

### Chapter 1: A Tale of Two Brothers (Genesis 4:1–16)

Just as with the earlier sections in Genesis, Chapter 4 exhibits awareness of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) traditions but often assesses entirely different interpretations to them. The over-arching theme of Gen 4–11 depicts the horrific results of Adam and Eve’s disobedience (Gen 3).<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, striking parallels of theme and structure occur between the story of Cain and Abel and that of their parents.<sup>52</sup> Rather than the fall of humanity via the infiltration of sin, here Moses depicted the fall of the family due to the alienation which sin produces.<sup>53</sup>

Genesis characteristically traces the human race’s descent from Adam by a series of divisions in the family tree (eg. Gen 5; Gen 10).<sup>54</sup> As frequently occurs in Genesis, here God granted the favor due to the firstborn son to the younger brother. The text always delivers an explanation for this change in status (Gen 4:4–5; Gen 17:18–21; Gen 25:21–26; Gen 49:1–12, 22–26).<sup>55</sup> Since the older brothers remained the firstborn, genealogies in Genesis list the descendants of the line falling outside the Lord’s blessing prior to the line of the son treated as the primary heir. Ishmael and Isaac provide a prime example in Gen 25:12–23.<sup>56</sup> These older brothers experienced life with a lesser share of God’s blessing.<sup>57</sup>

### Eve Acquires a Man

**1) Gen 4:1:** Moses began Gen 4 by writing, “And the man had known (*yada*) his wife,”<sup>58</sup> a Hebrew idiom for a sexual relationship.<sup>59</sup> The verb indicates that the couple experienced a deep personal involvement culminating in a hallowed act,<sup>60</sup> an intimate communion they received through their physical senses.<sup>61</sup> More than fulfilling a hormonal desire, this refers to a non-exploitative, profound understanding of the other.<sup>62</sup>

Hebrew authors never employed this verb when describing the mating of animals, which comprises an instinctual behavior.<sup>63</sup> When human sexuality did not involve reciprocal enjoyment but reproduction or lust, Scripture instead has the phrases “go into” (*bo*) (Gen 16:2; Ruth 4:5,

<sup>51</sup>Desmond T. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land, 2nd Ed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 117.

<sup>52</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 96.

<sup>53</sup>Walton, *Genesis*, 273.

<sup>54</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 96–7.

<sup>55</sup>Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land, 2nd Ed*, 105.

<sup>56</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 96–7.

<sup>57</sup> Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 117.

<sup>58</sup>John C. Collins, “The Wayiqqtol as ‘Pluperfect’: When and Why,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 1 (1995): 117–40, 135. Wherever Scripture appears in quotation marks, this represents my translation from the Hebrew (*BHS*) or Greek (*NA<sup>28</sup>*) text. Since both languages utilize word order for emphasis, with the most important points coming first, I maintain the original word order wherever feasible.

<sup>59</sup>William L. Holladay, “יָדָה” (*yada*), *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (CHALOT)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 128–9.

<sup>60</sup>Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 96.

<sup>61</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 100–1.

<sup>62</sup>Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 220.

<sup>63</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 96.

13)<sup>64</sup> or “lie with” (*shakav*) (Gen 39:7–12; 2 Sam 11:4).<sup>65</sup> This verb exonerates Bathsheba as an unwilling participant in David’s sin.<sup>66</sup>

Whether the “knowing” between Adam and Eve occurred prior to or after the fall cannot be determined from the text.<sup>67</sup> The remainder of verse one says, “and she conceived and gave birth to Cain (*Qayin*), and she said, ‘I have acquired (*qaniti*) a man, the Lord.’”<sup>68</sup>

The Old Testament often contains wordplay between a person’s name and birth circumstances (e.g. Gen 25:24–26; Gen 29:31–35; Gen 38:27–30). Although the verb associated with Cain’s name occasionally carries the nuance “I created,” far more often the word means “I gained, acquired, or purchased.”<sup>69</sup> In this context, either sense of the word fits.<sup>70</sup> While Gen 1–3 focused upon God creating,<sup>71</sup> other Ancient Near Eastern cultures attest names such as “I acquired him from the gods.”

Scholars debate whether Eve regarded herself as creating with God, or whether she saw Cain as one whom the Lord provided for her.<sup>72</sup> Attempting to acquire for one’s own the blessings which God can give does occur repeatedly in Genesis (Cf. Gen 3:1–7; Gen 16:1–2; Gen 17:15–21). This lends credence to the notion that Eve’s words reflect her belief that she replicated what the Lord had done by creating a man.<sup>73</sup>

On the other hand, God frequently promised “to be with” the patriarchs to help them (Gen 21:20; Gen 26:3, 24; Gen 28:15; Gen 31:3; and Gen 39:2). Thus, Eve may have exclaimed, “I have acquired a man with the [help of the] Lord.” Possibly, she erroneously thought Cain would function as the promised one who would defeat the serpent (Cf. Gen 3:15).<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, her proclamation remains too ambiguous for us to confidently choose one option over the other.<sup>75</sup>

Note that Eve—not Adam—performed the authoritative act of naming her son (Gen 3:20).<sup>76</sup> By calling him a “man” rather than a baby, she ironically alluded to Adam’s statement that “she will be called woman because from man she was taken” (Gen 2:23). Now a man had come from a woman. As a result, both genders must depend upon each other and ultimately upon God (1 Cor 11:11–12).<sup>77</sup>

<sup>64</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, “בֹּשֶׁט׃” (*bo*), *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 98.

<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/98/mode/2up>.

<sup>65</sup> Holladay, “שָׁכַב” (*shakav*), *CHALOT*, 368.

<sup>66</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 220.

<sup>67</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 260.

<sup>68</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 221.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “קָנָה” (*qanah*), *BDB*, 888–9,

<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/888/mode/2up>.

<sup>70</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 261.

<sup>71</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 101.

<sup>72</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 261.

<sup>73</sup>John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 111.

<sup>74</sup>Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 221.

<sup>75</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 102.

<sup>76</sup>Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament (IVPBBCOT)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Gen 3:20.

<sup>77</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 96.

**Read Gen 4:1.** How does the term “to know” reflect more than a physical action? What are the two possibilities regarding Eve’s view of Cain’s birth? How are men and women dependent upon each other? In what ways do you express your reliance on God?

### It Is Good Not to Touch

*Please note that this section carries a trigger warning for very disturbing historical information.*

**2) 1 Cor 7:1–5:** Paul began this section by writing, “It is good for a man a woman not to touch” (*haptō*), which appears to contradict what he stated in the very next verses. While commonly considered a euphemism for sexual intercourse,<sup>78</sup> the term “to touch” did not refer to a married couple enjoying sex together. Instead, the phrase describes what a man did to the object of his desire: penetrating another for his sexual gratification.<sup>79</sup>

Concerning Sarah’s experience in Gen 12:12–20, the Jewish historian Josephus (37–100 AD) wrote:

“Now, as soon as he came into Egypt, it happened to Abram as he supposed it would; for the fame of his wife's beauty was greatly talked of; for which reason Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, would not be satisfied with what was reported of her, but would needs see her himself, and was preparing to enjoy (*haptō*) her; but God put a stop to his unjust inclinations, by sending upon him a distemper, and a sedition against his government. And when he inquired of the priests how he might be freed from these calamities, they told him that this his miserable condition was derived from the wrath of God, upon account of his inclinations to abuse the stranger's wife.”<sup>80</sup>

In Greco-Roman culture, the male head of a household was free to seek sex for pleasure with his male and female slaves, prostitutes, or any unmarried woman. He reserved sex with his wife primarily for procreation.<sup>81</sup>

Demosthenes (384–322 BC) asserted this:

“For this is what living with a woman as one's wife mean: to have children by her and to introduce the sons to the members of the clan and of the [city], and to betroth the daughters to husbands as one's own. Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.”<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup>Roy E. Ciampa, “Revisiting the Euphemism in 1 Corinthians 7.1,” *JSNT* 31, no. 3 (2009): 325–38, 325.

<sup>79</sup>Ciampa, “Revisiting the Euphemism in 1 Corinthians 7.1,” 327.

<sup>80</sup>Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* (trans. William Whiston; The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus; Auburn and Buffalo, NY: John E. Beardsley, 1895), 1.163, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146%3Abook%3D1%3Awhiston%20chapter%3D8>.

<sup>81</sup>Ciampa, “Revisiting the Euphemism in 1 Corinthians 7.1,” 326.

<sup>82</sup>Demosthenes, “Against Neaera,” in *Demosthenes with an English Translation* (trans. Norman W. DeWitt and Norman J. DeWitt; LCL; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 59.122,

Greco-Romans expected wives to assent to their husband’s extramarital affairs with good will.<sup>83</sup> In contrast, Paul wrote, “The wife over her own body does not have authority, but the husband [does]. And likewise, the husband also over his own body does not have authority, but the wife [does].”

Typically, when women reached 14–15 years of age, they married men close to thirty years old.<sup>84</sup> The sexual abuse of slaves occurred so rampantly that Jewish rabbis ruled that female slaves must have been released by the age of three in order to marry as virgins. Otherwise, they were “amenable to the accusation of non-virginity” (*m. Ketuboth* 1:2)<sup>85</sup> These religious leaders believed that enough time would pass for the bodies of such women to return to a state as if they had never been violated. They took for granted that a female slave in a Greco-Roman household experienced rape by the age of three.

Within the Jewish community, rabbis applied the obligations of a man to a slave whom he married to both partners (Exod 21:10–11). They reasoned that if slaves and war captives had material and conjugal rights, then so should all men and women (*m. Ketuboth* 5:6–8).<sup>86</sup> However, Paul went beyond legalistic accounting to a focus on pleasing each other.<sup>87</sup>

Consequently, the idea that wives possessed jurisdiction over their husbands’ bodies was revolutionary in Paul’s time.<sup>88</sup> Few Greco-Romans could have conceived that a man’s body belonged to his wife.<sup>89</sup> This implied a full right of both partners to initiate sex within marriage, as well as an expectation of monogamy.<sup>90</sup>

Paul then wrote, “Do not continuously deprive one another, except when agreeing for a time, in order to devote yourselves to prayer, and may again be together in order that Satan might not tempt you on account of your lack of self-control.” Many translations omit that Paul employed a verb form (present active imperative) to forbid a continual or habitual depriving one’s spouse of sexual relations, not an occasional refusal.

Imagine a thirty-year old man, accustomed to satisfying his sexual desire at will, suddenly being expected to limit himself to his teenage wife. Making an important distinction, Paul wrote of an obligation to give—not the license to demand—physical love.<sup>91</sup> He expected both marriage partners to concentrate upon how to please each other in their sexual relationship and in other areas of life (1 Cor 7:32–34).

**Read 1 Cor 7:1–5.** Why was Paul’s command revolutionary in his era? What does “having authority over” each other’s bodies mean? How does this apply today?

---

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0080%3Aspeech%3D59%3Asection%3D122>.

<sup>83</sup>Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 71.

<sup>84</sup>S. M. Baugh, “Cultic Prostitution in New Testament Ephesus: A Reappraisal,” *JETS* 42, no. 3 (1999): 443–60, 456, [http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/42/42-3/42-3-pp443-460\\_JETS.pdf](http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/42/42-3/42-3-pp443-460_JETS.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> *Mishnah*, *Ketubot* 1:1–3, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/etm/etm120.htm>.

<sup>86</sup> Instone-Brewer, David, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*, 196, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/etm/etm124.htm>.

<sup>87</sup>David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 196.

<sup>88</sup>Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 280–1.

<sup>89</sup>Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 175.

<sup>90</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Rev. Ed.* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 311.

<sup>91</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 280–1.

### A Servant of the Ground and a Shepherd of a Flock

**3) Gen 4:2–5:** The story of Cain and Abel forms an A-B-C-B-A chiasm, with the first and fifth scene paralleling each other (Cf. Gen 4:2b–5 with Gen 4:15–16), as do the second and fourth (Cf. Gen 4:6–7 with Gen 4:9–14). Scene three, in which Cain murders his brother, gains the central focus (Gen 4:8).<sup>92</sup>

In God’s words of judgment against the snake after the fall, he declared that people would align themselves with the serpent or with the Lord as his “seed” (Gen 3:14–15). Those who opposed the Lord’s reign over them would pit themselves against the faithful followers of God. The battle between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman began here.<sup>93</sup>

Moses opened verse two by writing, “She again bore, his brother Abel.” In contrast with the birth of Cain (Gen 4:1), Eve made no recorded comment regarding the name of her second son. This may be because its significance was—in retrospect—too painful.<sup>94</sup> “Abel” means “vapor, breath, futility,”<sup>95</sup> an appropriately ominous moniker given the fleeting nature of his life (Ps 144:4; Job 7:7, 16; Ecc 1:2–3).<sup>96</sup>

In agrarian societies like Israel’s (Deut 21:15–17), the firstborn son enjoyed preeminence over his brothers (Gen 49:3; Ps 89:27).<sup>97</sup> However, as occurs throughout Genesis, here the principle of favoritism failed to hold true.<sup>98</sup> God frequently chose the younger brother (Gen 21:8–9; Gen 25:21–26; Gen 48:17–20; Gen 49:1–3, 22–26).<sup>99</sup>

Despite the fall, both of Adam’s sons worked to fulfill the cultural mandate of Gen 1:26–28 by stewarding the planet’s natural resources.<sup>100</sup> Cain continued in the profession of his father, as “a servant of the ground” (Gen 2:15; Gen 3:23), while Abel shepherded domesticated animals. This work took place far from Eden’s pleasures (Gen 3:24).<sup>101</sup>

But God never restricted his presence to Eden.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, after an indefinite amount of time,<sup>103</sup> Cain and Abel brought their offerings to the Lord. Moses’s original readers would have likened this to a vassal king bringing tribute as a sign of deference and respect to his suzerain overlord (2 Ki 17:3–4).<sup>104</sup>

A king who reigned in an era close to Moses’s wrote this to his underling:<sup>105</sup>  
 “Aziras was the grandfather of you, Duppi-Tessub. He rebelled against my father but submitted again to my father...As he was bound by treaty, he remained bound by treaty. As my father fought against his enemies, in the same manner fought Aziras. Aziras remained loyal toward my

<sup>92</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 99.

<sup>93</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 96.

<sup>94</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 102.

<sup>95</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “הָבֵל” (*hebel*), *BDB*, 210–1, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/210/mode/2up>.

<sup>96</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 102.

<sup>97</sup> Wilhelm Michaelis, “πρωτοτοκος” (*prototokos*), *TDNT* 6:871–82, 871.

<sup>98</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 96.

<sup>99</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 102.

<sup>100</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 97.

<sup>101</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 222.

<sup>102</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 222.

<sup>103</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 103.

<sup>104</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 262.

<sup>105</sup> Pritchard, James B., ed., *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd. ed. (ANET) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 203,

[https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET\\_20160815/Pritchard\\_1950\\_ANET#page/n227/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n227/mode/2up).

father [as his overlord] and did not incite my father’s anger. My father was loyal toward Aziras and his country; he did not undertake any unjust action against him or incite his or his country’s anger in any way. 300 (shekels of) refined and first-class gold, the tribute which my father had imposed upon your father, he brought year for year; he never refused it.”<sup>106</sup>

In contrast to Cain, who “brought an offering (*minkhah*) of the fruit of the ground to the Lord,” Abel “brought from the firstborn of his flock and from their fat.” This type of offering refers to a gift of thanks to God for his generosity toward them, rather than to atone for sin.<sup>107</sup> Consequently, one would anticipate that a tiller of soil would bring produce, and a shepherd would deliver a gift from his flock.<sup>108</sup>

In fact, this type of “offering” usually refers to flour or grain (Lev 2:1–3, 14–16).<sup>109</sup> At this point in time, God had not specifically set apart first fruits for the Lord’s priests (Exod 23:19; Num 18:12–13). Furthermore, people could make legitimate offerings from later in the harvest (Lev 27:30; Num 18:21; Neh 10:37).<sup>110</sup>

Therefore, Cain’s offering of produce was quite proper.<sup>111</sup> It does not explain his failure.<sup>112</sup> A lack of blood did not constitute a problem. In fact, Abel’s gift never refers to blood,<sup>113</sup> but to “their fat” (*khēlev*).<sup>114</sup> Cain’s fault fell elsewhere.<sup>115</sup>

Prior to the establishment of the Levitical priesthood after the exodus, God gave no restrictions upon offering a sacrifice of one’s own as Abel did (Lev 1:1–6).<sup>116</sup> It appears that both Cain and Abel served as priests, worshiping God and desiring his acceptance.<sup>117</sup> Genesis does not mention the Lord asking for such gifts. Yet when given unenthusiastically, such offerings fail to express true gratitude.<sup>118</sup> Many years later, David would refuse to offer a sacrifice which cost him nothing to end a plague ravaging Jerusalem (2 Sam 24:23–25). He regarded it as a form of what we today call “re-gifting.”

God commanded that the firstborn—seen as the best—<sup>119</sup> be set apart for himself (Exod 13:2). One could sacrifice only perfect, unblemished creatures (Lev 22:20–22). As the choicest part of an animal, the priests burned all the fat of each sacrifice, for it belonged to God (Lev 3:16–17).<sup>120</sup> Thus, the Lord “perceived a soothing aroma” (Gen 8:21).<sup>121</sup>

<sup>106</sup>Mursilis, “Treaty Between Mursilis and Duppi-Tessub of Amurru,” in *ANET* (Albrecht Goetze (trans) and James B. Pritchard (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 203,

[https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET\\_20160815/Pritchard\\_1950\\_ANET#page/n227/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n227/mode/2up).

<sup>107</sup> Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 4:7.

<sup>108</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 223.

<sup>109</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “מִנְחָה” (*minkhah*), *BDB*, 585,

<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/584/mode/2up>. Confirmed by a Logos 7 word study, which notes that 134 of 211 occurrences in the Old Testament refer specifically to grain offerings.

<sup>110</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 263.

<sup>111</sup> Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 4:7.

<sup>112</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 223.

<sup>113</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 263.

<sup>114</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “כֶּהֱלֵב” (*khēlev*), *BDB*, 316–7,

<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/316/mode/2up>.

<sup>115</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 263.

<sup>116</sup>Richard L. Pratt Jr, *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student’s Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1990), 259.

<sup>117</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 97.

<sup>118</sup> Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 4:7.

<sup>119</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 97.

<sup>120</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 103–4.

<sup>121</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 223.

The text in Gen 4 does not specify how people recognized God’s approval.<sup>122</sup> What we do know is “to Cain and his offering, he did not gaze with favor” (1 Sam 16:7). Moses’ emphasis falls upon the older brother’s reaction to the rejection of his offering.<sup>123</sup> When the Lord exposed his failure, the “seed of the serpent” “burned with anger” against the “seed of the woman” (Gen 4:6).<sup>124</sup>

**Read Gen 4:2–5.** Based upon this text, why does it appear that God rejected Cain’s offering but accepted Abel’s? How does this knowledge affect the way you give offerings to the Lord?

### By Faith

**4) Heb 11:4:** “By faith a better sacrifice Abel than Cain offered to God.” The author of Hebrews assumed that faith produces righteousness (Heb 10:37–39; Heb 11:6).<sup>125</sup> Therefore, this verse begins a discussion of the spiritual posture of individuals from the book of Genesis who served as exemplars of faith (Heb 11:1–22).<sup>126</sup>

Jewish tradition typically focused upon the deficiency of Cain’s offering, rather than upon the acceptability of Abel’s.<sup>127</sup> For example, Philo (20 BC–40 AD) noted that Cain brought young, inanimate things, while his brother brought strong and fat living sacrifices.<sup>128</sup> However, some Jewish writings emphasized the piety of these two men as the differentiating factor.<sup>129</sup> According to Josephus (37–100 AD), “Abel, the younger, was a lover of righteousness; and believing that God was present in all his actions, he excelled in virtue...but Cain was...very wicked.”<sup>130</sup>

A dichotomy between faith and works cannot exist (James 2:14–26).<sup>131</sup> Thus, Abel expressed his faith by his actions.<sup>132</sup> The author of Hebrews cited him as the standard for those who desire favor with God (Cf. Prov 15:8–10). Indeed, “Through [faith], being dead, yet he speaks.” This partially occurred due to the written record of Abel’s character.<sup>133</sup> Yet, Heb 12:22–

<sup>122</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 103.

<sup>123</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 263.

<sup>124</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 182.

<sup>125</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1998), 335.

<sup>126</sup> George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 375.

<sup>127</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 333.

<sup>128</sup> Philo, “A Treatise on the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain,” in *The Works of Philo Judaeus* (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; London: H. G. Bohn, 1854), 26–7, 227–8,

<https://archive.org/stream/worksofphilojuda01yonguoft#page/226/mode/2up>.

<sup>129</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 333.

<sup>130</sup> Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 1.2.1,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146%3Abook%3D1%3Awhiston+chapter%3D2%3Awhiston+section%3D1>.

<sup>131</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 571.

<sup>132</sup> Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 376.

<sup>133</sup> Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 335.

24 clearly specifies that Abel’s blood speaks,<sup>134</sup> but neither in conversation with others nor to himself.<sup>135</sup> His blood cries out for justice (Gen 4:10).<sup>136</sup>

**Read Heb 11:4.** According to the author of Hebrews, what made Abel’s offering superior to Cain’s? How does Abel still speak? What difference does knowing that make in your life?

### Oh, the Depth of the Riches of God!

**5) Rom 11:33–36:** Paul wrote this letter to a church struggling to re-incorporate its Jewish members after their return from five years of exile under the emperor Claudius.<sup>137</sup> Nero repealed the edict upon Claudius’s death in 54 AD (Acts 18:2; Rom 16:3).<sup>138</sup> Due to the return of Jewish followers of Christ into purely Gentile congregations, conflict erupted over the differing practices of the two factions. Paul sought to mediate their disputes. He appears to have written this epistle within five years after the exile ended.<sup>139</sup>

These verses come at the end of what many consider the greatest theological treatise in Scripture (Rom 1–11). They form a hymn of praise to God which bears some resemblance to Job 42:1–5.<sup>140</sup> It begins with “O!” to express strong emotion,<sup>141</sup> a reaction to what Paul had just written concerning the infinite depths and riches of God’s mercy, wisdom, and knowledge (Rom 11:25–32). The Lord’s plan of salvation reveals his majestic attributes for both Jews and Gentiles (Rom 11:12; 1 Cor 2:10–13; Gal 3:26–29).<sup>142</sup>

Structurally, the second sentence suggests the form of a hymn,<sup>143</sup> with two strongly alliterative adjectives meaning “unsearchable” (*anexeraunētos*) and “beyond tracing out” (*anexichniastos*). “Judgments” (*krima*) refers to God’s decisions in redemptive history (Ps 19:9; Ps 36:6; Ps 119:75).<sup>144</sup> The Lord’s purposes and activity enfold far more than our human minds can comprehend.<sup>145</sup>

Paul followed his exclamation with a series of rhetorical questions in which he anticipated the answer, “No one.” He employed an A–B–B–A chiasm with the qualities listed in Rom 11:33. “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” alludes to knowledge. “Who has been his counselor?” addresses the Lord’s wisdom (Isa 40:13). Finally, “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” (Job 41:11) refers to his riches.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>134</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews, Rev. Ed.* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 284.

<sup>135</sup> Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 573.

<sup>136</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 283–4.

<sup>137</sup> Charles D. Myers Jr., “Romans, Epistle to the,” *ABD* 5:816–26, 817.

<sup>138</sup> Keener, “Romans Situation,” *IVPBBCNT*, Rom.

<sup>139</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 13; Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 13.

<sup>140</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1998), 703.

<sup>141</sup> Frederick W. Danker, et al., “ὄ” (*ō*), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Ed.* (BDAG) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1101.

<sup>142</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 389.

<sup>143</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 699.

<sup>144</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 390.

<sup>145</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 700.

<sup>146</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 390.

In Rom 11:35, Paul deviated from his normal practice of quoting the Greek translation of the Old Testament and went directly to the Hebrew text of Job 41:11.<sup>147</sup> Here “repay” (*antapodidōmi*) has positive connotations as in Luke 14:13–4 and Col 3:24.<sup>148</sup> None of us can earn the Lord’s favor or kindness (Rom 3:21–30). Our salvation results solely from God’s great love for us (Rom 5:6–11). He is no one’s debtor.<sup>149</sup>

Paul expressed the supreme majesty of the creator and sustainer of the universe, for he comprises everything from beginning to end (1 Cor 8:5–6). Note that in the Corinthians passage, the functions which Paul here ascribes to God describe both the Father and the Son.<sup>150</sup> Thus, Paul extolled the Lord’s self-sufficiency and boundless prudence.<sup>151</sup> As the personification of God’s wisdom, Christ revealed God’s plan of salvation to us.<sup>152</sup> Yet, for our finite minds, these mysteries remain too vast for us to fully comprehend.<sup>153</sup>

**a) Read Rom 11:33–36.** How did Paul describe the fathomless mysteries of God’s plan of redemption? Why doesn’t God owe us anything despite our offerings to him? How does this passage resonate with your experience of God?

### A Living Sacrifice

**b) Rom 12:1:** In most of his letters, the Apostle Paul communicated the truth of the gospel, as here in Rom 1–11, before turning to how we should respond.<sup>154</sup> This well-known verse—which succinctly depicts a Christian’s reaction to God’s gracious mercy—<sup>155</sup> serves as the hinge for the ethical section of Romans in chapters 12–15. Accordingly, Paul began by writing, “therefore.”

Principles of Christian behavior arise from our theology. For example, our obedience flows from our gratitude for all that Christ has done for us (Rom 11:30–36; Luke 7:40–50),<sup>156</sup> as well as from what the Holy Spirit does in us (Phil 2:12–13).<sup>157</sup> Consequently, Paul authoritatively exhorted the Roman believers to live in accordance with the gospel which they received.<sup>158</sup> He gave specific instructions to obey in Rom 12:3–15:13.<sup>159</sup>

But first, he called them “brothers [and sisters]” in order to strengthen his bond with these believers,<sup>160</sup> most of whom he had never met.<sup>161</sup> He then compared a life of Christian integrity to

<sup>147</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 Vols. (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 2:591.

<sup>148</sup>Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 701.

<sup>149</sup>Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 704.

<sup>150</sup>Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 704.

<sup>151</sup>Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:590–1.

<sup>152</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 390.

<sup>153</sup>Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 703.

<sup>154</sup>Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:596.

<sup>155</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 393–4.

<sup>156</sup>Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:59–6.

<sup>157</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 394.

<sup>158</sup>Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:597.

<sup>159</sup>Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 708.

<sup>160</sup>Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 284. In Greek, a masculine plural can apply to a group of men or to one of mixed gender.

<sup>161</sup>Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 4.

sacrificial rituals in which we comprise the offerings.<sup>162</sup> Earlier in this letter, Paul employed the same term (*paristēmi*) in his call to the Romans to present their bodies to the Lord as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:11–19).

Although *paristēmi* in terms of a sacrifice occurs nowhere in the New Testament apart from Romans,<sup>163</sup> Greco-Roman works often attest that usage.<sup>164</sup> For example, Xenophon (430–354 BC) wrote, “He accordingly brought two victims to the altar and proceeded to offer sacrifice (*paristēmi*) to King Zeus.”<sup>165</sup>

Josephus (37–100 AD) asserted, “Archelaus, lest he should be in danger of not being thought the genuine son of Herod, began his reign with the murder of three thousand citizens; as if he had a mind to offer (*paristēmi*) so many bloody sacrifices to God for his government, and to fill the temple with the like number of dead bodies at that festival.”<sup>166</sup>

In Rom 12:1, “your bodies” (*sōma*) refers to the entire self, rather than merely to the physical frame (Cf. Rom 6:13; Eph 5:28).<sup>167</sup> How we behave works in concert with how we think (Rom 12:2).<sup>168</sup> As I frequently told my daughters, “If people’s words and actions don’t conform to each other, their behavior will tell you what they really believe.”

Paul called his readers to offer all that we are to God.<sup>169</sup> We honor him by displaying the fruit of the Spirit as we eat, engage others in conversation, work, study, and even play. Those walking in tune with God’s Spirit aim for a life of continuous worship directed toward the one who created and redeemed us (Gal 5:22–26; Eph 5:15–21; Col 3:17, 23–24).<sup>170</sup>

In contrast, Scripture strongly condemned the mere outward ritual of performing sacrifices, even before the coming of Christ (Ps 51:16–17; Isa 1:11–17; Amos 5:21–24).<sup>171</sup> The Lord accepted only those sacrifices which people offered from a pure heart (Ps 24:1–6).<sup>172</sup>

Due to the once-for-all-time sufficiency of Jesus’s atoning death,<sup>173</sup> God no longer requires animal bloodshed (Heb 9:11–14). Instead, we offer ourselves as “living sacrifices,”<sup>174</sup> passing from self-rule to the possession of the one who receives our offering.

After dying with and being raised with Christ,<sup>175</sup> we become God’s property (Rom 6:3–5).<sup>176</sup> The Jewish philosopher Philo (20 BC–40 AD) noted, “The sacrifice when once placed on

<sup>162</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 284.

<sup>163</sup> Danker et al., “παριστήμι” (*paristēmi*), *BDAG*, 778. Confirmed by a Logos 7 word study.

<sup>164</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:598.

<sup>165</sup> Xenophon, *Anabasis* (vol. 3 of *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*; LCL; trans. Carleton L. Brownson; Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann, 1922), 1.6.22,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0202%3Abook%3D6%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D22>.

<sup>166</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, in *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (trans. William Whiston; Auburn and Buffalo, NY: Beardsley, 1895), 2.89,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0148%3Abook%3D2%3Awhiston%20chapter%3D6%3Awhiston%20section%3D2>.

<sup>167</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:598.

<sup>168</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 284.

<sup>169</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (trans. John Owen; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 452.

<sup>170</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 397–8.

<sup>171</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 710.

<sup>172</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 395–6.

<sup>173</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 284.

<sup>174</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 394.

<sup>175</sup> Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 252.

<sup>176</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:599.

the altar, is no longer the property of the person who has offered it but belongs to that Being to whom the victim is sacrificed.”<sup>177</sup> The Lord does not demand something from us: he wants us.<sup>178</sup>

Paul’s description of the type of sacrifice meshes with tabernacle and temple practices. The animals were still alive when brought before God (Lev 1:5), they were holy (Lev 6:24–27), and—since they were without defect—the lord accepted them (Lev 1:3–4).<sup>179</sup> While “holy” (*hagios*) can mean “set apart” for service,<sup>180</sup> it also carries the nuance of “pure, perfect, worthy of God.”<sup>181</sup> Thus, over time, believers should experience increasing conformity to life shaped by the Holy Spirit.<sup>182</sup>

**Read Rom 12:1.** Due to what Jesus has done for us, what is our reasonable response? How do Old Testament sacrificial practices affect your understanding of life as a believer?

### Transformed Minds

**c) Rom 12:2:** After Paul called believers in Rome to offer themselves to God as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1), he commanded them not to be “formed according to the pattern” of this present age.<sup>183</sup> This requires an act of the will,<sup>184</sup> allowing the Spirit to transform us (Rom 8:1–11).<sup>185</sup> We cannot merely follow the influences of our pre-Christian experiences.<sup>186</sup> Although we live in this current age, as citizens of “the age to come” we must act accordingly, intentionally developing moral sensitivity (Phil 3:17–21; Eph 4:21–24).<sup>187</sup>

The verb tenses in this verse indicate that we must continually practice both the “not being conformed” and the “being transformed.”<sup>188</sup> By undergoing the process of changing the way we think, we alter the way we live. We need patience, as this typically requires sustained effort over time.<sup>189</sup> However, the way we view the world shifts profoundly (1 Cor 2:11–16).<sup>190</sup>

Many Greco-Roman philosophers viewed matter as inherently corrupt.<sup>191</sup> For example, Plotinus (ca. 204–270 AD) contended, “Cut off as we are by the nature of the body, God has yet given us, in the midst of all this evil, virtue the unconquerable.”<sup>192</sup> Paul did not adhere to the

<sup>177</sup>Philo, “On Animals Fit for Sacrifice,” in *The Works of Philo, Vol. 3* (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; London: Bohn, 1855), 221, <https://archive.org/stream/worksofphilojuda03phil#page/220/mode/2up>.

<sup>178</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 285.

<sup>179</sup> Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 462.

<sup>180</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 394.

<sup>181</sup> Danker et al., “ἅγιος” (*hagios*), *BDAG*, 11.

<sup>182</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:601.

<sup>183</sup> Frederick W. Danker, et al., “συσχηματίζω” (*syschēmatizō*), *BDAG*, 979.

<sup>184</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 712.

<sup>185</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:607. The verb is *metamorphoō*.

<sup>186</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 395.

<sup>187</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:608–9.

<sup>188</sup> William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek, 3rd Ed.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 310. The present tense connotes either continuous or repetitive action.

<sup>189</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 398.

<sup>190</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 286.

<sup>191</sup> Harry Alan Hahne, “The Whole Creation Has Been Groaning,” in *Apocalyptic Vision* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 19–26, 19, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/106707.pdf>.

<sup>192</sup> Plotinus, *The Six Enneads, 2nd Ed.* (trans. Stephen Mackenna, revised by B. S. Page; London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 2.3.9,97, <https://archive.org/stream/plotinustheennea033190mbp#page/n155/mode/2up>.

mind/body dualism common in Greco-Roman thought. He asserted that the presenting of our bodies results in the renewal of our minds.<sup>193</sup>

Once this transformation occurs, we are “able to determine what [is] the will of God.” In other words, we learn how to behave in a manner pleasing to him.<sup>194</sup> This by no means takes place automatically.<sup>195</sup> To accomplish this change, we must reprogram how we think by feeding upon Scripture and other materials whose values align with those of the kingdom of God.<sup>196</sup> The adage “garbage in; garbage out” certainly holds true. Once we know the will of God, we face the task of performing it (Phil 4:8–9).<sup>197</sup>

This verse espouses the necessity of inner transformation as opposed to external conformity.<sup>198</sup> Paul did not command us to grit our teeth and attempt to keep the Mosaic law (Rom 2:28–29). Instead, we must “walk in the Spirit,” which yields a “good and acceptable and complete” ethical life pleasing to God (Gal 5:16–25; Mark 12:28–34).<sup>199</sup> Not that this is always easy. In our fallen world, few clear-cut issues emerge in terms of right and wrong.<sup>200</sup> Therefore, we must continually develop moral discernment and hear both sides of an argument before prayerfully reaching a conclusion.

**Read Rom 12:2.** How did Paul’s command repudiate the prevailing Greek philosophy of his era? What practical things can you do to enhance the renewal of your mind?

### Sin Lies Stretched Out

**6) Gen 4:6–7:** This portion of the narrative implies that God continued to meet with people face-to-face even after he drove them out of Eden (Gen 3:22–24).<sup>201</sup> First, the Lord employed an idiom, “Why is it burning (*kharah*) to you?” to question Cain regarding the source of his anger. Then he asked, “And why has your face fallen (*naphal*)?” indicating that Cain exhibited depression.<sup>202</sup> Just as in Gen 3:9, God already knew the answer.<sup>203</sup> Nevertheless, he gave Cain an opportunity to confess his error.<sup>204</sup>

Some scholars describe v. 7 as one of the most difficult verses in Genesis to translate and to comprehend.<sup>205</sup> It opens with, “If you do well, exaltation (*seth*).” Other strong translation

<sup>193</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 714.

<sup>194</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 395.

<sup>195</sup> Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 253.

<sup>196</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 399.

<sup>197</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 718.

<sup>198</sup> Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 253.

<sup>199</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 714.

<sup>200</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 287.

<sup>201</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 263.

<sup>202</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 224.

<sup>203</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 104.

<sup>204</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: a commentary*, 98.

<sup>205</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 225.

possibilities for “exaltation” include “acceptance” and “forgiveness.”<sup>206</sup> Whichever option we select, one thing is clear: Cain could obtain God’s favor,<sup>207</sup> and obedience would raise his countenance.<sup>208</sup> Sadly, Cain left the Lord’s questions unanswered, revealing his true nature. He knew the right thing to do but rebelled against it, illustrating the power of original sin.<sup>209</sup>

After Cain ignored his questions, God continued, “And if you do not do right, at the doorway sin lies stretched out” (*rabatz*).<sup>210</sup> In Ancient Near Eastern thinking, one who would lie across a threshold either sought to keep the entrants safe or was a demon (*rabitzum* in Akkadian) who lurked there to harm those who crossed its path.<sup>211</sup>

Among the curses which the seventh century BC Assyrian emperor Esarhaddon placed upon his vassal kings for disloyalty was this:<sup>212</sup> “May...evil spirits, demons, and lurkers select your houses (as their abode).”<sup>213</sup> Therefore, most Hebrew scholars contend that this verb depicts sin skulking in Cain’s path,<sup>214</sup> waiting for its victim to launch a vicious attack (Cf. Gen 49:9).<sup>215</sup>

Using the same phrase as in Gen 3:16, the Lord told Cain that sin’s “longing (*teshuqah*) is toward you.”<sup>216</sup> With emphasis,<sup>217</sup> God declared “and you must rule over (*mashal*) it.”<sup>218</sup> This conversation indicates that Cain could choose to do the right thing, rather than depicting him as one so utterly depraved that he could not avoid sin.<sup>219</sup> The serpent employed his persuasive deception to lure Eve into ignoring the Lord’s command (Gen 3:1–5). In contrast, Cain stubbornly refused to allow God’s plea to divert him. He embraced the way of the serpent.<sup>220</sup>

**Read Gen 4:6–7.** What did God command Cain to do? How does this depiction of sin fit with your experience? Are you more like Eve or like Cain?

<sup>206</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “שֵׁט” (*seth*), 673, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/672/mode/2up>.

<sup>207</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 263–4.

<sup>208</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 105–6.

<sup>209</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 98.

<sup>210</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs “רָבַצַּ” (*rabatz*), *BDB*, 918. An alternative is “at the door sin makes its lair.” <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/918/mode/2up>.

<sup>211</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 227.

<sup>212</sup> James B Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures, 3rd Ed. (ANET)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 265.

<sup>213</sup> Esarhaddon, “Treaty of Esarhaddon with Baal of Tyre,” in *ANET*. Translated by D. J. Wiseman, 534–41, line 493, 539, [https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET\\_20160815/Pritchard\\_1950\\_ANET#page/n569/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n569/mode/2up).

<sup>214</sup> E.-J. Waschke, “רָבַצַּ” (*rabatz*) in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* (Rev. Ed., G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry (Eds.), D. W. Stott (Trans.) (Grand Rapids; Cambridge. U.K.: Eerdmans, 2004), 13:298–303, 303.

<sup>215</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 264.

<sup>216</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “תְּשׁוּקָה” (*teshuqah*), *BDB*, 1003, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/1002/mode/2up>.

<sup>217</sup> F. W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar (GKC)* (ed. Emil Kautzsch; trans. Arthur Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 437, <https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/436/mode/2up>. Since Hebrew verbs already contain a subject, the appearance of the pronoun “you” makes the statement emphatic.

<sup>218</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “מָשַׁל” (*mashal*), *BDB*, 605, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/604/mode/2up>.

<sup>219</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 228.

<sup>220</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 100.

### Instruments of Righteousness

**7) Rom 6:12–14:** Paul began this chapter by urging believers to consider ourselves dead to sin (Rom 6:1–7).<sup>221</sup> We cannot remain content to live as we had prior to placing our faith in Jesus.<sup>222</sup> Instead, “sin must not reign” in us. The apostle called us to take hold of Christ’s victory by revolting against sin’s domination (Cf. 1 Cor 15:54–58).<sup>223</sup>

Although he used the term “mortal bodies” (*thnētos sōma*), this most likely means the whole person, not just our physical flesh (Rom 6:6).<sup>224</sup> By personifying lustful passion as a slave-master, Paul warned believers not to fall prey to our cravings, which results in enslavement.<sup>225</sup> To thwart sin’s desire to rule over us, we must refuse to obey it.<sup>226</sup>

We fight this battle daily in the decisions we make.<sup>227</sup> These passions include the need to dominate others and to covet what they have,<sup>228</sup> not only sensual lust.<sup>229</sup> As the Greco-Roman philosopher Epictetus (55–135 AD) stated, “Freedom is not procured by a full enjoyment of what is desired, but by controlling the desire.”<sup>230</sup>

In the Greek army, a hoplite fought with a spear.<sup>231</sup> Since we are “dead to sin and alive to God” (Rom 6:11), we must not present our natural abilities as “instruments” or “weapons” (*hopla*),<sup>232</sup> battling on the side of sin.<sup>233</sup>

The great preacher John Chrysostom (347–407) wrote this: “The body is not evil, since it may be made an arm [i.e. a weapon] of righteousness. But by calling it an arm, he makes it clear that there is a hard warfare at hand for us. And for this reason, we need strong armor, and also a noble spirit, and one acquainted too with the ways of this warfare; and above all we need a commander. The Commander, however, is standing by, ever ready to help us, and abiding unconquerable, and has furnished us with strong arms likewise. Farther, we have need of a purpose of mind to handle them as should be, so that we may both obey our Commander, and take the field for our country.”<sup>234</sup>

Here in Romans, Paul’s contrast between unrighteousness and virtue sharply focuses

<sup>221</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 382.

<sup>222</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:316.

<sup>223</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 200.

<sup>224</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 336.

<sup>225</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 163.

<sup>226</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 336.

<sup>227</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 383.

<sup>228</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 383.

<sup>229</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 336.

<sup>230</sup> Epictetus, “Discourses,” in *The Works of Epictetus: His Discourses, in Four Books, the Enchiridion, and Fragments*. (trans. Thomas Wentworth Higginson; New York: Thomas Nelson, 1890), 4.1.175.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0237%3Atext%3Ddisc%3Abook%3D4>

<sup>231</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 163.

<sup>232</sup> Danker et al., “ὅπλον” (*hoplon*), *BDAG*, 716.

<sup>233</sup> Craig S. Keener, *InterVarsity Press Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (IVPBBCNT)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), electronic edition, Rom 6:12–3.

<sup>234</sup> John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (NPNF1–11)* (ed. Philip Schaff; trans. J. B. Morris and W. H. Simcox, revised by George B. Stevens; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1889), 11.6.5., 411, <https://archive.org/stream/selectlibraryofn11auguoft#page/410/mode/2up>.

upon one’s behavior.<sup>235</sup> No middle ground exists.<sup>236</sup> After renouncing sin, we immediately serve under our new master, the Lord.<sup>237</sup> This involves a decisive and deliberate decision to come under his control, sharing in Christ’s new life of resurrection.<sup>238</sup>

Paul’s statement, “for sin shall not rule over you” does not mean that Christians will never sin.<sup>239</sup> However, sin no longer exerts sovereignty over us.<sup>240</sup> Jesus does. Unless we deliberately choose to turn away from following the Lord, never again shall we experience powerlessness in our fight against sin (1 Cor 10:1–13).<sup>241</sup> Although refraining from habitual transgressions may seem daunting, we are indeed “dead to sin and alive to God.”<sup>242</sup>

By writing, “for you are not under law but under grace,” Paul did not claim that believers can freely ignore God’s commands.<sup>243</sup> Rather than obeying the Mosaic law, we fall under a new covenant—the law of Christ—which is characterized by grace (John 1:17; Rom 8:1–2; Gal 3:23–29). Now we have the Spirit’s power to overcome temptation (Gal 5:13–26). Remaining “in Adam” is no longer a valid option for God’s people (Rom 5:12–21).<sup>244</sup>

**Read Rom 6:12–14.** How can we avoid slavery to sin? What happens when we present ourselves to God as “instruments of righteousness”? Why can’t people whose loyalty belongs to Jesus continually practice sin? What advantage do you have which Cain did not experience?

### Cain Arose against His Brother

**8) Gen 4:8:** Here we reach the center of the chiasm in the account of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16). Thus, the central focus falls upon the two brothers standing alone.<sup>245</sup> In contrast to the long dialogues on either end of the story, this section tersely describes what occurred.<sup>246</sup> Depictions of Cain struggling with his conscience or considering the consequences of his actions are strikingly absent. Instead, Moses portrayed his act as the outrageous result of consuming jealousy.<sup>247</sup> The repetition of “his brother” magnifies the horror of the event.<sup>248</sup>

<sup>235</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 163.

<sup>236</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 337–8.

<sup>237</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 385.

<sup>238</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 338.

<sup>239</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:318–9.

<sup>240</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 387.

<sup>241</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:319.

<sup>242</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 387.

<sup>243</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 200.

<sup>244</sup> Witherington and Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 164–5.

<sup>245</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 106.

<sup>246</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 99.

<sup>247</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 264.

<sup>248</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 106.

Only one generation after the fall (Gen 3:1–7; Gen 3:22–4:1), the first case of sibling rivalry proved deadly.<sup>249</sup> The verse begins with “And Cain said to Abel his brother,” then omits what Cain communicated. It skips right to “And it happened, while they were in the field, Cain arose against Abel his brother, and he killed him.”

That Cain went out to the field to find his brother strongly suggests premeditation.<sup>250</sup> He vented his anger toward God on the most likely scapegoat.<sup>251</sup> The fractured relationship between husband and wife now extended to their offspring (Gen 3:12, 16).<sup>252</sup>

“Killed” (*hāragh*) implies private, ruthless violence.<sup>253</sup> Such activity lies at the extreme of what the sixth commandment forbids,<sup>254</sup> for Exod 20:13 employs a term (*rātsakh*) which includes the possibility of manslaughter.<sup>255</sup> Cain rejected the one whom the Lord accepted, instead of acknowledging God’s rebuke and repenting (Gen 4:6–7). Yet, this only increased his torment. He dealt with Abel by exterminating him, but what could he do with God?<sup>256</sup>

**Read Gen 4:8.** What do you think Cain was trying to accomplish by killing his brother? Do you see similar tendencies in yourself?

### Transcending the Law

**9) Matt 5:21–22:** Christ preached, “You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, ‘You shall not commit murder.’” In this passage, Jesus contrasted the teaching of his day with the true meaning of the Pentateuch. Rabbis employed the formula, “You have heard that it was said” when speaking of religious tradition.<sup>257</sup> “It was said” implied that God himself spoke the command.<sup>258</sup> “The ancient [ones]” referred to the people who first received the Mosaic law.<sup>259</sup>

Jesus quoted, “You shall not murder” (*phoneuō*) directly from the Greek translation of Deut 5:17. Although Hebrew has seven words meaning “to kill,”<sup>260</sup> the term used here refers to intentionally taking someone’s life.<sup>261</sup> Thus, it involves an act of premeditation. In addition, *phoneuō* includes abetting murder and benefiting from this crime (1 Ki 21:11–19). The penalty was death (Num 35:16–21).<sup>262</sup>

“Anyone who commits murder will be liable to judgment” likely derives from Num 35:20–24, 30–34. That passage emphasizes the need for legal proceedings to determine whether someone intentionally killed another person. The process also sought to prevent blood feuds

<sup>249</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 98.

<sup>250</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 106.

<sup>251</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 230.

<sup>252</sup> H. F. Fuhs, “הָרַג” (*hāragh*) in *TDOT*, 3:454–7, 454.

<sup>253</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “הָרַג” (*haragh*), *BDB*, 246–7,

<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/246/mode/2up>.

<sup>254</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 230.

<sup>255</sup> W. R. Dörmers, “רָצַח” (*ratsakh*) in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*, 5 Vols. (Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:1189.

<sup>256</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 230.

<sup>257</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1998), 111, 115.

<sup>258</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 241.

<sup>259</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 200.

<sup>260</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 241–2.

<sup>261</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 200.

<sup>262</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 241–2.

from occurring.<sup>263</sup> A Jewish apocryphal work noted, “He who works the killing of a man’s soul, kills his own soul, and kills his own body, and there is no cure for him for all time.”<sup>264</sup>

At the time of Christ, competing Jewish factions vied to win people over to their interpretation of obedience to the Mosaic law through lengthy debates.<sup>265</sup> Jesus found fault with the rabbis’ application of the Old Testament (OT).<sup>266</sup>

By emphatically proclaiming, “but I say to you,”<sup>267</sup> Jesus invoked his own authority as the Messiah.<sup>268</sup> He equated his decree to the rest of Scripture while explaining the original intent of God’s law.<sup>269</sup> Christ’s words did not violate the law: they transcended it.<sup>270</sup>

Jesus looked beyond a person’s behavior to an unrestrained heart which generates murder (1 John 3:15).<sup>271</sup> Contrary to the frequent perception that Christ loosened the requirements of the OT (Matt 5:17–20), here he made the rigor of the commandment far greater.<sup>272</sup> A person’s character matters just as much as behavior.<sup>273</sup>

Anger violates God’s commands, for it forms the basis for murder. Therefore, both receive the same judgment.<sup>274</sup> Our rage strips people of their value as image-bearers of God (Gen 1:26–27; Matt 12:34–37; Matt 15:18–20).<sup>275</sup>

Some manuscripts say, “Anyone who is angry with his brother *without reason*.” The words in italics appear to be a later addition intended to make the command easier to keep.<sup>276</sup>

“Brother [or sister]” likely refers to another believer.<sup>277</sup> However, later in the sermon Jesus ordered, “Love your enemies and pray on behalf of the ones persecuting you” (Matt 5:43).<sup>278</sup> This expands the command to all people, not only to fellow Christians.<sup>279</sup>

The punishments outlined in this verse increase in severity, even though the sins seem roughly equivalent.<sup>280</sup> Those “subject to judgment” would have appeared before either the local religious authorities (*sanhedrin*),<sup>281</sup> a group of twenty-three men who determined the outcome of capital cases (*m. Sanhedrin* 1.4), or the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, which was the highest Jewish council. It consisted of a group of seventy-one priests, scribes, and elders.<sup>282</sup>

<sup>263</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 200.

<sup>264</sup> W. R. Morfill, trans., *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch (2 Enoch)* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), 60.1. <https://archive.org/stream/bookofsecretsofe00morf#page/76/mode/2up>.

<sup>265</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 181.

<sup>266</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 240.

<sup>267</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 319. Greek verbs include a personal pronoun. Adding the word “I” to the verb makes it emphatic.

<sup>268</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 111.

<sup>269</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 240–1.

<sup>270</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 112.

<sup>271</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 183.

<sup>272</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 114.

<sup>273</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 182.

<sup>274</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 116.

<sup>275</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 242.

<sup>276</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 113. Italics mine.

<sup>277</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 200.

<sup>278</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 116.

<sup>279</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 200.

<sup>280</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 200–1.

<sup>281</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 242.

<sup>282</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, “Sanhedrin,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD)*, 6 Vols., David Noel Freeman, Ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:975–80, 576–7.

However, anger did not come to trial before the Jewish courts except in highly controlled communities like that of the Essenes.<sup>283</sup> The Community Rule of the Dead Sea Scrolls says: “If [someone] has spoken in anger against one of the Priests inscribed in the Book, he shall do penance for one year and shall be excluded for his soul’s sake from the pure Meal of the Congregation. But if he has spoken unwittingly, he shall do penance for six months...Whoever has deliberately insulted his companion unjustly shall do penance for one year and shall be excluded.”<sup>284</sup>

“*Raka*” appears only here in the New Testament.<sup>285</sup> Rabbis commonly employed it as an insult.<sup>286</sup> The term implied that the person addressed was “empty-headed” or foolish.<sup>287</sup> In that culture, calling someone “an idiot” was considered a serious offense, for it demeaned the person’s name.<sup>288</sup> For the same reason, calling someone “a bastard” resulted in forty lashes (b. Kiddushin 28a).

Greco-Roman society also considered defamation an actionable injury. For example, Gaius (ca. 130–180 AD) wrote, “Outrages are atrocious either by the act, as when a man is wounded, horse-whipped, or beaten by a stick; or from the place, as when an affront is offered in the theater or the forum; or from the persons, as when a magistrate or senator is insulted by one of lower rank.”<sup>289</sup>

These types of insults reveal attitudes of contempt which the Lord condemns.<sup>290</sup> The heavenly court hears every word we speak (Matt 10:26–30; Mark 4:22–25). Slandering another person merits the punishment which would have been given to the ones we falsely accuse (Deut 19:16–19).<sup>291</sup>

Jewish courts under Roman rule could no longer carry out the punishments for capital crimes (John 18:31–32). Therefore, for Jesus, “the Sanhedrin” appears to refer to God’s heavenly court.<sup>292</sup> That tribunal shall condemn the guilty to destruction “into the *Gehenna* of fire.”<sup>293</sup>

Earlier in Israel’s history, parents burned their children to death as sacrifices to the Canaanite god Molech in Gehenna (Ps 106:37–39; Jer 7:31; 2 Ki 23:10).<sup>294</sup> By the time of Christ, Gehenna served as Jerusalem’s city dump. Since garbage continually burned there,<sup>295</sup> it provided an apt metaphor for the fires of hell.<sup>296</sup>

**a) Read Matt 5:21–22.** Why are anger and insults akin to murder? What do they do to us?

<sup>283</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 182.

<sup>284</sup>Geza Vermes, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th Ed (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 1QS7:2–4, 79. [https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-Uy\\_BZ\\_QGsaLiJ4Zs/The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20%5BComplete%20English%20Translation%5D#page/n137/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-Uy_BZ_QGsaLiJ4Zs/The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20%5BComplete%20English%20Translation%5D#page/n137/mode/2up).

<sup>285</sup>Joachim Jeremias, “*Ρακα*” (*raka*), in *Theological Diction of the New Testament (TDNT)*, 10 Vols. Gerhard Kittel, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 6:973–6, 973.

<sup>286</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 116.

<sup>287</sup>Wilkins, *Matthew*, 242.

<sup>288</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 116.

<sup>289</sup>Gaius, *Institutes of Roman Law by Gaius* (trans. Edward Poste, rev E. A. Whittuck; Oxford: Clarendon, 1904), 3.225, 427–8, <https://archive.org/stream/gaiinstitutiones00gaiuoft#page/426/mode/2up>.

<sup>290</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 201.

<sup>291</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 184.

<sup>292</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 184.

<sup>293</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 201–2.

<sup>294</sup>George C. Heider, “Molech (Deity),” *ABD* 4:895–8, 897.

<sup>295</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 202.

<sup>296</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 117.

### Be Reconciled to Your Brother

**b) Matt 5:23–24:** Jesus narrowed his focus from a general principle in Matt 5:21–22 to specific application in these verses.<sup>297</sup> He taught that a believer’s relationship with God correlates with how we treat others.<sup>298</sup>

Rabbis of that era asserted something similar. According to the *Mishnah*, “From all your sins before the Lord shall ye be clean. Those transgressions of which man has been guilty towards his God, [the Day of Atonement] atones for; but for those transgressions of which man has been guilty towards his neighbor, [the Day of Atonement] cannot atone, until he has appeased his neighbor” (*m. Yoma* 8.9).

In this instance, Christ addressed occasions when one aggrieves someone else, not been the recipient of the offense.<sup>299</sup> Yet, elsewhere he said, “If you are standing [and] praying, forgive if you have anything against someone, in order that also your Father in heaven may forgive your sins” (Mark 11:25). Thus, this applies to resentment in both directions. Reconciliation is paramount,<sup>300</sup> for fostering bitterness has the same effect as drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.<sup>301</sup>

“When, therefore, you bring your gift on the altar” implies a sacrifice in Jerusalem’s temple (Josh 22:29; Ezra 6:3).<sup>302</sup> However, Christ delivered the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee (Matt 4:25–5:1). Following Jesus’s command to “leave your gift there in front of the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother [or sister] and then come offer your gift” required a journey of approximately eighty miles each way.<sup>303</sup>

Imagine arriving in Jerusalem after traveling for days. Due to the distance, you bought a lamb for an offering when you arrived. While standing in a long line at the temple, you remember how you offended your neighbor. Following Christ’s command would necessitate going back to Galilee, making amends, and repeating the process.

Eph 4:26 and Ps 4:4 apply to people with differing temperaments. While one person immediately erupts in anger and needs to take time to reflect and pray before responding to a situation, another grows enraged by allowing time to pass. We must understand how we operate and act accordingly.

By making such a difficult demand, Christ stressed the importance of maintaining right relationships with our neighbors, especially within the church (Matt 18:21–35; Eph 4:21–32).<sup>304</sup>

**Read Matt 5:23–24.** Why is living in harmony with all people—and particularly with other believers—so critical to our spiritual well-being? Are you the type of person who needs to deal with infuriating issues immediately or do you need time to process your anger? How is Christ’s admonition like what the Lord said to Cain in Gen 4:3–8?

<sup>297</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 202.

<sup>298</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 185.

<sup>299</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 243.

<sup>300</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 117.

<sup>301</sup> This concept is attributed to Alcoholics Anonymous.

<sup>302</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 243.

<sup>303</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 191.

<sup>304</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 203.

### Misappropriated Blood

**10) Gen 4:9–10:** We return to the fourth scene in the saga of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16), the conversation between the Lord and Cain. Strong parallels exist between this interrogation and Adam’s (Gen 3:9–12).<sup>305</sup> God first drew attention to Cain and Abel’s familial relationship by asking, “Where is Abel, your brother?”<sup>306</sup> As in Adam’s case, the Lord already knew the answer.

Cain’s reply belied a heart much harder than those of his parents. Rather than acknowledging his fault, he denied any awareness of Abel’s situation.<sup>307</sup> He responded by saying, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

“Keeper” (*shamar*) is the same word used as Adam’s job description in Gen 2:15.<sup>308</sup> In only one generation, people degenerated from tending paradise to disavowing any obligation to one’s family.<sup>309</sup> Since a “keeper” tended flocks, Cain employed sarcasm here. He essentially asked, “Should I be shepherding the shepherd?”<sup>310</sup> Not only did Cain imply that God’s question was improper,<sup>311</sup> he exhibited the evasiveness of his parents (Gen 3:11–13).<sup>312</sup>

The Lord never demands that a person watch over a sibling continually.<sup>313</sup> He assumes that responsibility (Num 6:24–25; Ps 121:4–8).<sup>314</sup> Cain used that fact as an accusation against God.<sup>315</sup> Nevertheless, in times of difficulty, the Lord expects a man’s brother to assist him whenever feasible (Lev 25:47–48).

Ironically, Cain should have acted as the “avenger of blood” in the event of Abel’s murder (Ruth 3:12–13; Num 35:19–21).<sup>316</sup> People in the Ancient Near East believed that a murderer misappropriated his victim’s blood. That vital fluid could be redeemed and symbolically returned to the relatives of the slain only by the death of the offender.<sup>317</sup>

Accordingly, an 8th century BC Aramaic treaty between two allied kings states: “If it happens that one of my brothers or one of the hou[se of my father or one of my sons or one of my *officers* or one of my officials or one of the people under my control or one of my enemies seeks my head to kill me and to kill my son and my offspring, if it is me they kill, you must come and avenge my blood from the hand of my enemies. Your son must come to avenge the blood of my son from his enemies. The son of your son must come to avenge the bl[ood of the s]on of my son. Your offspring must come to avenge the blood of my offspring. If it is a city, you must slay it with the sword. If it is one of my brothers or one of my slaves or [one] of my officials or one of the people under my control, you must slay him and his offspring, his *supporters*, and his friends

<sup>305</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 106.

<sup>306</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 227.

<sup>307</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 106–7.

<sup>308</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “שָׁמַר” (*shamar*), *BDB*, 1036, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/1036/mode/2up>.

<sup>309</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 267.

<sup>310</sup> Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 338–9, [http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/890/D\\_Schlimm\\_Matthew\\_a\\_200812.pdf?sequence=](http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/890/D_Schlimm_Matthew_a_200812.pdf?sequence=).

<sup>311</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 230.

<sup>312</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 265.

<sup>313</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 106–7.

<sup>314</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 231.

<sup>315</sup> Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Ethics of Anger in Genesis*, 339.

<sup>316</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 107.

<sup>317</sup> S. David Sperling, “Blood, Avenger of,” *ABD* 1:763–4, 764.

with the sword. If you do not do so, you will have been false to all the Gods of the treaty in this inscription.”<sup>318</sup>

The Lord responded with outrage to Cain’s callousness,<sup>319</sup> switching from interrogation to accusation. God said, “What have you done? The voice of the blood of your brother is crying out to me from the ground!” (Cf. Job 16:18–19).<sup>320</sup> Murder without recompense polluted the land. This rendered it unfit for God’s presence, even when the guilty person remained unidentified (Deut 21:1–9).<sup>321</sup>

Israelites considered killing someone by bloodshed particularly heinous. Those seeking to murder another might ease their guilt by not shedding the victim’s blood. This may explain why Reuben easily persuaded his brothers to throw Joseph into a pit to slowly die (Gen 37:19–24). The blood which even David shed in warfare prevented him from building a temple for the Lord (1 Chr 22:7–8).<sup>322</sup> When Christ returns, all the blood shed upon the earth shall be revealed and avenged (Isa 26:21; Rev 6:9–11).<sup>323</sup>

**Read Gen 4:9–10.** How was this conversation like and different from the one in Gen 3:9–13? What made Abel’s murder especially repugnant? Why is it impossible to hide bloodshed from God? What effect does it have upon the earth? How does this affect the way you evaluate justice for murdered people?

### A Charge of Hypocrisy

**11) Matt 23:29–33:** This passage appears at the end of Jesus’s scathing denunciation of the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Matt 23:1–39). By focusing upon adherence to the *Mishnah*—external regulations more restrictive than what God required—these men often failed to practice the character qualities expected of the Lord’s people.

Christ employed a common rhetorical strategy of that era by using their own testimony to reveal the contradictions in their behavior.<sup>324</sup> Jesus announced to the assembled crowd, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, ‘If we were in the days of our fathers, we would not be their partners in the blood of the prophets.’”

<sup>318</sup>Barga’yah, “The Treaty Between Ktk and Arpad,” Pages 559–61 in *ANET*. Translated by A. J. Dupont-Sommer and J. Starcky, 661. Italics original.

<sup>319</sup>Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 98.

<sup>320</sup>Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 231.

<sup>321</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 107.

<sup>322</sup>S. David Sperling, “Blood,” *ABD* 1:761–3, 763.

<sup>323</sup>Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 113.

<sup>324</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 554.

*The Lives of the Prophets*, written in the first century AD, not only lists the burial sites of the prophets, it provides detailed descriptions of their tombs.<sup>325</sup> By seeking to convey their admiration for these seers, the scribes and Pharisees attempted to dissociate themselves from the people who murdered them. However, they erected this facade to hide their lack of receptivity to the messengers sent by God (Matt 12:14–16; Matt 21:33–46).<sup>326</sup>

Jesus continued, “Therefore, you testify against yourselves that sons you are of the murderers of the prophets.” While claiming that they would not have participated with their ancestors, the scribes and Pharisees identified themselves as their seed (Gen 3:15).<sup>327</sup> In this instance, Jesus used “sons” (*huios*) as an idiom.<sup>328</sup> During the time of Christ, the term could depict a man’s character.<sup>329</sup>

For example, the Essene Community produced this statement, “The Sons of Darkness will be burnt...For all folly and wicked[ness are dar]k, and all [pea]ce and truth are brigh[t. For all the Sons of Light g]o towards the light, towards [eternal] jo[y and rej]oicin[g], and all the Sons of Dar[kness go towards death] and perdition.”<sup>330</sup>

A person’s disposition determined one’s designation as a Son of Light or a Son of Darkness.

Consequently, the behavior of Jesus’s opponents testified against their descent from the prophets. Instead, their ancestors had murdered those messengers of God (Heb 11:32–40).<sup>331</sup> As a result, the Lord held them responsible for the deaths of the men whose tombs they venerated,<sup>332</sup> reaping the judgment of their forebears.<sup>333</sup>

Christ declared, “And so, fill up the measure of your fathers!” This allusion refers to a cup on the verge of overflowing with the blood of God’s people.<sup>334</sup> According to Jewish belief, God predetermined a necessary amount of suffering before the last age would arrive.<sup>335</sup>

A first century AD Jewish apocryphal book recounts this conversation with an angel: “A grain of evil seed was sown in Adam’s heart from the beginning, and how much ungodliness it has produced until now, and will produce until the time of threshing comes! Consider now for yourself how much fruit of ungodliness a grain of evil seed has produced. When heads of grain without number are sown, how great a threshing floor they will fill!”

Then I answered and said, ‘How long and when will these things be? Why are our years few and evil?’

“He answered me and said, ‘You do not hasten faster than the Most High, for your haste is for yourself, but the Highest hastens on behalf of many. Did not the souls of the righteous in their chambers ask about these matters, saying, “How long are we to remain here? And when will come the harvest of our reward?”’

“And Jeremiel the archangel answered them and said, ‘When the number of those like yourselves is completed; for he has weighed the age in the balance, and measured the times by measure, and

<sup>325</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 876–7.

<sup>326</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1998), 278.

<sup>327</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 672.

<sup>328</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 877.

<sup>329</sup>Eduard Lohse, “ὄσιος” (*huios*), *TDNT* 8:334–97, 358.

<sup>330</sup>Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, Rev. Ed., 4Q548 Fragment 1:10, 626, [https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-Uy\\_BZ\\_QGsaLiJ4Zs/The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20%5BComplete%20English%20Translation%5D#page/n625/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-Uy_BZ_QGsaLiJ4Zs/The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20%5BComplete%20English%20Translation%5D#page/n625/mode/2up).

<sup>331</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 672.

<sup>332</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 876.

<sup>333</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 554.

<sup>334</sup>Gerhard Delling, “πληροῶ” (*plēroō*), *TDNT* 6:283–311, 294.

<sup>335</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 555–6.

numbered the times by number; and he will not move or arouse them until that measure is fulfilled.” (4 Ezra 4:30–37, RSV)

Christ asserted that what their ancestors began, the scribes and Pharisees would complete (Acts 7:51–52; 1 Thess 2:14–16).<sup>336</sup> The Old Testament prophets also employed this type of irony. They exhorted the Israelites to continue sinning but to expect God’s judgment as a result (Isa 6:9–11; Jer 44:24–29; Amos 4:4–6).<sup>337</sup>

Jesus said, “You serpents, offspring of vipers! How will you escape from the condemnation of Gehenna?” John the Baptist had employed the same invective against the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 3:7–10). That Christ spoke this way to Israel’s leaders shocked those who heard him.<sup>338</sup> He delivered a clear message: God destined the most overtly religious people in Israel for the fire of hell.<sup>339</sup>

**a) Read Matt 23:29–33.** Why did Jesus call the scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites” in these verses? What would be their fate? How can you avoid hypocrisy?

### From Abel to Zechariah

**b) Matt 23:34–36:** In these verses, Christ shifted from the past failures of Israel’s leaders to their future transgressions (Cf. Matt 23:29–33).<sup>340</sup> He stated, “On account of this, behold, I am sending to you prophets, and wise people, and scribes.”<sup>341</sup> Since God alone reserves the right to send prophets, this pronouncement shocked those who heard him (Jer 1:4–5; 2 Chron 36:15–16).<sup>342</sup> Once again, Jesus equated himself with Yahweh (Matt 9:1–8; Matt 12:8, 40).

“Wise people” (*sophos*) likely refers to those who teach in a style like that of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (Prov 1:1–7; Ecc 12:9–11). While the inclusion of scribes seems surprising, many devout Jews became followers of Christ beginning at Pentecost (<https://www.theopedia.com/Pentecost>) (Matt 13:52; Acts 2:14, 36–42).<sup>343</sup>

Christ foretold, “Some of them you will kill and you will crucify. And some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and you will persecute from city to city” (Acts 7:58–60; Acts 26:9–11). By rejecting Jesus and his disciples, these men would repeat the sins of their forefathers.<sup>344</sup> Their rebellion would culminate in the most extreme form imaginable: the betrayal and execution of their long-awaited messiah.<sup>345</sup>

<sup>336</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 672.

<sup>337</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 554.

<sup>338</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 672.

<sup>339</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 877.

<sup>340</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 878.

<sup>341</sup>The three types of people mentioned here are listed in masculine plural form. This can refer either to only males or to groups comprised of both genders.

<sup>342</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 555.

<sup>343</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 878–9.

<sup>344</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 672.

<sup>345</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 877.

He continued, “So that may come upon you all the righteous blood being poured out on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”

An important key to understanding this verse involves the corporate solidarity of patrimonial headship within Ancient Near Eastern societies. The head of a family represented every member of his clan, both for good and for ill (Exod 20:4–6; 2 Sam 9:1–7; Jer 35:12–19; Dan 6:24).<sup>346</sup> Therefore, God would credit the guilt incurred by the ancestors of the people of Jerusalem to their accounts, as if they had shed that blood.<sup>347</sup>

The Old Testament (OT) records two prophets whom their own people murdered, Uriah and Zechariah the son of Jehoida (Jer 26:20–23; 2 Chr 24:20–22). They nearly killed Jeremiah (Jer 26:11, 24). Jezebel, a foreign-born queen, massacred an unknown number of prophets (1 Ki 18:4). According to *The Lives of the Prophets*, Jeremiah was eventually martyred, as were Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Micah (Neh 9:26).<sup>348</sup>

The OT mentions more than thirty men named Zechariah. However, only a few fit the profile well enough to be the man mentioned by Jesus. No evidence exists that Zechariah son of Barachiah, who wrote the book of Zechariah, died unnaturally (Zech 1:1).<sup>349</sup> Furthermore, the Babylonians destroyed the temple before his lifetime (Zech 1:12–17),<sup>350</sup> so that Zechariah could not have died between the temple and the altar. Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, which is translated as Barachiah in the Greek OT, served as a witness for Isaiah (Isa 8:2). However, he does not appear to have suffered a violent death.<sup>351</sup>

Josephus (37–100 AD) mentioned the murder of a wealthy man named Zechariah son of Baruch by Zealots in the temple in 67 AD.<sup>352</sup> However, Matthew likely wrote this gospel before that date.<sup>353</sup> Consequently, this appears to be a transcription error. Only the ancient *Codex Sinaiticus*, which dates from the fourth century AD, lacks “son of Barachiah.”<sup>354</sup> On the other hand, *Sinaiticus* is one of the earliest reliable complete manuscripts (Ⲙ) known to scholars.<sup>355</sup> Therefore, the omission may reflect what Matthew wrote.

In a parallel passage, Luke did not include the designation “son of Barachiah” (Luke 11:50–51).<sup>356</sup> Most scholars assert that Matthew and Luke utilized the same sources, the gospel of Mark and an unknown document called Q.<sup>357</sup>

<sup>346</sup>Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 138.

<sup>347</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 556.

<sup>348</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 880.

<sup>349</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 677.

<sup>350</sup>W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 19–28* (ICC; Edinburgh; London; New York: T & T Clark, 1997), 318.

<sup>351</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 676–7.

<sup>352</sup>Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, in *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (trans. William Whiston; Auburn and Buffalo, NY: John E. Beardsley, 1895), 4.5.4, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0148%3Abook%3D4%3Awhiston+chapter%3D5%3Awhiston+section%3D4>

<sup>353</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 35.

<sup>354</sup>Nestle, et al., *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, 28. *Revidierte Auflage*, 78, <http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/manuscript.aspx?book=33&chapter=23&lid=en&side=r&verse=35&zoomSlider=0>. Note that the English translation on this site does not reflect the omission of *hiou Barachio* denoted by the blue marker resembling a capital T on the Greek transcription.

<sup>355</sup>Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament, 2nd Ed.* (Erroll F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 73.

<sup>356</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 868.

<sup>357</sup>Osborne, *Matthew*, 36–7.

In the Hebrew Bible, the last book is 2 Chronicles rather than Malachi.<sup>358</sup> While the names of the martyrs cited run the gamut from A to Z, more likely Jesus named Abel and Zechariah because they were the first and last saints to die in the pages of the Hebrew OT (Gen 4:8; 2 Chron 24:20–22). Since Zechariah was murdered in the ninth century BC, he was not the last righteous man unjustly killed. King Jehoiakim murdered Uriah for testifying against Jerusalem three centuries later (Jer 26:20–23).<sup>359</sup>

Therefore, Christ employed the literary device known as merism. God would hold the scribes and Pharisees accountable for the deaths of Abel, Zechariah, and all the prophets in between them. Furthermore—as with Abel’s blood (Gen 4:10)—Zechariah called for the Lord to avenge him (2 Chron 24:22).<sup>360</sup>

The *Babylonian Talmud* records this event from the sacking of Jerusalem in 586 BC: “An old man from the inhabitants of Jerusalem told me that in this valley Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard killed two hundred and eleven myriads, and in Jerusalem he killed ninety-four myriads on one stone, until their blood went and joined that of Zechariah, to fulfill the words, ‘Blood toucheth blood.’”

“He noticed the blood of Zechariah bubbling up warm and asked what it was. They said, ‘It is the blood of the sacrifices which has been poured there.’ He had some blood brought, but it was different from the other. He then said to them, ‘If you tell me [the truth], well and good, but if not, I will tear your flesh with combs of iron.’”

‘They said, ‘What can we say to you? There was a prophet among us who used to reprove us for our irreligion, and we rose up against him and killed him, and for many years his blood has not rested.’”

“He said to them, ‘I will appease him.’” He brought the great Sanhedrin and the small [local] Sanhedrin (*m. Sanhedrin* 1.4) and killed them over him, but the blood did not cease. He then slaughtered young men and women, but the blood did not cease. He brought schoolchildren and slaughtered them over it, but the blood did not cease. So, he said, ‘Zechariah, Zechariah. I have slain the best of them. Do you want me to destroy them all?’ When he said this to him, it stopped” (*b. Gittin* 57b).

Jerusalem’s destruction did not occur solely to avenge Zechariah’s blood. During the reign of Manasseh—a century before the Babylonians razed the city—the king shed so much innocent blood that God proclaimed certain judgment (2 Ki 24:3–4; Lam 4:12–16; Lam 5:7).

Christ’s discussion of blood “being poured out” indicates that this martyrdom had not reached its completion.<sup>361</sup> Even as the guilt for Zechariah’s death centuries earlier desecrated the temple and invited God’s retribution, so would the blame for the execution of Jesus fall upon that generation (Matt 27:24–26; Deut 32:43; Matt 23:37–24:2).<sup>362</sup>

As Josephus reported, only thirty-seven years later, Rome’s army destroyed Jerusalem and its temple:

“[The Jews] were forced to defend themselves for fear of being punished; as after they had fought, they thought it too late to make any supplications for mercy; so, they were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died, and were then crucified before the

<sup>358</sup>Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 1983), 1459–574.

<sup>359</sup>Robert Althann, “Uriah (Person),” *ABD* 6:767–9, 768–9.

<sup>360</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 880.

<sup>361</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 880.

<sup>362</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 557.

wall of the city. This miserable procedure made [General] Titus greatly to pity them, while they caught every day five hundred Jews; nay, some days they caught more...

“The main reason why he did not forbid that cruelty was this, that he hoped the Jews might perhaps yield at that sight, out of fear lest they might themselves afterwards be liable to the same cruel treatment. So, the soldiers, out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies...

“While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity, but children, and old men, and profane persons, and priests were all slain in the same manner...The flame was also carried a long way, and made an echo, together with the groans of those that were slain; and because this hill was high, and the works at the temple were very great, one would have thought the whole city had been on fire.

“Nor can one imagine anything either greater or more terrible than this noise; for there was at once a shout of the Roman legions, who were marching all together, and a sad clamor of the seditious, who were now surrounded with fire and sword...The blood was larger in quantity than the fire, and those that were slain more in number than those that slew them; for the ground did nowhere appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over heaps of those bodies, as they ran upon such as fled from them.”<sup>363</sup>

**Read Matt 23:34–36.** How did Christ’s pronouncement of judgment upon that generation come to pass? Why did he hold that generation responsible for so many deaths?

### Blood Given for You

**12) Matt 26:26–28:** This passage focuses upon God’s perspective on the death of Jesus.<sup>364</sup> It also explains the origin of one of the universally recognized sacraments of the church.<sup>365</sup> While hosting the traditional Passover feast, Christ introduced a startling new element to the ancient ritual.<sup>366</sup> Jewish people around the world follow a specific pattern of celebrating the meal.<sup>367</sup> Typically, the host interprets the meaning behind the various portions of the meal, such as the

<sup>363</sup>Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 5.11.1, 6.5.1,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0148%3Abook%3D5%3Awhiston+chapter%3D11%3Awhiston+section%3D1;>

[http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0148%3Abook%3D6%3Awhiston+chapter%3D5%3Awhiston+section%3D1.](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0148%3Abook%3D6%3Awhiston+chapter%3D5%3Awhiston+section%3D1)

<sup>364</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 994.

<sup>365</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 771.

<sup>366</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 991.

<sup>367</sup>The Jewish Federations of North America, “The Passover Haggadah: A Guide to the Seder,”

[http://www.jewishfederation.org/images/uploads/holiday\\_images/39497.pdf.](http://www.jewishfederation.org/images/uploads/holiday_images/39497.pdf)

unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, and the lamb.<sup>368</sup> During the feast, celebrants consume four cups of wine.<sup>369</sup>

Jesus transformed the meaning behind the food and drink into a portrayal of his redemptive death, rather than emphasizing the historical exodus from Egypt (Exod 13:1–10; 1 Cor 11:26).<sup>370</sup> He embodied the sacrifice to which the Passover pointed (1 Cor 5:7).<sup>371</sup>

The *Mishnah* provides this overview of the ritual:

“When the first cup has been poured out, the blessing of the festival must be said... Herbs and vegetables are then to be brought: the lettuce is to be immersed, and part eaten thereof, until the eating of the unleavened bread; then unleavened cakes are to be placed before him, as also lettuce and two kinds of cooked food...

“During the existence of the Holy Temple, the paschal sacrifice was then also placed before him. A second cup of wine is then poured out; and the son shall then enquire of his father [the cause of this ceremony], and when the son's mental faculties are insufficient, the father is bound to instruct him in the following manner: ‘Wherefore is this night distinguished from all other nights? That on all other nights we may eat either leavened or unleavened bread, but on this night it must be all unleavened; on all other nights we may eat any kind of herbs, but on this night we must eat bitter herbs; on other nights we may eat meat, either roasted, boiled, or cooked in different ways, but on this night we must eat roasted meat only; on all other nights we immerse what we eat once, but on this night twice.’

“And according to the powers of comprehension of the child, thus his father is bound to teach him: he shall first inform him of the dishonor [of our ancestors]...and conclude with Deut 26:5–9.

“Rabbi Gamaliel says, ‘Whosoever does not mention [explain] three things on the Passover, has not fulfilled his duty. These are the paschal sacrifice, the unleavened cakes, and bitter herbs. The paschal sacrifice is offered because the Lord passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt; the unleavened bread [is eaten] because our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt [before they had time to leaven their dough]; and bitter herbs are eaten, because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt’” (*m. Pesah* 10:2–5).

Jesus identified himself with the Passover lamb (Exod 12:21–28).<sup>372</sup> Yet, Christ also used the unleavened bread to symbolize his body.<sup>373</sup> Note the abundance of sacrificial terminology in his words, such as “flesh,” “blood,” “poured out,” and “remission of sins.”<sup>374</sup>

According to Matthew, “While they were eating, Jesus took bread and he blessed [it] and broke [it] and gave [it] to his disciples. And he said, ‘Take, eat, this is my body.’” This differs radically from the traditional formula,<sup>375</sup> which states, “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His laws and commanded us to eat matzah.”<sup>376</sup>

The host served unleavened bread after the main part of the meal to symbolize the coming of the messiah,<sup>377</sup> for it represented cleanliness and new life (1 Cor 5:7–8). By these

<sup>368</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 630.

<sup>369</sup>Wilkins, *Matthew*, 836.

<sup>370</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 771.

<sup>371</sup>Wilkins, *Matthew*, 836.

<sup>372</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 772.

<sup>373</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 991–2.

<sup>374</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 631.

<sup>375</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 991.

<sup>376</sup>The Jewish Federations of North America, “The Passover Haggadah: A Guide to the Seder,” 13, [http://www.jewishfederation.org/images/uploads/holiday\\_images/39497.pdf](http://www.jewishfederation.org/images/uploads/holiday_images/39497.pdf).

<sup>377</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 772.

words, Jesus implied that his impending death would benefit his disciples.<sup>378</sup> The institution of bread to represent Christ’s body indicates that God no longer requires the sacrifice of a lamb to cover our sins (Heb 9:11–14).<sup>379</sup>

Exactly what Jesus meant by the word “is” (*eimi*) in “This is my body” has provoked a great deal of controversy in the Protestant church.<sup>380</sup> The verb can have a wide range of meaning. “Is” can mean anything from complete physical reality to a symbolic representation.<sup>381</sup>

Although Martin Luther and the other Reformers agreed upon fourteen of fifteen points at the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, their views on the Lord’s Supper tore them apart. The debate centered upon whether Jesus meant his words, “This is my body” and “This is my blood” to be taken literally or figuratively. Luther denounced the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which led people to believe that a priest’s words of institution mystically changed the bread and wine into Christ’s actual body and blood. Yet, Luther charged that those who “contort the little word ‘is’ into ‘signifies’ [do so] frivolously and unsupported by Scripture.”<sup>382</sup>

This theological debate would never have occurred to the disciples.<sup>383</sup> After all, a literal interpretation of the Passover liturgy which reads, “This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate when they came from the land of Egypt” (Deut 16:3) was not possible. They could not have ingested the same pieces of unleavened bread.<sup>384</sup> Furthermore, Jesus ate with them at this meal, so they did not consume his actual body.

When Christ previously informed his compatriots that they needed to consume his flesh and drink his blood, bread and wine were not even present (John 6:48–58).<sup>385</sup> Therefore, the Lord’s Supper provides spiritual benefit and memorializes Christ’s sacrifice but does not constitute another offering of himself (Heb 7:23–28; Heb 9:24–28). Thus, a rich symbolism remains the best option.<sup>386</sup>

Matthew reported, “And when he had taken a cup and given thanks, he gave [it] to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.” Prior to this, they ate the bitter herbs and sang Psalms 113–118, in accordance with *m. Pesah* 10:1–7.<sup>387</sup> Of the four cups of wine which they consumed, this one appears to be the third cup, known as the cup of blessing or the cup of redemption (1 Cor 10:16; Exod 6:6).<sup>388</sup>

Observant Jewish people traditionally recite these words, “Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the world, who creates the fruit of the vine.”<sup>389</sup> Instead, Jesus asserted, “For this is my blood of the covenant, poured out on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”

<sup>378</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 992.

<sup>379</sup>Wilkins, *Matthew*, 836.

<sup>380</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 772.

<sup>381</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 992.

<sup>382</sup>James M. Kittleston, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 179.

<sup>383</sup>Wilkins, *Matthew*, 836–7.

<sup>384</sup>Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 631.

<sup>385</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 992.

<sup>386</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 772.

<sup>387</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 773.

<sup>388</sup>Wilkins, *Matthew*, 837.

<sup>389</sup>The Jewish Federations of North America, “The Passover Haggadah: A Guide to the Seder,” 15, [http://www.jewishfederation.org/images/uploads/holiday\\_images/39497.pdf](http://www.jewishfederation.org/images/uploads/holiday_images/39497.pdf).

Symbolizing Jesus’s blood, to partake of that wine signifies our participation in his atoning sacrifice (Heb 12:22–24).<sup>390</sup>

In Egypt, the blood of lambs had saved the lives of many (Exod 12: 22–23). Now Christ’s blood secures the salvation of his people.<sup>391</sup> The phrase “Blood of the covenant” occurs in several Old Testament passages, such as Exod 24:8 and Zech 9:11.<sup>392</sup> However, the new covenant foretold by Jer 31:27–34 fits best with the concept of a restored relationship with God resulting from the forgiveness of sins (Ezek 36:25–27; Matt 5:17–20). Thus, Christ’s atoning sacrifice forms the theological basis for the new people of God.<sup>393</sup>

**Read Matt 26:26–28.** How did Jesus alter the traditional Passover meal? What does receiving Communion do for us? How does the sprinkled blood of Jesus “speak a better word than the blood of Abel?”

### Praying for Justice

**13) Rev 6:9–10:** The book of Revelation consists of the Apostle John’s vision during his exile on the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9–11). When he wrote it, persecution affected many churches. However, only a few regions of the Roman Empire experienced martyrdom. While some of what John saw pertained to his own era, much of his vision related to the unfolding of future events.<sup>394</sup> Christ charges every believer to deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow him (Mark 8:34–38).<sup>395</sup> Therefore, none of us should be surprised when persecution comes (John 15:18–21; Rom 8:35–39).

The Lamb represents the crucified and risen Christ (Rev 5:6–10). When the Lamb broke the other seals, plagues afflicted humanity (Rev 6:1–6, 11–17; Rev 8:1–5). His opening of this one revealed those whom humanity afflicted praying for justice.<sup>396</sup> In the book of Revelation, “inhabitants on the earth” refers to the persecutors of God’s people (Rev 3:10).<sup>397</sup> John “saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered,” indicating that the scene took place in heaven.<sup>398</sup> This view of the afterlife differed from the Old Testament conception of entry into the underworld (*Sheol*), upon one’s death (Num 16:30–33; Job 7:6–10).<sup>399</sup>

These believers chose to identify with the suffering of the Lamb, receiving execution for their witness to the redemptive work of Jesus.<sup>400</sup> This passage affirms that God ushers his people

<sup>390</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 773.

<sup>391</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 993.

<sup>392</sup>Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 773.

<sup>393</sup>France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 994–5.

<sup>394</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 395.

<sup>395</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 391.

<sup>396</sup>Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 217.

<sup>397</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 392.

<sup>398</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1998), 403.

<sup>399</sup>Theodore J. Lewis, “Dead, Abode of the,” *ABD* 2:101–5, 102.

<sup>400</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 390.

into his presence immediately when our lives on earth reach their end (2 Cor 5:1–8; Phil 1:21–24; 1 Thess 5:9–10). However, our bodily resurrection will not occur until Christ returns (1 Cor 15:42–58; 1 Thess 4:13–17).

Stoic philosophy promoted a similar view. However, its adherents considered the body a prison of the soul.<sup>401</sup> According to Seneca (ca. 1 BC–65 AD):

“This body of ours is a weight upon the soul and its penance. As the load presses down the soul is crushed and is in bondage, unless philosophy has come to its assistance and has bid it take fresh courage by contemplating the universe and has turned it from things earthly to things divine. There it has its liberty, there it can roam abroad; meantime it escapes the custody in which it is bound and renews its life in heaven.”<sup>402</sup>

Israel’s priests poured a sacrificial bull’s blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering (Lev 4:7). Therefore, the souls of martyrs dwelling under the altar in heaven indicates that the Lord views their deaths as a sacrifice, “because the blood for a soul (*nephesh*) will make atonement” (Lev 17:11).<sup>403</sup> Paul considered the ongoing persecution he experienced and his impending death “a drink offering” (Phil 2:17; 2 Tim 4:6).<sup>404</sup>

However, the altar in heaven does not necessarily represent the bronze sacrificial altar (Exod 27:1–3). Given that the martyrs’ prayers rose to God, their souls might rest under the altar of incense (Exod 30:8–10; Rev 8:3–5; Rev 9:13–15; Rev 16:4–7).<sup>405</sup> While the theme of sacrifice points to one type of altar and prayer to another, in John’s vision both images may converge into one reality.<sup>406</sup>

The *Babylonian Talmud* states, “The souls of the righteous are hidden under the Throne of Glory” (*b. Shabbat* 152b). Therefore, the altar could also signify the throne of God, protecting the souls of martyrs after they lose their lives (Matt 10:26–39; Phil 1:27–30; 2 Tim 1:8–12).<sup>407</sup> Crying out for vindication “with a loud voice,”<sup>408</sup> these souls pled, “How long, O master, holy and true, will you not judge and grant justice to our blood from the inhabitants on the earth?” (Cf. Gen 4:9–11).

A man subjected to persecution under Domitian (51–96 AD) noted, “Well, how I bore my exile...bearing up under the hatred...of the most powerful, stern man, who was called by all Greeks and barbarians both master and god, but who was in reality an evil demon.”<sup>409</sup> This meshes with John’s view of the real power behind the Roman Empire (Rev 12:9; Rev 20:2–3).<sup>410</sup>

In a Jewish intertestamental apocryphal account, some citizens of Israel appealed to their ruler. “They went to the king and said, “How long will you fail to do justice and to avenge our kindred?” (1 Macc 6:22 NRSVCE)

<sup>401</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 403–4.

<sup>402</sup> Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Moral Epistles, Vol. 1* (trans. Richard M. Grummere; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), 94–5, <https://archive.org/stream/adluciliumepistu01seneuoft#page/452/mode/2up>.

<sup>403</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “נֶפֶשׁ” (*nephesh*), *BDB*, 659–60, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/658/mode/2up>. This word can be translated as “soul,” “living being,” “life,” or “self,” among other options.

<sup>404</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 146.

<sup>405</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 391.

<sup>406</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 146.

<sup>407</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 391–2.

<sup>408</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 218.

<sup>409</sup> Dio Chrysostom, *Orations, Vol. 4* (trans. H. Lamar Crosby; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), 45.1, 207, <https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.57803/2015.57803.Dio-Chrysostom-Vol-4#page/n217/mode/2up>.

<sup>410</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 407.

A Jewish tombstone from the same era features a similar plea: “I call upon and pray the Most High God, the Lord of the spirits and of all flesh, against those who with guile murdered or poisoned the wretched, untimely lost Heraclea, shedding her innocent blood wickedly: that it may be so with them that murdered or poisoned her, and with their children; O Lord that seeth all things, and ye angels of God, Thou before whom every soul is afflicted this same day with supplication: that Thou mayst avenge the innocent blood and require it again right speedily!”<sup>411</sup>

In Hebrew tribunals, plaintiffs argued their own cases before the judge.<sup>412</sup> After condemnation by human courts, the martyrs in John’s vision sought vindication in the heavenly one. Had God remained silent, he would have signaled that the martyrs’ murder was justifiable.<sup>413</sup> “How long?” pleads for the Lord’s quick intervention,<sup>414</sup> for much time has passed without justice (Ps 13:1–4; Ps 79:1–7; Zech 1:12).<sup>415</sup> According to these martyrs, by failing to vindicate them, God put his reputation at stake (Luke 18:1–8).<sup>416</sup>

Although they received an immediate response (Rev 6:12–17), their prayers shall not be fully answered until the events of Rev 19:2 occur. At that time, the Lord shall serve as “the avenger of blood” (Num 35:19; Ps 9:10–16).<sup>417</sup>

**a) Read Rev 6:9–10.** Why are the souls of these martyrs under the altar? How does this fit with the sacrificial altar, the altar of incense, and God’s throne? For what are they waiting? How does this passage affect you?

### The Full Number of Martyrs

**b) Rev 6:11:** For people in Greco-Roman culture, clothing represented a person’s identity.<sup>418</sup> In this verse, God responded to the martyr’s plea in Rev 6:9–10 symbolically, giving each of them a white robe. White robes denoted the purity which resulted from persevering in faith (Rev 3:4–5).<sup>419</sup> This garb also connoted salvation, victory, and immortality.<sup>420</sup>

Therefore, the Lord declared them righteous despite the world’s guilty verdict.<sup>421</sup> Then these martyrs were told to “rest a little longer.” God expects them to wait, even though his sense of time is not like ours (2 Pet 3:8).<sup>422</sup> C. S. Lewis captured this concept well. When the Christ-

<sup>411</sup> Adolf Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan; New York; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 435, <https://archive.org/stream/lightfromancient00deis#page/434/mode/2up>.

<sup>412</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 146.

<sup>413</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 218.

<sup>414</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 218.

<sup>415</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 407.

<sup>416</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 392–3.

<sup>417</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 407–8.

<sup>418</sup> Ulrich Wilckens, “στολή” (*stolē*), *TDNT* 7:687–91, 689.

<sup>419</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 394.

<sup>420</sup> Wilckens, “στολή” (*stolē*), *TDNT*, 7:691.

<sup>421</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 394.

<sup>422</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 220.

figure told Lucy that he would return shortly, she asked, “Please, Aslan...what do you call soon?” He replied, “I call all times soon.”<sup>423</sup>

What the martyrs eagerly anticipate will occur when “might be completed also, [the number of] their fellow servants, their brothers [and sisters], the ones about to be killed even as they [had been].”

The apocryphal book of 1 Enoch expresses this same concept:

“And in those days shall have ascended the prayer of the righteous, and the blood of the righteous from the earth before the Lord of Spirits. In those days the holy ones who dwell above in the heavens shall unite with one voice and supplicate and pray...that judgment may be done unto them...In those days I saw the Head of Days when he seated himself upon the throne of his glory, and the books of the living were opened before him...And the hearts of the holy were filled with joy; because the number of the righteous had been offered, and the prayer of the righteous had been heard, and the blood of the righteous been required before the Lord of Spirits.”<sup>424</sup>

The martyrdom of believers falls within the plan of God. Their deaths shall inaugurate the coming of the Kingdom in all its fullness,<sup>425</sup> making these Christians especially important in determining when the day of the Lord shall come.<sup>426</sup>

Nero’s victims in John’s era were soon followed by those who died under other Roman emperors.<sup>427</sup> For example, Polycarp, a disciple of John, refused to deny Christ by elevating Caesar above the Lord.<sup>428</sup> Shortly before his persecutors burned him to death, he testified, “Thou hast granted me this day and hour, that I might receive a portion amongst the number of martyrs...May I be received among these in Thy presence this day, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice.”<sup>429</sup> May we stand as firmly as Polycarp did, through whatever trials we undergo.

**Read Rev 6:11.** Why were the martyrs given white robes and told to wait a little longer? How do their deaths affect the timing of Christ’s return? What gives you the ability to stand firm under great pressure?

### Cursed from the Ground

**14) Gen 4:11–14:** People in the Ancient Near East and in the Roman Empire believed in a three-part universe.<sup>430</sup> For example, Homer wrote, “Now therefore let earth be witness to this, and the broad heaven above, and the down-flowing water of the Styx.”<sup>431</sup> The phrase, “the ground which

<sup>423</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), 138.

<sup>424</sup>R. H. Charles, trans., “Book of Enoch,” in *The Apochrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (APOT)* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 47, 90–2, <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924067146773#page/n207/mode/2up>.

<sup>425</sup>Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 411.

<sup>426</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 394.

<sup>427</sup>Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 149.

<sup>428</sup>Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language, 3rd Ed.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 37.

<sup>429</sup>Polycarp, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (trans. J. B. Lightfoot, adapted by Athena Data Products ; 1990), 14.2, <https://archive.org/stream/apostolicfathers02lakeuoft#page/330/mode/2up>.

<sup>430</sup>Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 2004), 128.

<sup>431</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey* (trans. A. T. Murray; LCL; Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; Heinemann, 1919), 5.184–6,

had opened its mouth in order to take the blood of your brother from your hand” suggests that Abel entered Sheol, the abode of the dead (Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5).<sup>432</sup>

As with the serpent and the ground (Gen 3:14–19),<sup>433</sup> God cursed Cain. By being “cursed from the ground,” Cain would no longer benefit from its productivity.<sup>434</sup> This implied banishment from places where he could cultivate the earth.<sup>435</sup> Instead, Cain would be “one wavering back and forth...on the land,” a restless wanderer in his quest to find food. Far from experiencing the joys his parents had in Eden (Gen 2:7–25), Cain would spend his life hunting and gathering food to survive.<sup>436</sup>

Since Cain disavowed any responsibility for the welfare of his brother (Gen 4:8–9), the Lord deprived him of family relationships.<sup>437</sup> No longer would he enjoy their community. Cain would lose his sense of belonging, in some ways, a fate worse than death.<sup>438</sup>

According to the Jewish philosopher Philo (ca. 20 BC–40 AD):  
 “[Cain and Abel were] persons who have received a birth more excellent than that of any succeeding generation, in being sprung from the first wedded pair, from the first man and woman...But, nevertheless the elder of them endured to slay the younger and, having committed the great and most accursed crime of fratricide, he first defiled the ground with human blood. “Now, what good did the nobility of his birth do to a man who had displayed this want of nobleness in his soul? Which God, who surveys all human things and actions, detested when he saw it; and, casting it forth, affixed a punishment to it, not slaying him at once, so that he should arrive at an immediate insensibility to misfortunes, but suspending over him ten thousand deaths in his external senses, by...incessant griefs and fears, so as to inflict upon him...the most grievous calamities.”<sup>439</sup>

Adam and Eve accepted their sentences without protest (Gen 3:16–24). Cain failed to repent. Instead, he responded with self-pity.<sup>440</sup> Although, the Lord could have justly sentenced him to an immediate death,<sup>441</sup> Cain seemed concerned only with the effects of the harsh punishment imposed by God,<sup>442</sup> which he considered intolerable.<sup>443</sup> He protested, “Behold, you have driven me this day from upon the faces of the ground, and from your face I will be hidden.” Cain perceived that God was sending him even farther from the Lord’s presence than his parents had been when they were driven out of Eden (Gen 3:22–4:6).<sup>444</sup>

Cain’s complaint also reflects his fear of entering a wilderness devoid of the rule of

---

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0136%3Abook%3D5%3Acard%3D145>.

<sup>432</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 107–8.

<sup>433</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 98. There is no evidence that God cursed Adam or Eve.

<sup>434</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 232.

<sup>435</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 107.

<sup>436</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 265.

<sup>437</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 265.

<sup>438</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 232.

<sup>439</sup> Philo, “On the Virtues,” in *The Works of Philo, Vol. 3* (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; London: Bohn, 1855), 499, <https://archive.org/stream/worksofphilojuda03phil#page/498/mode/2up>.

<sup>440</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 98.

<sup>441</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 233.

<sup>442</sup> Schlimm, “From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Ethics of Anger in Genesis,” 342, [http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/890/D\\_Schlimm\\_Matthew\\_a\\_200812.pdf?sequence=](http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/890/D_Schlimm_Matthew_a_200812.pdf?sequence=)

<sup>443</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 108.

<sup>444</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 108.

law.<sup>445</sup> He said, “I shall be one who wavers back and forth in the land, and anyone who finds me shall kill me.” He fretted that he would receive the same treatment he delivered to Abel (Gen 4:8; Num 35:19).<sup>446</sup> Where no government exists, blood feuds tend to occur.<sup>447</sup>

As many have observed, Cain’s lament indicates that other people besides his parents lived at that time.<sup>448</sup> However, this portion of the text focuses upon his spiritual condition, rather than human history. Therefore, Genesis cannot definitively answer speculation regarding whom he feared and where he would later find a wife (Gen 4:17).<sup>449</sup>

**a) Read Gen 4:11–12.** How would Cain live due to his sin? What does this tell us about the value of human life? Why was Cain’s punishment too much for him to bear? How would you respond to that sentence?

### Banished from God’s Presence

**c) Gen 4:15–16:** Here the narrative of Gen 4:1–16 takes a surprising turn: the Lord granted the murderer a pledge and a protective action.<sup>450</sup> While God did not promise that Cain would live, he would render judgment against anyone who killed him.<sup>451</sup> The number seven denotes a complete cycle.<sup>452</sup> Therefore, that upon “anyone who kills Cain sevenfold shall vengeance be taken” indicates that God would deliver perfect justice,<sup>453</sup> an act of divine retribution (Ps 79:8–12).<sup>454</sup>

Then “the Lord put on Cain a sign (*oth*).”<sup>455</sup> God provided protective clothing for Adam and Eve before sending them out of Eden into a hostile environment (Gen 3:20). Here he gave their son a safeguard for his new conditions.<sup>456</sup> The precise nature of this sign remains a subject of tremendous speculation.<sup>457</sup> Marking a slave with a tattoo,<sup>458</sup> or maiming a criminal commonly occurred in the Ancient Near East.<sup>459</sup> However, Cain’s mark best fits with the sign of preservation which an angel placed upon the heads of innocent people in Jerusalem (Ezek 9:3–

<sup>445</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 164.

<sup>446</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 233.

<sup>447</sup> Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBOT*, Gen 4:15.

<sup>448</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 233.

<sup>449</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 99.

<sup>450</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 233.

<sup>451</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 165.

<sup>452</sup> Leland Ryken, et al., “Seven,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (DBI)* (Downers Grove, IL; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 774–5.

<sup>453</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 99.

<sup>454</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 109.

<sup>455</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “*וֹת*” (*oth*), *BDB*, 16,

<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/16/mode/2up>.

<sup>456</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 265–6.

<sup>457</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 109.

<sup>458</sup> Mallory Ditchey, “Body Language: Tattooing and Branding in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 4, no. 1 (14 March 2017), <https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/janeh.ahead-of-print/janeh-2015-0004/janeh-2015-0004.xml>.

<sup>459</sup> Theophile J. Meek, “Middle Assyrian Laws,” in *ANET*, A4, 180,

[https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET\\_20160815/Pritchard\\_1950\\_ANET#page/n205/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/Pritchard1950ANET_20160815/Pritchard_1950_ANET#page/n205/mode/2up).

6).<sup>460</sup> Although he was forced from God’s presence, Cain remained under the Lord’s protection.<sup>461</sup>

“And Cain was banished from the presence of the Lord,”<sup>462</sup> just as his parents had been (Gen 3:22–24).<sup>463</sup> “And he dwelt in the land of Nod.” “Nod” means “Wandering.” This designation reinforced Cain’s sentence to live as a restless outsider (Gen 4:11–14).<sup>464</sup> Adam and Eve went “east of Eden.” So did their only remaining son.<sup>465</sup> While Adam and Eve had attempted to become like God (Gen 3:1–7), Cain sought to draw near to God by making an offering (Gen 4:3). However, his demeanor ultimately resulted in banishment from his community as well as from the Lord’s presence (Gen 4:4–8).<sup>466</sup>

Many parallels exist between the accounts of the fall and of Cain and Abel. However, the narrative of the two brothers demonstrates the increasingly brutal effects of sin. In only one generation, Cain’s behavior resulted in even greater alienation of humanity from God.<sup>467</sup>

**Read Gen 4:15-16.** How did Cain live in alienation from God and yet with his mercy? Have you ever experienced that?

### Children of the Devil

**15) 1 John 3:10–12:** The Apostle John proclaimed that a test exists to determine the validity of a person’s claim of faith in Christ,<sup>468</sup> and whether we ourselves belong to him (Matt 7:15–23).<sup>469</sup> This passage strongly affirms that holiness characterizes the lives of believers.<sup>470</sup>

John began by stating, “In this it is evident [who are] the children of God and the children of the devil.” Thus, he made a sharp division of people into two classes. While Jesus applied the latter designation to Israelis who opposed him (John 8:42–47), John professed that this name applies to some people who claim to live for Christ.<sup>471</sup>

Those whose lives are typified by sin do not know God (1 Cor 5:9–13; Gal 5:19–21).<sup>472</sup> Therefore, we must scrutinize ourselves to determine whether we live righteously. Although we can never achieve perfection in this life, we do have the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome temptation (1 Cor 10:6–13; Gal 5:22–26).

<sup>460</sup> Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 4:15.

<sup>461</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 235.

<sup>462</sup> Jacob J. Rabinowitz, “The Susa Tablets, the Bible, and the Aramaic Papyri,” *VT* 11, no. 1 (1 January 1961): 55–76, 56,

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249582516\\_The\\_Susa\\_Tablets\\_The\\_Bible\\_and\\_The\\_Aramaic\\_Papyri](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249582516_The_Susa_Tablets_The_Bible_and_The_Aramaic_Papyri).

<sup>463</sup> Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 133.

<sup>464</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 235.

<sup>465</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 227–8.

<sup>466</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 110.

<sup>467</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 100.

<sup>468</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1989), 179.

<sup>469</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 187.

<sup>470</sup> Gary M. Burge, *Letters of John* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 150–1.

<sup>471</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 180.

<sup>472</sup> Burge, *Letters of John*, 157.

John saw no conflict between the law and the gospel: both call us to live in holiness and love (1 John 2:3–6).<sup>473</sup> Therefore, failing to practice righteousness on an on-going basis indicates that one is not a believer. This especially applies to not loving fellow Christians.<sup>474</sup>

What John wrote to them was nothing new. They had heard this from him before (John 13:34–35).<sup>475</sup> By loving others, even those outside of the church, we fulfill the moral demands of the law (Rom 12:9–21; Rom 13:8–10; Gal 6:7–10).<sup>476</sup> Consequently, the apostle exhorted them to live out the new character which the Lord had placed within them.<sup>477</sup>

Since the essence of God is love (1 John 4:7–12),<sup>478</sup> the commands to believe and to continuously love others are inextricably linked.<sup>479</sup> The apostle then emphasized the requirement to love by contrasting devotion with its antithesis.<sup>480</sup>

Greco-Romans considered killing a member of one's family one of the most heinous crimes.<sup>481</sup> For example, Cicero (106–43 BC) castigated his archenemy by calling him, “You parricide, you fratricide, you murderer of your sister.”<sup>482</sup>

John applied this same concept within the church,<sup>483</sup> citing Cain as the prototype of murderers (Gen 4:3–8).<sup>484</sup> While Cain could control his actions, John specified the source of his attitude and behavior as Satan himself.<sup>485</sup> He was “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44; Gen 3:1–7, 17–19).<sup>486</sup> According to John, Cain “slaughtered” (*sphazō*) his brother.<sup>487</sup> This term exudes violence. It occurs in the New Testament only here and nine times in the book of Revelation (e.g. Rev 6:4).<sup>488</sup>

The atrocity began with a failure to love which turned to hatred: murder in embryonic form (Matt 5:21–22).<sup>489</sup> John noted that Cain despised Abel “because his deeds were evil and those of his brother [were] righteous.” Jealousy of his brother's uprightness formed the root of Cain's life-altering iniquity (Prov 27:4; James 3:13–16).<sup>490</sup>

**a) Read 1 John 3:10–12.** What do our attitudes toward Christians reveal about us? Why is Cain a supreme example of the consequences of envy? How does jealousy affect your life?

<sup>473</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 183.

<sup>474</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 187.

<sup>475</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 189.

<sup>476</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 181.

<sup>477</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 188.

<sup>478</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 181.

<sup>479</sup> Burge, *Letters of John*, 160. In Koine Greek, a verb in the present tense indicates that the action occurs continuously or repetitively.

<sup>480</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 183.

<sup>481</sup> Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, 1 John 3:11–3.

<sup>482</sup> M. Tullius Cicero, “On His House,” in *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero* (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; London: George Bell & Sons, 1891), 10.26, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0020:text=Dom.:chapter=10>.

<sup>483</sup> Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, 1 John 3:11–3.

<sup>484</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 189.

<sup>485</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 183–4.

<sup>486</sup> Burge, *Letters of John*, 160.

<sup>487</sup> Danker et al., “σφάζω” (*sphazō*), *BDAG*, 979.

<sup>488</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 184.

<sup>489</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 189–90.

<sup>490</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 185.

## Love or Death

**b) 1 John 3:13–15:** Following John’s exposition concerning Cain’s murder of his brother (1 John 3:10–12), he inserted an aside. the apostle proclaimed the importance of loving others even though the world will hate us. In fact, we can expect persecution.<sup>491</sup> First, he wrote, “Do not be astonished.” His next phrase can be translated as “if the world hates you” or “that the word hates you.” Since “be astonished” occurs in the imperative (*thaumazete*), rather than the subjunctive mood, (*thaumazēte*),<sup>492</sup> he likely meant “that the world hates you.”<sup>493</sup>

The same situation exists today as in the era of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–8).<sup>494</sup> Those who remain in spiritual death despise those who “crossed over from death into life” (John 15:18–21; 1 Pet 4:12–19).<sup>495</sup> Sadly, this attitude of hatred can appear even within our congregations (1 John 2:7–11).<sup>496</sup> People without love for other believers expose their true origin:<sup>497</sup> the realm of evil and death.<sup>498</sup>

John provided a compelling description of the transition from one kingdom to another, an event which occurred in the past but whose effects endure.<sup>499</sup> He emphatically pronounced, “We know that we have crossed over from death into life because we love the brothers [and sisters].”<sup>500</sup> Since “we love” appears in the present tense, continual devotion to other Christians characterizes God’s people.<sup>501</sup> The proof of eternal life consists of the love we have for those in whom the Holy Spirit also resides.<sup>502</sup> Loving others does not lead to salvation but exhibits that we have already received redemption. It provides tangible evidence of Christ’s work within us (1 John 3:16–18, 23–24; John 5:24).<sup>503</sup>

On the other hand, “Anyone who does not continually love remains in death.” In addition, “Everyone who hates his brother [or sister] is a murderer.” Hatred fails to recognize the image of God in other people, wishing that they no longer existed (Gen 1:26–27; Matt 5:21–24).<sup>504</sup> From the Lord’s viewpoint, our attitudes and motives are equivalent to actions (Matt 5:27–28).<sup>505</sup>

The term which John used here for “murderer” (*anthrōpoktonos*) appears in only two verses in the New Testament, here and in John 8:44. John associated both usages with the devil. In extra-biblical literature, authors reserved the word for especially revolting murders.<sup>506</sup> After

<sup>491</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 190.

<sup>492</sup> William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek, 3rd Ed.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 290.

<sup>493</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 187.

<sup>494</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 190.

<sup>495</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 186.

<sup>496</sup> Burge, *Letters of John*, 161.

<sup>497</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 190.

<sup>498</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 190–1.

<sup>499</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, 573. The perfect tense describes an event which occurred in the past with results which remain in the present.

<sup>500</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 188. Greek verbs already incorporate a pronoun. Adding another pronoun to the verb makes the pronoun emphatic. “Brothers” can refer to only men or to a group of mixed genders.

<sup>501</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 189. The present tense refers to a continual or repetitive action.

<sup>502</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 191.

<sup>503</sup> Burge, *Letters of John*, 161.

<sup>504</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 191.

<sup>505</sup> Burge, *Letters of John*, 161.

<sup>506</sup> John Byron, “Slaughter, Fratricide and Sacrilege: Cain and Abel Traditions in 1 John 3,” *Biblica* 88, no. 4 (1 January 2007): 526–35, 527–8, <https://www.bsw.org/biblica/vol-88-2007/slaughter-fratricide-and-sacrilege-cain-and-abel-traditions-in-1-john-3/85/>.

the Cyclops devoured one of his men, Odysseus said to him, “You were destined, it seems, to pay the penalty for your ungodly feast. For my burning Troy to the ground would have been a sorry deed if I had not punished you for the murder (*anthrōpoktonos*) of my companions.”<sup>507</sup>

Hatred indicates that a person possesses the same nature as the devil. Such a person cannot belong to the kingdom of God (1 Cor 5:9–13; Gal 5:19–21).<sup>508</sup> An absence of love is not compatible with eternal life.<sup>509</sup>

**Read 1 John 3:13-15.** Why shouldn’t we be surprised when those outside of the church hate us? What makes hatred for Christians incompatible with eternal life? How does John’s admonition mesh with the account of Cain and Abel?

---

<sup>507</sup>Euripides, *Cyclops, Alcestis, Medea* (translator David Kovacs; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 694–5, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0094%3Acard%3D663>.

<sup>508</sup> Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 191–2.

<sup>509</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 190.