

# DEVOTIONAL

SHIPWRECKED  
BITTERNESS: CAIN AND ABEL  
SEPTEMBER 18, 2022

GRACE  
FELLOWSHIP

**Discussion Starter:** What uncontrolled emotions can wreck a relationship among family members?

**Key Text:** “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’<sup>2</sup> And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,<sup>4</sup> and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.<sup>6</sup> The LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?’<sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.’<sup>8</sup> Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.” (Genesis 4:1-8)

In 1509, Pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and Raphael to paint the frescos in the pope’s office. Although both projects were to be done “for God’s glory,” a spiteful rivalry arose between the two artists. Michelangelo resented Raphael’s easier assignment and the attention Pope Julius showed Raphael. Raphael was envious that Michelangelo had been given such an honored and prestigious venue to paint. Their attitudes worsened to the point where they refused to even speak to one another—and all this bitterness and strife arose in the midst of their work “for the glory of God.”

Jealousy and bitterness are two of the most destructive emotions we can experience. They steal our joy and obstruct our perspective. Their effects are especially damaging when they occur among family members. In our lesson today, we’ll see how jealousy and bitterness shipwrecked the relationship between two brothers: Cain and Abel.

Upon pronouncing a curse for Adam and Eve’s sin (Gen.3:14-19), God promised that through Eve He would bring a Savior who would defeat Satan and restore all things (Gen.3:15)—a promise that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. After their eviction from the Garden of Eden, Eve gave birth to her and Adam’s first son and named him “Cain” (which means “gotten” or “acquired”). Eve may have at first thought Cain was the redeemer God had promised (4:1), but she would soon realize how mistaken she was!

After Cain’s birth, Adam and Eve had a second son and named him Abel, which means “breath” (4:2). The Bible doesn’t tell us how much time passed between Cain and Abel’s births. These two boys would usher in the world’s first “second generation.” Cain grew up to become a farmer; Abel became a shepherd. Although brothers, Cain and Abel were diametrically different in their hearts and attitudes toward God. Scripture describes Cain as representing all people who love evil (1 Jn.3:12), but Abel as “righteous” (Heb.11:4). Eventually, Cain would murder his brother Abel.

**Discuss:** What factors do you think lead to siblings responding to God and the Gospel differently even though they are raised in the same home?

## 1. A Difference in Cain and Abel's Offering

We can imagine these brothers growing up near Eden's gate, which was guarded by the angel's flaming sword (Gen.3:24). The boys had heard how their parents tried to cover their sin with fig leaves and how God instead covered them with animal skins, signifying the importance of blood sacrifice and substitution (Gen.3:7, 21). When the brothers came of age to worship the Lord themselves, Abel feared God and brought to God the best of his flock (4:4), but Cain brought what he had gathered from the earth—an offering representing his own works (4:3).

**Discuss:** According to these verses, how did Jesus do away with the animal sacrificial system once and for all: Hebrews 7:27; 10:1-10?

## 2. A Difference in God's Response to Cain and Abel's Offerings

The Bible never suggests that Abel's profession as a shepherd was more respectable than Cain's profession as a farmer—in fact, people in Bible times subsisted on both jobs. However, God “*had regard for Abel and his offering*” (4:5), but “*for Cain and his offering he had no regard*” (4:6). Rather than obeying God, Cain brought the work of his own hands as an offering to God. His salvation-by-works action became a prototype of the essential elements of false religions: refusing God's plan and trying to atone for sin through a system of good works. Jude 11 declares, “*Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain.*”

In contrast to Cain's approach, Abel offered a blood sacrifice, thus demonstrating his faith and obedience to God's plan. God accepted Abel's offering because Abel approached God on the basis of substitutionary sacrifice. Hebrews 11:4 says, “*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.*”

**Discuss:** Read Hebrews 12:24. In what ways does Abel's offering prefigure Christ? How do you think Christ's offering “*speaks a better word*” (Heb.12:24)?

## 3. A Difference in God's Invitation and Cain's Decision

God assured Cain that if he turned to God in repentance, he would be accepted (4:7). But, rather than repenting of his lack of faith and reverence for God, jealousy toward Abel and bitterness consumed Cain and turned him into the world's first murderer: “*Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him*” (4:8).

**Discuss:** What is it about jealousy and bitterness that makes them so destructive to a relationship? What can we learn from these verses about jealousy and bitterness: Romans 12:15; 1 Corinthians 3:3; Galatians 6:4; James 3:16?

### For Further Study:

Free online commentary on the Book of Genesis at [www.enduringword.com](http://www.enduringword.com)

“Cain and Abel” article at [www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org)

“Why Did God Accept Abel's Offering but Reject Cain's?” [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)