

BIBLE STUDIES
SERIES: HEBREWS CHAPTER 11

LESSON #3

ABEL

Hebrews 11:4

“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

We come now to the first of the Heroes of Faith or Biographies of Believers. The first person mentioned is Abel, who worshipped by faith. It is significant that the first person listed is Abel, not Adam or Eve.

Here is the first act of worship recorded in human history. True worship is the highest faith function of the human soul, and only as we worship God can we walk with God and witness for God.

The account of Abel is very sketchy. Many things are left unexplained. There are no details where we want to see the details. But there is a window into Abel’s life in Genesis 4:1-8 that gives us insight into Abel’s home life:

“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.” (Gen.4:1-8)

OUR INTRODUCTION TO TWO BROTHERS

There is a town on the Amazon River in Brazil with the official name of “Port Of Two Brothers.” I have been there. In fact I know the two brothers who established the town. They were missionaries. Here in Genesis chapter four is what we might call, “The Portrait Of Two Brothers.” They were quite different from the two brothers who established the Port of Two Brothers!

This paragraph of biblical history in Gen. 4, gives us the bare details of the early life of these two brothers. First, let us consider:

The Two Offsprings.

Cain - The Elder Son. The name “Cain” in the Hebrew is “Kan” and means: “spear.”

Abel - The Younger Son. The name "Abel" in the Hebrew means: "vapor, breath."

Make what you will of the meaning of their names, they are very interesting in view of what developed later.

Their Two Occupations.

Cain was a farmer. "*Cain was a tiller of the ground*" – Gen.4:2a

Abel was a shepherd. "*Abel was a keeper of flocks*" – Gen. 4:2b

Both are commendable vocations. There is nothing negative suggested by their occupations, neither are we to infer that one is preferred above the other.

Their Two Offerings

This is the area that we must understand in order to comprehend what was going on between the two boys and God. These were the first recorded sacrifices after the Fall and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. In fact, these were the first recorded sacrifices of the human race.

Gen.4:3 - "*Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground.*"

The British Pastor and Author, Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "*Cain was the lover of a merely outward worship, in which faith had no place. He loved a worship of show and pomp, he garnished the altar with fruits and decked it with flowers; his was a religion of taste and elegance, a religion of his own devising.*"

Gen.4:4a - "*Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock.*"

Abel's lamb was a single lamb – one lamb for one man. Later on, at the Passover, it became one lamb for one family. Still later, on the day of Atonement, it became one lamb for one nation. And finally, at Calvary, it was one Lamb for the entire world.

Abel represents true worship; Cain represents false worship. The two offerings are therefore expressive of the different kinds of religion.

Here we have the background and the basics of the story of the two brothers. This is an overview of the story that we are introduced to in Genesis four. Now for some observations:

SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT TWO BROTHERS

The Activity That Is Described.

The activity in which both boys were engaged was an act of worship. Both Cain and Abel gave offerings to God. How did they know to do that? Did God instruct them? Did God specify what was an acceptable offering? If so, how did God communicate with them?

In the early days of human existence on the earth, God communicated directly and verbally with the early inhabitants. At least 25 times in Genesis we read: "God said...." In Gen. 4:9 & 10 God carries on a verbal conversation with Cain questioning him: "*Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD said, "What have you done?"* And the conversation continues.

By prior conversations God had instructed Adam and Eve about many things as in Genesis 1:27-31 *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’ Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so.”*

Other conversations are recorded in Gen. 2:16,17 where God talks to Adam and Eve about what to eat and what not to eat, and, in 3:8-19 where He talks with them about their disobedience.

Evidently God had verbally revealed His will about many things to Adam and Eve, including the matter and manner of worship. “We may imagine it was the habit of their parents, and has descended to them with all the sanction of parental example.” (Barnes' Notes) Cain and Abel had received specific instructions that were intended to govern their offerings to God.

The activity that is recorded in Genesis four pertains to worship. The whole story centers around their acts of worship. “Worship”, you say? “Worship is worship. How one chooses to worship is up to the individual. All religions are good. We should be free to worship according to the dictates of our own conscience.” Not so fast! Wouldn't it be a good idea to consult the One Who is to be worshipped about how to worship Him? What was God's appraisal?

The Appraisal That Was Delivered.

Genesis 4:4-5:

nasb: *“And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.”*

nkjv: *“And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.*

The Message: *“God liked Abel and his offering, but Cain and his offering didn't get his approval.”*

Cain became the founder of the world's first false religion. False religion is an attempt to come to God by another way other than that which He has prescribed. There were differences in their worship which reveals the essential differences in the two sons. God was pleased with Abel and displeased with Cain. More about this later.

The Anger That Was Displayed.

Gen.4:5-16 - *“So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? “If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?” He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is*

crying to Me from the ground. *"Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. "When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear! "Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." So the LORD said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold " And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him. Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden."*

There is more in this passage than we could possibly extract in one session. Suffice it to say that if you want to find out the true condition of Cain's heart, look at what happened after he worshipped! How do we act after church is over?

What we have seen this far in this lesson is background, only the preface to the major point of this lesson which is the statement with which we began in Hebrews 11:4 - *"By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks."*

Let us now concentrate on this and other statements in the Scriptures about the two brothers.

GOD'S EVALUATION OF THE TWO BROTHERS

God's evaluation of the two brothers is very revealing. The lives of Cain and Abel are so interwoven and entwined that it is difficult to focus on the one without at the same time focusing on the other. However, God's comments recorded in scripture bring into focus the stark differences between the two brothers in a very dramatic way. Notice first:

God's Evaluation Of Cain.

If we search scriptures we will see God's evaluation of him:

- *"The Lord did not respect Cain and his offering."* Gen.4:5
- *"Cain was very angry"* Gen.4:5b
- *"..... and his countenance fell"* Gen.4:6a
- *"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door."* Gen.4:6,7
- *"Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him."* Gen.4:8
- *"Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know....." Am I my brother's keeper?"* Gen.4:9
- *"..... now you are cursed from the ground When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you."* Gen.4:11
- *"A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth."* Gen.4:12
- *"Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD"* Gen.4:16
- *"By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain"* Heb.11:4;
- *"Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother."* I John 3:12a
- *"... why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous."* I John 3:12b

- “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer” I John 3:15a
- “..... and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” I John 3:15b
- “Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain.” (the apostates) Jude 11

There may be those who read the account of Cain’s encounter with God and say that Cain’s banishment was excessive punishment. However, a second look at the lifestyle that Cain chose will reveal that Cain was a rebel against God all his life. There is no indication that he ever repented of his disobedience to God’s Law or of his murder of his brother.

He was religious but not righteous. He turned his back on God and walked away never to return! He forfeited the God of grace. Cain was not a child of God because he did not have faith.

As I have stated, the lives of Cain and Able are closely entwined. However, even though Cain has been in the spotlight somewhat, the real star is Abel. And we shall see that he far outshines his brother as we look at:

God’s Evaluation Of Abel.

We begin with God’s evaluation of Abel by looking first at Hebrews 11:4 - “*By faith Abel offered.....*”

There are two all-important principles encased within this verse:

Principle one: Abel’s attitude toward God.

“*By faith Abel offered....*” Abel had faith in God; Cain did not have faith. This is the point of the whole story. There was a distinction in the disposition of the two worshipers. Abel had that quality of faith that resulted in him obeying God’s revelation regarding an acceptable sacrifice. Cain did not have this quality of faith and the faith of the worshiper is essential to the acceptableness of the offering.

Heb. 11:6 “*without faith it is impossible to please Him....*” Cain’s faithless offering was rejected; Abel’s faith offering was accepted. Cain was rebuked by God; Abel was commended.

We see clearly, at the very beginning of the human race, the principles of faith and faithlessness, faithless worship vs. faith worship. And both are very obvious down through human history to this very day.

Principle two: Abel’s approach to God.

Heb. 11:4 - “*By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice .“* Abel’s attitude of faith in God had everything to do with Abel’s approach to God. He approached God with the appropriate sacrifice which had been specified by God. As we have seen, God had revealed His will verbally to Adam and Eve and their family, regarding worship and many other matters. Here, in the early history of mankind, is the practice of a principle that continues throughout the Bible, that of substitutionary atonement; the principle of a blood sacrifice.

Heb.9:22 *“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”* You see, the fact that God accepted Abel’s offering is evidence that the offering was what God had stipulated. It was a blood sacrifice which was a requirement for a sin offering.

“These are the first recorded sacrifices of the human race. To form an accurate conception of the idea which lies at the foundation of all sacrificial worship, we must bear in mind that the first sacrifices were offered after the fall, and therefore presupposed the spiritual separation of man from God. (Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament)

SUMMATION

- Abel is an illustration of faith; Cain of faithlessness.
- Abel offered a slain lamb; Cain gave an offering of produce. We have reason to believe that Abel had some realization of his sinfulness and his need for forgiveness.
- Abel approached God on God’s terms; Cain approached God on his own terms.
- Abel was commended by God, Cain condemned.
- Abel was obedient, Cain was obstinate.
- Able is referred to as *“Righteous Abel”* (Matt.23:35); Cain is referred to as *“of the wicked one”* (I John 3:12)
- The first two brothers in history stand as the types and representatives of the two main and enduring divisions of mankind, and bear witness to the eternal enmity between good and evil.

CONCLUSION

We have but scratched the surface of all that was involved in the story of two brothers. Although there is more about the rebel brother in scripture than the righteous brother, we must not allow Abel and his faith to get lost among all the other intriguing details. It is Abel’s faith that is the focus of our study. Although not one single word that Abel every said is recorded, Abel’s faith has a living voice! The record of his faith is a testimony to succeeding generations!

Eugene Peterson writes of faith as follows: *“It’s often said that living by faith is a risky way to live. What isn’t so often said is that living by sight has risks, too. Even greater risks The greater danger wasn’t living by faith but living by unbelief.”*

Biblical scholar James Moffat wrote that *“death is never the last word in the life of a righteous man. When a man dies, whether righteous of unrighteous, he leaves something in the world. Dead men do tell tales. They are not silent, they speak.”*

Abel’s testimony is ringing clear yet today! Heb. 11:4 *“He, being dead yet speaks...and though Abel is long dead, we can still learn lessons from him about trusting God.”* (TLB)

After death, what will be said of your life? Cain did it his way, Abel did it God’s way – which way will it be for you?

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