

SESSION 36: THE WAILING VOICE OF INNOCENT BLOOD, PART TWO

Genesis 4:9-16

July 28, 2024

PREFACE

Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, has just committed the first homicide on earth and, when called out by Yahweh, displays an extraordinary level of deceit and arrogance to the Creator. He is asked by God, “Where is Abel your brother?” Instead of confessing, he lies. When he is scolded and cursed by God for his sin and crime, instead of bowing in humility before his Judge, he whines.

In our previous session we saw Yahweh’s grace, once again, in that when He later writes His Law for Moses, the infraction committed by Cain will be punished by immediate death; here, instead of that, he is banished and consigned to a life of a wanderer and vagrant. God extends a merciful hand to Cain, *not* killing him, as he deserves, but instead banishing him to a life wandering aimlessly about the earth.

That is how we left it last time, because that is what the text says. In this session, we will discover that Yahweh’s grace is extended even further, granting a *different* life for Cain.

Read Genesis 4:9-17.

vv13-14

In v12 Yahweh makes His judgment and curse very clear to Cain: “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.” 📖

We find Cain’s response to this in the next two verses:

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 it will be that whoever finds me will kill me.

We need to address several important aspects of this passage; here again is text that, on the surface, is easy to pass by, but to the serious student of God’s word is revealed far more information—or at least points to ponder and examine in greater depth.

Note that throughout the account God is designated as Yahweh, to remind the reader of the gracious faithfulness which characterizes His dealings with sinners. Cain’s answer, however, gives no indication of a repentant spirit. There is no grief over sin in the words, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.”

My punishment is too great to bear!

In my reading the scholars are split about down the middle on how this is to be translated. On one side are those who, like Luther, make it “My **sin** is too great to be forgiven!” or “My **sin** is too great for me to bear!” (emphasis added). Either of those two exclamations express at least a measure of guilt and confession—not in full flower, but at least a bud.

On the other side are those who, like all our common translations (save for the *Tree of Life Version*) make it, as in the LSB, “My **punishment** is too great to bear!” or “My **punishment** is more than I can bear” (emphasis added).

It is true that the Hebrew *awoni* (ah-von-ee) can be translated either sin (or iniquity) or punishment. A good example of the former is found in Psalm 51.

Read Psalm 51:5.

Just as the context in David’s psalm requires that it be translated “iniquity” or “sin”—it would make no sense for him to have written, “Behold, I was brought forth in punishment...”—the context of vv13-14, and specifically v14, requires the word “punishment.” Verse 14 is all about what Yahweh is doing to him, His judgment, His curse—not what Cain did to merit that curse.

“Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground;”

I don’t know about you, but I hear more of Cain’s insolence in this remark. Doesn’t it smack of his parents’ responses when *they* were caught?

Read Genesis 3:11-13.

Implicit in “*You* are doing this to me” is a shirking of responsibility, a not-so-subtle pointing of the finger at someone else. ➡

Cain whines that Yahweh’s sentence does not fit the crime—yet we have established that, later, according to Mosaic Law, he would have been instantly put to death. Cain’s right; his sentence does *not* fit the crime—it’s too lenient.

I am reminded of the infamous crime of the California Menendez brothers who brutally killed their two parents in 1989. During their trial and subsequent sentencing in 1996, many bleeding heart liberals cried out for leniency based on the fact that these two “boys” (now 28 and 26, respectively) had lost their parents. To which those of sober mind responded, “Well, that’s because *they killed them!*”

Adding to his insolence is the way he sets up this remark with “Behold” (*hen*) which in this setting is probably similar to an accusatory “Hey look, You have driven me from...”

Donald Barnhouse: One of the consequences of sin is that it makes the sinner pity himself instead of causing him to turn to God. One of the first signs of new life is that the individual takes sides with God against himself.

and from Your face I will be hidden,

Cain is saying, essentially, *from Your presence I will be hidden* [as in the NIVs]. *I will have lost any privilege of communion with You.* Yet Yahweh never made this part of His curse upon the man, which raises a number of questions:

- Is Cain expressing a regretful longing on his part? or just a cold fact, a result of his banishment?
- Is he associating being “driven this day from the face of the ground” with the “face” of Yahweh—thereby expressing the concept (substantiated in v16) that by leaving the precincts of Eden he will be excommunicated from a holy place?

It is hard to know precisely what had been transpiring between Yahweh and the people of His Creation, especially since their expulsion from the garden. They remain in the precincts of Eden—the Garden is not *named* Eden; it is a garden *in* Eden (Genesis 2:8). We can rightly assume that since the Fall and expulsion from the Garden that their communion with God had changed, but was it now nonexistent? We assume they worshiped Yahweh God, since Abel and Cain made offerings to Him (Genesis 4:3-4), but what other forms did that worship take? Even outside the Garden there had to be some form of communion, since that is what Cain would be losing by leaving Eden.

I do not agree with those who describe the Garden and/or Eden itself as a “temple” of sorts, as in a shrine where one would return to worship Yahweh God. Yes, there was the regular *presence* of God—especially prior to the Fall. But I reject that more formalized picture of it as a “temple.”

...and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will be that whoever finds me will kill me.”

Alexander MacLaren (1826-1910), that poet of the pulpit, adds color to this for us.

MacLaren: All sin makes us homeless wanderers. There is but one home for the heart, one place of repose for a man, namely, in the heart of God, the secret place of the Most High; and he who, for his sin, durst not enter there, is driven forth into “a salt land and not inhabited,” and has to wander wearily there.

Then for a second time Cain states something that was not part of Yahweh’s curse upon him; he considers his very life as forfeit if he is made to leave Eden.

So once again we have to wonder from where this idea comes. Was there in place already the concept that a known murderer’s life was free for the taking—especially by kin, which at this point in history everyone would be? If so, how could someone in a distant land even *know* what he had done? 📌

I think Greg, last week, offered a reasonable possibility, that it would be apparent—if not immediately, then eventually—to everyone he encountered that Cain was a man cursed by Yahweh (e.g., Jonah on the ship, Jonah 1:7-12). He would be at least shunned, and quite possibly killed as a reject from decent society. Or it could be that a descendant of Abel himself—remember, we don’t know how old the two brothers were in Chapter Four, nor their marital status—some distant son or second cousin, might have learned of the murder through the grapevine and have taken it upon himself to exact an act of blood vengeance. After all, Cain’s great-great-great-great grandson, Lamech, will know what Yahweh is now to say to Cain (v24).

Yahweh now affirms this possibility of Cain being killed in the next verse.

v15

So Yahweh said to him, “Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.” And Yahweh appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one who found him would strike him.

We must remember that in this narrative of the first family we are not granted access to the entire story. We are not privy to the time frame, the span of time between additional births, the departure of later family members, nor *their* histories in distant lands. As with other descendency lists in the Bible, not every last individual is included; these lists tend to pursue a distinct *line*, while ignoring others. When we add to this ignorance of time spans and gaps the stated information about lengthy *life* spans during this ancient period—e.g., Adam lived 930 years, his son Seth 912 years (Genesis 5:5-8), we can easily assume a vast uncounted population spread over the earth.

Second act of grace by Yahweh: Cain would not just be allowed to live, but he would carry with him some sort of protection. Don't miss the irony here: *Cain is a cold-blooded murderer, who will henceforth be supernaturally protected—by God—from being murdered himself.*

We need not waste our time trying to figure out what form this “sign” or “mark” (Hebrew *ot* [OAT]) took. We might rationally assume that it was something recognizable to a stranger, but just what that might be, we have no clue—if it even *was* something visible on his person. John Sailhamer offers a tantalizing theory that is, again, another tie-in to the future Mosaic Covenant—specifically, the “cities of refuge” for any “manslayer.”

Read Numbers 35:6, 10-12.

Sailhamer posits that the city Cain will build for his family in Nod (vv16-17) will be in essence his “sign” protecting him from those desiring to take his life. It is an intriguing theory that has some aspects to commend it, but it falters on one critical point: Every reference in the Pentateuch to the cities of refuge specifies that they are only for “the manslayer who has struck down any person *unintentionally*...” (Numbers 35:11, emphasis added). Cain does not meet this requirement, as he set out to *intentionally* kill his brother Abel. ❏

Even so, the Law has not yet been handed down, so we see God's grace during these early days in sparing the life of Cain. And I appreciate the K&D view of this.

K&D: God granted him continuance of life, not because banishment from the place of God's presence was the greatest possible punishment, or because the preservation of the human race required at that time that the lives of individuals should be spared—for God afterwards destroyed the whole human race, with the exception of one family—but partly because the tares were to grow with the wheat [Matthew 13:24-30], and sin develop itself to its utmost extent...

Out of all the possible answers to the question, *Why did God spare Cain?* (and they are myriad), the two that track best for me are the “tares and wheat” principle mentioned by K&D, and that “God lengthened Cain's days that he might repent” (Leupold), which the evidence seems to indicate that he did not.

“Or if he struck him with a wooden object in the hand, by which he would die, and as a result he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. The blood avenger himself shall put the murderer to death; he shall put him to death when he meets him.”
(Numbers 35:18–19)

Then Cain went out from the presence of Yahweh and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Several things stand out in this brief verse that closes the Edenic narrative:

- Cain does indeed leave the presence of Yahweh; he is now alienated from his Maker, the Lord of heaven.
- After his being cursed by God to a life of “wandering,” we are a bit surprised to read that he “settled” (dwelt) somewhere—anywhere.
- We are told that he dwelt in “the land of Nod, east of Eden.”

The name of that land where Cain dwelt—capitalized in all our versions, implying that it was an established settlement—is simply the Hebrew for the “wandering of an aimless fugitive” (node).

Whether the region had a known name or not, it was simply a barren, probably desert region somewhere to the east of Eden.

YLT: And Cain goeth out from before Jehovah, and dwelleth in the land, moving about east of Eden;

TLV: Then Cain left Adonai's presence and dwelled in the Land of Wandering, east of Eden.

With the exception of v25 and its recording of another son born to Adam and Eve, we are now through with Eden and its Garden. Some of these early names will reappear elsewhere in God's word, but the narrative of Creation and its first family has come to an end.

We leave it with mixed feelings.

On the one hand, in its pages we have a picture of the paradise in which God intended his people, and the earth itself with its beasts and other living things, to dwell in sweet communion with Him. So from it we have an idea of how believers will be spending eternity future with our Lord.

On the other hand, however, these early pages describe the painful root of our own rebellion and depravity—the corruption we live with every day of our lives because of the decisions made by Adam and Eve. And even they would be firsthand witnesses to this, since the corruption would be born into their immediate offspring.

SESSION 36

The Wailing Voice of Innocent Blood, part two Genesis 4:9-16

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