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Presentation Transcript
Bible Stories for Adults, Part 5 – Cain and Abel
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Our title today is *Cain and Abel, Bible Stories for Adults 5*.

I have, in a way, left off some of the most important things adults can learn from the previous three presentations in this series, which are the creation, Adam and Eve, and the story of the first two in the Garden and their deception by the serpent. I've left these vital elements until now, because we don't really understand their value until we see the results of what happened after Adam and Eve succumbed to the adversary.

So let's get into the over-arching meaning of these three stories as we learn about Cain and Abel in our fourth Bible story. Genesis 4:1 – we can begin:

Genesis 4:1 – Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."

So the word *Cain*, in Hebrew, sounds a lot like the word *gotten*. So it kind of sounds like Eve had high hopes that her relationship with God could be restored, but, as we're about to see, it was not to be.

V-2-4 – *And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground – both honorable professions or jobs. In the course of time, Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.*

Now we know that, in Moses' time, there were grain offerings, and various kinds of offerings that were from the fruit of the ground, as well as animal offerings. So the fact that Cain did that, in itself, is consistent with good practice. And it says:

V-4-5 – *And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering He*

had no regard.

Now it doesn't tell us why Cain's offering was not accepted, except that it says God didn't have regard for Cain either. Why not? Why doesn't it tell us that? Well, because it's irrelevant to the point of the story – remember the rule – what's the point. So now we're going to learn more about what's going on.

V-5-7 – *So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. So he didn't like it that his offering wasn't accepted, and he got angry about it. And the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 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."*

Now notice here, God is not against Cain, even though Cain is put out with Him, apparently. He's trying to help Cain see that his attitude is in the way of their relationship. And this is a good thing for all of us to remember. The example that God sets for us is this: when there is a relational rupture between us and someone else, we go to that person and try to resolve the issue – with our friends, our coworkers, our associates, our children and our mates – even our neighbors.

And notice also that this is the first verse in the Bible that uses the word *sin*. God's telling Cain, "Watch out, because sin is crouching at the door. You're just a step away." What is a sin? Well, in 1 John 3:4, it tells us everyone who sins breaks the law. In fact, *sin is lawlessness*. So all of you folks that think the law never existed before Moses, think again. Moses' law was only the codification of the law that existed from Adam. They broke God's law when they ate of the tree. The law of God is God's way of defining His relationship with us, and He told them clearly they weren't supposed to eat of that.

Now, the word *sin* is used eight times in Genesis. So we know from Moses that God's law included the seventh day as the Sabbath. And in Genesis, we see that that day is set apart, though it doesn't say what we're supposed to do about. But that set of principles in the Bible is called the Law of God. So there were laws that God set for people to live by in order to have a good relationship with Him. And they're mentioned throughout the book of Genesis – and the rest of the Bible, too, for that matter.

So when Moses wrote his law, he wrote it the way God told him to write it. And that was a codification – a writing down in principle form – of the laws that God had already set for how people are supposed to behave, if they want to have a good relationship with God and with other people. So we see from the beginning that that's set. Now we can continue on in verse 8.

V-8 – *Cain spoke to Abel, his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother, Abel, and killed him.*

Killed his little brother. Why? Well, because he was angry that God didn't accept his offering. So he was projecting the blame on to his little brother, Abel – you know, “You goody two-shoes. You always get everything right. Makes me look bad.” So he's projecting the blame on to his little brother. Jesus called Abel *righteous Abel*. So this practice humans have, of projecting their sins on to the righteous is the reason Jesus, and the prophets, and all Christian martyrs have been killed – a lot more people than that, for that matter.

Now, just for a moment, let's take a step back and think about this propensity. Projection is the formal name for a defense mechanism found in all of us. It's a self-deception. It is one of the components that makes the human heart desperately wicked, to quote Jeremiah. Was this attitude present in Adam when he was created? Well, think about this. We can go back to Genesis 1:31.

Genesis 1:31 – *And God saw everything that He had made – and by that time, that included Adam and Eve – and there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.*

So we can see that this form of thinking was *not* present in human beings at first. Humans were made to be receptacles for the Holy Spirit – the mind of the Father and of the Son. Now Paul makes an interesting observation about himself in Romans 7:18:

Romans 7:18 – *For I know that in me – that is, in my flesh – dwells no good thing. For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good, I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not. But the evil I will not to do, that I practice.*

So he's talking about the struggle between good and evil that's in people. And he says it's in his flesh. But he's not talking about his body. The word for that is *soma* in Greek. That's not the word he uses. He uses the word *sarx* here. He's talking about a part of him in which dwells no good thing. And that could not have been present when God made Adam, since He said it was all good. But it's part of him after they interact with and follow the lead of the serpent.

So this chapter is showing us that Adam and Eve's interaction with the adversary in the Garden produced a way of thinking that they did not have at first. Now Christian people call that the sin nature. And there's a good reason for that. Paul identified that part of himself as sinful – nothing good in it. And this new way of thinking is based on their desire to think for themselves, and do things their own way, and disobey God's rules. They don't count. And then the result of *guilt* come up from disobeying their Creator. And that leads to addiction and murder and all the fruits of the flesh that we see in today's world. Humans are always trying to look good and push away responsibility for bad actions. And then, the consequences of that become a life of anguish mentally.

So one conclusion we can draw from this: for any society to operate on truth and equality, and care for each other, it has to be founded on certain rules and principles that God already laid down for Adam and Eve. And, if that is true, why is a nation, that professes itself to be Christian

more than any other – the United States of America – filled with violent crime, political corruption, broken marriages, child abuse, human trafficking, drug abuse? Well, that because following God's rules is hard for us – even those of us who profess to be Christians. We don't do it very well.

I'm reminded of what Gandhi said to some of his British friends. He said, "Your Jesus we like. It's your Christians that are the problem." So let's continue.

Genesis 4:9 – *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel, your brother?" And he said, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?"*

Now we have to remember that Cain knows that the one he's talking to created his father and mother. So his attitude wrecks. I mentioned earlier my friend, who asked why God asked Cain about his sin this way. "Well, it was like He was setting him up to lie. We wouldn't do that to our children. We just confront them about what they did." So, when he asked me that question, I had to think about it, and here's what I came to. First of all, what my friend said should happen – which is just to confront Cain with what he did – well, that's usually what God does. He tells people what they've done, and then He tells them what He's going to do about it. But, in this case, it seems that He knew what Cain would do, but was, perhaps, giving him a chance to come clean, so that he would have a chance to see beyond his projection, and face up to his behavior. God always knows everything that's going to happen, because He doesn't live in the present. He lives above all time. So He knew what would happen, but it's in the record that He gave him a chance to come clean. So that's important so that he would have a chance to see beyond his weakness and face up to his behavior – to take responsibility for it. Of course, he didn't.

V-10-12 – *And the LORD said – after he blew his chance to come clean – "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."*

So God tells Cain what his attitude and resultant actions have caused – you know, the dreaded consequences of his behavior. And, like all of us, when we see what's going to happen to us – based on the wrong actions that we've committed – he said:

V-13 – *"My punishment is greater than I can bear" – you know, "Woe is me!" "Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from Your face I shall be hidden." "Woe is me! It's all Your fault!" Then he said; "I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." You know, "I can't take it. It's too much. It's not fair!" And then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." So the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.*

So God explained to Cain that this might have happened because he was now publicly exposed as a murderer. But God loves Cain even when Cain doesn't love Him – even when Cain violates His relationship rule. And He protects Cain from the social consequences of his action.

So the rest of the story is the beginning of human civilization. It quickly comes down to somebody called Tubalcain – one of Cain's line – who was so arrogant as to admit murdering people who opposed him, and to say that if Cain's revenge was sevenfold, then his would be seventyfold. Society quickly turns toward the dark side and the picture is very bleak. If you like, you can read the rest of the story for yourself. There's a lot said that is incomprehensible in its details, but just keep asking yourself, "What is God showing us here and what's the point of this story?"

Let's think about the point of this story. Think about what Adam and Eve had in the beginning. They had the perfect place to live. They had the perfect job. They had the perfect marriage. They had the perfect relationship with God. They had perfect health. They had an opportunity for eternal life without having to die. They didn't know mental guilt or anguish or stress. There was no need for it. And then look what happened. The devil deceived them into disobeying God, and from there follows a sequence of losses. They lost their chance to live eternally – at least in the present. They lost the perfect place to live. They lost the perfect job. They lost the perfect marital relationship. They lost their perfect, guiltless relationship with God. They lost their chance to raise an awesome, strife-free family, working in harmony in family partnership with God. They started to accumulate guilt and anxiety and stress from everything that had happened. Joy became pain to them. They had to move and leave and wander. Everything got a lot harder for them.

As a therapist, I think about how I had to learn all these things firsthand when I started working with the inner workings of folks' lives. I work with traumatized people for a living. And when people are traumatized, it's because while the traumatic events are occurring, people cannot process the losses they're experiencing. I have a client who was shot in the leg by a mugger at 1 pm at a McDonald's in a safer part of town, and he's lost a sense of safety. He's always looking around, fearful of imagined danger. He hates to go out. He doesn't like to drive. The technical term for his condition is *hyper-vigilance*. In addition to that, he's depressed and anxious because he's lost a sense of safety and a sense of well-being about himself, and he's lost the use of his leg to some degree. He has lead fragments in his leg, which is raising the lead levels in his body. And those fragments are so small they'd, pretty much, have to take his leg apart all over again to find them all, so they tell him it's not worth it. So it's quite likely that his life span will be shortened because of this. He's more angry now. You know, traumatized people over-react often. That they experience the loss of physical safety triggers various situations. And so they can become violent at times.

You know, when I first started working with trauma, I thought I would mostly be working with that dramatic kind of trauma that's easily recognized – you know, police and border patrol who

have seen way too much, or auto accidents victims, or abused children and adults. And I do work with these people, but mostly I work with people who were traumatized by their parents in early childhood inadvertently, Their parents were trying to do the best they could by their children. And when we look at those parents – I've met some of them even – when we go back to them, we see that they were traumatized too. And the trauma that they experienced has a lot to do with why they treated their children the way they did. So trauma comes from loss, and a loss of safety and loss of healthy sense of self.

So we think about Adam and Even and Cain and what they went through in their lives – all because of what happened when Adam and Eve followed the lead of the serpent. And if we look at the world today and all the horror in it, there's a straight line back through the generations to the losses that the serpent inflicted on the lives of Adam and Eve. So there's the biblical explanation for how things got the way they were.

So there are so many people who look at God's promises, and they think, "God is not fair – that it's evil of Him to allow little children to suffer and call Himself a loving God. It's not fair that His professed followers have caused as much suffering as anybody in the world." And it causes people to want nothing to do with that kind of God – at least, that's what they tell us. So these four chapters show us what is necessary for a healthy human society. It's not just for Christians. It's for mankind. If we look at the principles here, about how to treat others, everyone, pretty much, knows that lying ruins relationships – you don't have to be a Christian to know that – that murdering is a bad thing, bearing false testimony is a bad thing, that jealousy ruins relationships, etcetera. And Paul tells us that the law is written also in the hearts of all those who are non-Israelites – that, of course, from his Jewish perspective. So it's not really that all religions teach this as much as this is already a part of the way human beings work. And we, as Christians, know that that came from the God that created us. And that finds its way into other religions – or all religion. So everyone, in some way, values human relationships, but it's all of us who refuse to follow His map to a good world and a good life. God, since He started it all, needs to be at the center of it in our minds. We need to know that He knows best, and be willing to follow His lead, and that we don't do this is the reason for all the evil in the world, not God.

We can read these chapters and see that every mistake humans made in the account, He was right there trying to show them what to do to get back into relationship with Him, despite the consequences of their own actions. Since He clearly gave Adam and Eve free will, unless He takes that back, there's no way to fix the world. You can't have free will and have God controlling everybody at the same time – keeping them from doing evil things. So it's got to be one way or the other. We're either robots living in a sterile world, or we have free will and we take the consequences of it.

So I say, "There's no way to fix it," and that's with one exception. And that is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And what will that accomplish? Well, if we look in John 12:32, Jesus said – this is a real insight into what He's thinking:

John 12:32 – *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth”* – and that’s a reference to His crucifixion – *“will draw all people to Myself.”*

So God knows a way to fix all the problems while still allowing us to have free will. And it’s a loving, sacrificial gift of His own life for all of ours that will finally cause us all to listen up and start going God’s direction in the end. Now, that’s not going to happen right now, but He says that’s what’s going to work in the end, and we’re just going to have to watch and see how that happens. I know it’s already worked in *my* life, but there are other people that just aren’t in a place where they can receive that yet. But God’s going to take care of that, too. It’s been God’s plan all along and He’s working it now. But God is so much wiser and intelligent than we are that it’s hard for us to see how He will work it out. By our standards, He’s completely unconventional, I mean, would you have allowed that serpent into the Garden? To our way of thinking about it, it makes no sense whatsoever. Would you have let society rapidly spiral down to the point that you had to start over after a massive flood? That doesn’t seem to make sense either. Would you have let your son die a horrible death? Me neither! But then you and I are not God. And that’s the point.

God, in the Bible, because He knows we are clueless, shows us His plan, and how He’s working it through various stages of history, and how He’s working it now, and how He will ultimately work it all the way out to the end to the conclusion that He predicts – which is all of us in relationship with Him forever. And much of that greater story is contained in the stories He tells us in the Bible.

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Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.