the Bible contains so many genealogies and whether they have significance. Preserving a record of a life lived may stem, in part, from the desire for eternal significance, especially since the Fall separated people from the fellowship they were intended to share with their Creator. Of course, genealogies are also a practical way of preserving history for future generations. As the population on earth began to grow, at some point, not every living person would be able to recall the roots of every other living person. A genealogy offered proof of one’s heritage and aided the memory of future generations. With regard to the genealogy in Genesis 5, the purpose is not to help us calculate the amount of time between Creation and the Flood. The specific purpose of most Biblical genealogies is to trace God’s promise to send mankind a Deliverer (Genesis 3:15) to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This promise was the basis of forward-looking faith for all these early patriarchs. They were watching and waiting for the birth of this person.
- ii. A Motif of Death: 5:6-24: Despite cultural progress, Genesis 5 emphasizes that, in the end, each man died. The words “*and then he died*” conclude the summary of each life. What God created as good ended in a cycle of death. However, each man’s death did not occur until after he propagated life, assuring each generation that God’s promise (Genesis 3:15) was still alive.

- iii. Key Figures in Adam (Seth)’s Lineage: The writer (Moses) draws attention to several of the men in the genealogy in chapter 5:
1. *Enosh*: Seth’s son Enosh was born at the time when public worship began (some translations credit Enosh with this). By contrast, Cain’s firstborn, Enoch (a different “Enoch” than the son of Seth who “walked with God”), is known for building the first city. As one scholar observed, “Cain’s firstborn and successors pioneer cities and the civilized arts, but Seth’s firstborn and successors pioneer worship.”^{vi}
 2. *Enoch*
 - a. *Walked with God*: This descendant of Seth “*walked faithfully with God.*” The phrase describes fellowship and obedience to God – exactly what human beings were created for! It’s possible that prior to the Flood, when there were still landmarks that made Eden identifiable, God personally revealed Himself to Enoch, as He had to Adam and Eve. Hebrews 11:5 mentions Enoch as a man who pleased God by faith. “*Walking with God*” can’t possible involve a complete distancing of oneself from real life. Enoch had children! Furthermore, according to Jude 14 and 15, he was a prophet who told his generation about God. Enoch rubbed shoulders with his contemporaries, yet his faith was such that he apparently loved the praise of God more than the praise of men.
 - b. *God Took Him Away*: Then Enoch “was no more because God took him away.” In the Biblical record, only Elijah shares this experience of translation into heaven without physical death. It is a beautiful picture of what those who are alive at Christ’s return will experience!
 3. *Lamech*: The last descendant in both Cain and Seth’s lines is named Lamech. The comparison between the two extends beyond their names, for in both lists, only the Lamechs speak. But it is immediately obvious that this is not the same individual. Not only do the two Lamechs descend from different lines, they are characterized in entirely different ways. Each epitomizes the spiritual condition of his ancestors. Cain’s descendant Lamech was a polygamist who boasted about his vengeful and murderous spirit, while Seth’s descendant Lamech anticipated the fulfillment of God’s promise, hoping God’s blessing would come through his son, Noah (5:29).

Summary Statement: While Cain's descendants represent faithless, godless, fallen humanity, Seth's descendants represent faith-filled, regenerated, redeemed humanity. Like his forefathers, Adam and Seth, Lamech put his hope in God's promise.

Principle: *We each have the opportunity to leave behind a legacy of faith.*

Illustration: I can trace my own confidence in the Lord to the example of my parents. A few times as I grew up, our family relocated, according to the Lord's calling on my father's life. What I most recall about these situations was my parents' confidence that the Lord would give them direction. Once the Lord's answer came, I witnessed their obedient response. Time and again, I have seen my parents' hope in the Lord, and I praise God for the impression it made on me.

This is exactly what Seth and his descendants did: they called on the name of the Lord and put their hope in Him and His promises. Imagine the impact we can have on our children (regardless of their ages), our co-workers, believers who are less mature in the faith, and others who observe our lives, if we will actively *put our hope in God!* To whom will you model real and active hope in God this week?

Conclusion

I once sat in the lecture of a seminary professor with a fabulous spiritual heritage. Among his close relatives are Bible scholars and martyred missionaries. I listened as he humbly told us about the wretched life of his grandfather and how his grandfather came to faith in Christ. He encouraged those present by saying, "You may not have the family history with which I have been blessed, but you can, like my grandfather, *begin* such a legacy!"

Every spiritually rich family heritage begins with one individual who chooses to trust in God's promised Deliverer, Jesus Christ, and models their faith by instruction and in daily living to the next generation.

In many ways, each of us is like our parents and others who have influenced us. But once we have trusted Jesus to save us, we can choose new habits and patterns of thinking to pass on to the next generation. We will all leave some kind of legacy for those who follow us. What kind will you leave?

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- ⁱ Swindoll, Chuck (quoted at <http://www.bigeye.com/attitude.htm>)
- ⁱⁱ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998). *A Handbook on Genesis*. UBS Handbook Series (127). New York: United Bible Societies.
- ⁱⁱ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998). *A Handbook on Genesis*. UBS Handbook Series (127). New York: United Bible Societies.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Vol. 1: Commentary on the Old Testament* (75). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- ^{iv} Mathews, K. A. (1996). *Vol. 1A: Genesis 1-11:26. The New American Commentary* (300–302). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ^v Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Vol. 1: Commentary on the Old Testament* (78). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- ^{vi} Mathews, K. A. (1996). *Vol. 1A: Genesis 1-11:26. The New American Commentary* (292). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.