

THE ACCEPTED OFFERING

Genesis 4:1-5

INTRODUCTION

- A common theme in the popular music of the world is that of self-rule, self-determination and a rejection of authority
 - ✓ “Do what you wanna do, be what you wanna be”
 - ✓ “Born to be wild”
 - ✓ “I did it my way”
- This accurately describes the fallen state of man, living for sin and self, while rejecting the Lordship of Christ over them
- In all the false religions of this world, the same man-centred attitude directs their religious observances
- They have some sort of “god” they worship, and have devised the means by which they can approach unto their god
 - ✓ Repetitious prayers, mantras
 - ✓ Offerings of produce, food, or animals
 - ✓ Acts of asceticism, penance, self-harm
 - ✓ Keeping the Ten Commandments
 - ✓ Observing the sacraments
 - ✓ Baptism, church attendance
 - ✓ Pilgrimage to a “holy site”
- Some have the opinion that it doesn’t really matter how you worship God, he will accept you as long as you are sincere and try your best
- “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” (Proverbs 14:12)
- Multitudes in this world are convinced that they are on the right way and when life comes to an end they will enter into a blessed eternity, not realising that they are in fact heading to eternal damnation in the lake of fire
- If we are to be saved and find acceptance with God in the day of judgment, it must be by the way *God* prescribes, not by the way man imagines
- Thus far in our studies of Genesis we have covered:
 - ✓ In Genesis 1 the creation of the heavens, earth and all things including man
 - ✓ In Genesis 2 the details of the creation of man and woman
 - ✓ In Genesis 3 the temptation and fall of man, the entrance of sin, the curse upon creation, as well as the promise of a Saviour

- The promise of Genesis 3:15 is key to what follows in Genesis 4 and the rest of Scripture
- There God revealed that from Eve there would come forth a “seed” (descendants) and those descendants would branch into two lines – a godly line and an ungodly line, and those two lines would be at continual enmity against each other
- That enmity would be manifest in the first two sons of Adam and Eve – one is righteous and belongs to God, while the other is unrighteous and belongs to Satan
- And really in the opening eight verses of this chapter we are shown the stark contrast between the righteous line and the unrighteous line
 - ✓ In how they relate to God (vv.1-7)
 - ✓ In how they relate to one another (v.8)
- Then as the second half of chapter 4 through to the end of chapter 5 we follow the growth of those two opposing lines – the ungodly line represented by Cain and his descendants, and the godly line represented by Seth and his descendants
- There are several firsts in this chapter
 - ✓ The first baby (1)
 - ✓ The first farm (2)
 - ✓ The first religious offering (3-4)
 - ✓ The first death (4:8)
 - ✓ The first murder (4:8)
 - ✓ The first martyr (8)
 - ✓ The first city (17)
 - ✓ The first cattle herd (20)
 - ✓ The first music (21)
 - ✓ The first metal works (22)
- Verse 1 records the birth of Cain
- His name means “acquired”
- Eve’s declaration, “I have gotten a man from the LORD” may indicate that she believed that this son was the promised Seed who would bring deliverance
- It is noteworthy that whereas during the temptation Eve only used the name *Elohim* for God, here she uses the name *Jehovah*, an indication of the faith that she now had in the LORD
- Verse 2 records the birth of Abel
- His name means “vanity” – there are various thoughts as to this name
 - ✓ It may be a prophetic name foreshadowing his untimely death

- ✓ It may reflect Eve's realisation that Cain was not the promised Saviour and her disillusionment in this
 - ✓ It may be her feelings about human existence in a cursed world generally – vanity and lacking in meaning
 - ✓ In Cain's lofty name and Abel's lowly name, we perhaps see how man can misjudge and esteem by outward appearance things completely opposite to how they truly are in God's sight
- In ancient times, birth order was of great importance
 - The firstborn:
 - ✓ Has the preeminent position among the children
 - ✓ Has authority over his brethren
 - ✓ Has the birthright – entitled to a double-portion
 - Under the Mosaic law, the firstborn belonged to the Lord, was to be consecrated to God – the tribe of Levi took the place of all the firstborn of Israel (Numbers 3:12-13)
 - Yet there are many instances in Scripture where the firstborn was not blessed, or lost the blessing he ought to have received and the blessing went to the second-born, creating resentment and enmity between the two
 - ✓ Abel over Cain
 - ✓ Isaac over Ishmael
 - ✓ Jacob over Esau
 - ✓ Ephraim over Manasseh
 - ✓ The prodigal son over the elder brother
 - ✓ Christ (the Second Adam) over the First Adam
 - There is a principle here that God blesses the second birth
 - For us as individuals, we all have our "first birth", that is our physical birth which includes our fallen, sinful, adamic nature – the flesh, the old man, the carnal nature that is opposed to, and at enmity with God
 - The first birth is not blessed, but cursed
 - The second birth is the blessed birth – this is the spiritual birth that takes place the moment we trust Christ for our salvation
 - Born again, born from above, we are made new creatures, and given a new nature, "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24)
 - In verse 3, the phrase "in process of time" or "at the end of days" indicates a set time they brought their offerings to God
 - This may refer to a time God had appointed for them, such as the end of the year, or on the sabbath

- It may also indicate the first time that Cain and Abel offered for themselves, independently of their parents
- Evidently God had given revelation to Adam, Eve and their sons his acceptable way of sacrifice, and now Cain and Abel had their opportunity to show their obedience to God's revealed precepts
- This is thought to have taken place at the entrance of the Garden of Eden where the cherubim and the flaming sword were – the place where God's visible presence and glory was manifested
- There are a number of similarities between Cain and Abel as they approach God in worship:
 - ✓ They acknowledge God's right to require their worship
 - ✓ They acknowledge they are the sons of a fallen and guilty humanity
 - ✓ They acknowledge that God is merciful despite their sin
- But the differences between the two men and their worship is far greater than their similarities
- These two offerings represent to us the two ways men attempt to come before God – one way is he accepts, but the other he does not
- Today we will study these two offerings and discern the only way that sinful men can find acceptance before our holy God

God's accepted offering must be:

I. THE BEST SACRIFICE

- A. Abel was a shepherd, the first of many of God's saints who were shepherds – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David – who each in some way prefigured the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ
- B. Abel brought of the "firstlings of his flock"
 1. This can refer to the firstborn of the flock
 2. It can refer to the choicest and best
 3. "The fat thereof" is the fattest of the firstlings, that is the best of the best of his flock
 4. God only accepts the sacrifice that is without blemish (Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 1:3)
 5. Blemished sacrifices are abomination unto God (Deuteronomy 17:1; Malachi 1:7-8)

6. This points to Christ who offered himself “a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19)
- C. Cain’s ordinary crops
1. It is notable that in contrast to Abel’s offering there is no mention in Cain’s offering of the quality of the fruit he brought
 2. He simply brought what was available to him without reference to its quality

II. A BLOODY SUBSTITUTE

- A. Abel’s offering constituted an animal’s blood and life on his behalf
1. This requirement was demonstrated by God on the day when Adam and Eve fell, when God killed an animal to clothe their nakedness
 2. In the years that followed, it is certain that God in his communications with this first family stipulated the proper form of offering
 3. Abel himself is called a prophet (Luke 11:50-51) and received direct revelation from God
 4. For sin to be atoned for, blood and death is required
 - a. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and that death is separation from God
 - b. In order for man to avoid the punishment of our sin, the death of another is required
 - c. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” (Leviticus 17:11)
 - d. “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” (Hebrews 9:22)
 5. All of this points to the Lord Jesus Christ whose blood does infinitely more than the blood of Abel’s sacrifice – it atones for and redeems every believing sinner forever (Hebrews 12:24)
 - a. By his blood we are justified (Romans 5:9)
 - b. By his blood we are forgiven (Ephesians 1:7)
 - c. By his blood we are brought nigh (Ephesians 2:13)
 - d. By his blood we have peace (Colossians 1:20)
 - e. By his blood we are redeemed (1 Peter 1:18-19)

- f. By his blood we are cleansed from all sin (1 John 1:7)
- B. Cain's bloodless offering could not atone for his sin
- 1. In God's economy, offerings of produce were accepted – but these were for thanksgiving, never for sin
 - 2. Cain was not ignorant, he knew what God required, yet he wilfully rebelled against God's pattern and chose to approach God in his own way
 - a. As Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, learned, God is not interested in the "strange fire" of man's innovations in worship – he expects us to worship according to his word (Leviticus 10:1-2)
 - b. The Bible calls this "will worship" (Colossians 2:23) – forms of worship according to man's will, not God
 - 3. Following Cain, liberal theologians scoff at the doctrine of the blood atonement
 - a. Liberal theologian and pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick said the doctrine of the blood atonement was a slaughterhouse religion, and he said it was "precivilized barbarity."
 - b. There is something about that blood that is offensive to the world
 - c. It should be no surprise that the doctrine of the blood atonement is the target of Satan's fiercest attacks
 - d. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

III. FROM A BELIEVING SOUL

- A. Abel's heart was right with God
- 1. Even more important than the sacrifice itself is the state of the heart of the sacrificer
 - 2. "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15:22)
 - 3. When the Jews brought their sacrifices to God with wicked and rebellious hearts, he abominated them, and was wearied with them for the hypocrisy of it (Isaiah 1:13-14; Amos 5:21-22)
 - 4. Above all, God requires our hearts (Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8)
 - 5. He had a heart of humility

- a. Submitting in obedience to God's ordinance
- 6. He had a heart of contrition
 - a. He acknowledged his sin and his need of forgiveness
 - b. He acknowledged his deserving of death as punishment for his sin
- 7. He had a heart of sincerity
 - a. Not mere outward formality in worship, but worship in spirit and truth
- 8. He had a heart of faith
 - a. The book of Hebrews reveals that "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh." (Hebrews 11:4)
 - b. All the offerings in the world avail to nothing without faith
 - c. The sacrifice of Christ on our behalf has no benefit to us until our *faith* is placed in it (John 3:16; Romans 5:1)
 - d. Faith has been aptly defined as "Forsaking All, I Trust Him"
 - e. It is said of Abel that "he was righteous" Hebrews 11:4), and he is called "righteous Abel (Matthew 23:35) – that is, he was justified by faith in the atoning sacrifice
- 9. "The heart is the altar that sanctifies the gift"
- B. Cain's heart was not right with God
 - 1. He came to God in his pride and self-righteousness
 - 2. He came to God in rebellion and disobedience
 - 3. He came to God disrespectfully, bringing only fruit not blood
 - 4. He came to God hypocritically, appearing outwardly pious, but inwardly wicked
 - 5. He came to God in unbelief
 - 6. He came to God with an evil heart – "his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12)
 - 7. He responded to God's rejection by further hardening his heart (v.5)

- a. He became angry with God and with his brother
- b. Instead of looking up to God in repentance, he looked down in rage, fury and malice, the germ of murder taking root in his wicked heart

CONCLUSION

1. Every human being is represented by either Cain or Abel
2. Most people are as Cain, thinking they are morally good and that by their self-righteousness they will have a happy eternity
3. Few people are as Abel, willing to admit they are vile, wretched, hell-deserving sinners, unable to do anything to save themselves from divine wrath, and in deep repentance fleeing to Jesus Christ for mercy, casting their soul upon him as the only means of salvation, trusting in his atoning blood to save them from their sins and to grant eternal life by his free grace
4. Are of Cain or of Abel?
5. Have you come to Christ for salvation? If not, you must do so today, without delay
6. It is significant that in this account of the first sons born to the first parents in history that God wants us to first to see how they worshipped him
7. Worship is preeminent to God
8. God created man for the purpose of worshipping him
9. God is seeking for worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23)
10. Is the worship of God the priority in your life?
11. Are you careful to worship the Lord according to the pattern that he has prescribed in the word of God?