



Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus

A Discipleship Journey

The OLD TESTAMENT- Their Story is Our Story

Cain, Abel & Seth

Genesis 4, Week 2

Most Biblical scholars believe the first 11 Chapters of the Bible to be myth - archetypal or universal stories that explore creation, human nature, and our relationship with God. These stories help us make sense of the world, find meaning, and give us direction. The story of Cain, Abel, and Seth fit into this category. Generally seen as the story of sibling rivalry, murder and banishment, the events can also offer us a path to spiritual transformation.

As the story goes, Cain and Abel, the first two sons of Adam and Eve, both make offerings to God. God favors Abel's offering over Cain's so, in a jealous rage, Cain murders Abel. As punishment, God banishes Cain from the community and subjects him to a nomad's life in the wilderness. Yet God, in his abundant grace, vows to still protect him from those who may wish to kill him. Adam and Eve had relations and she gave birth to Seth, whose descendants eventually become the Israelites.

As mentioned in our introduction, this story is one of personal transformation, with insights into how we grow from spiritual immaturity into maturity. Cain, representing humanity's spiritual immaturity, picks up where Adam and Eve left off; focused primarily on his external worldly image, he'd forgotten who he was created to be. Cain did everything expected of him: he tilled the soil, tended to the crop, and *brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil* (Genesis 4:3). Abel also did everything he ought: as keeper of the flocks, he protected and nurtured the flock. When the time came for his offering, *Abel, for his part, brought one of the best firstlings of his flock* (Genesis 4:4).

The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not.
(Genesis 4:5)

God accepted both offerings, but favored Abel's - why? Both men did what they were supposed to do, but Abel gave from the heart, gave his best. Cain fulfilled an obligation, perhaps out of his worldly need for approval and status; Abel gave out of love and a desire to be in relationship with God, characteristic of living from his true self made in God's image. Abel, then, represents one who has been transformed or spiritually matured.

We all struggle with the tension between what the world wants us to be and who God is calling us to be. Sometimes, like Cain, the world wins. Concerned with pleasing God and our faith community, we do all of the things we ought to be considered good Christians - go to Mass, volunteer, pray, donate to charities. But perhaps the effort is made more for our benefit rather than as an expression of love. When that happens, our reward is empty, meaningless, and may leave us feeling a bit lost, untethered or banished to the wilderness. But there is always hope. God doesn't leave us in the wilderness; He is always offering us another chance. Adam and Eve bore another son, Seth, who remembers who he is created to be and goes forth to live a righteous life. Seth becomes humankind's second chance at a right relationship with God. We, too, can experience this spiritual transformation and mature in our relationship with God. We, too, can re-connect with who we were created to be and carry on the work God calls us to do.

What have been some of your Cain-Abel struggles? What was it like for you when your "Cain" prevailed? When your "Abel" prevailed?

What is most helpful for you to become more like Seth and live into the image of who we were created to be?