

Series: God & Cain #1020

Title: Genesis 4.2

Cain's Brother, Abel

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. As always, I am very happy to have you join me and all these other listeners while we are still fairly early on in our series *God and Cain*. What we have here in the first few verses of Genesis 4 is Cain and his family. His father is Adam. His mother is Eve. And today we meet Cain's younger brother, Abel.

Families are really something, aren't they? And we all have one, whether we like it or not, and whether or not we are in relationship to our family of origin. Some of us, for whatever reason, are separate from our families. It is very interesting to read Genesis, in particular, because in this first Book of the Bible we meet several families. And when you read about them you will see that these homes, or shall we more accurately say, these tents are full of problems, trouble, relational difficulties – to say the least!

I mean if you stumbled into the Book of Genesis one day expecting to find *the perfect* family, you will be sorely disappointed. Talk about missed expectations. The perfect family does not exist (then or now). Maybe you have had this experience and can remember it? Do you remember dating the person who is now your spouse and that moment came when you went to meet their family? There is that time when the dating relationship blossoms, and maybe you are thinking of marriage, and you realize that men – you are going to have to meet her family. Women – you are going to have to meet his family.

My wife and I met in our church in Hong Kong. Her family lives in Hong Kong, and so I was up first. I well remember meeting her Dad and Mom, as well as her sister. *I was so nervous!* But what I was more worried about was when Ling had to meet *my* family, because I know my family! I know very well our personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. I knew how my parents, my brother, and my extended family would behave and what she would become a witness to. So, when we traveled back to Boston and that time came for her to visit with the Swallow family, boy, I held my breath and prayed a lot about *that*.

"Would you like to meet my family," or "It is time for you to meet my family." Those sentences. Yes, some of us cannot wait to introduce future spouse to said family. But for many of us, this is a stressful moment in time, because we know all the family secrets and we are hesitant to let someone we *really like* in on them. We also know, or expect, how the various members of our families will act, and ah, this concerns us.

When we flew to Boston and visited with my family one of the things we had to deal with was the fact that the home in which I grew up only had (and still only has) one bathroom. Our family was my parents, my brother, and myself. So we got used to a certain rhythm in which the four of us would use the bathroom on a set schedule. We did not print this schedule. We did not have a meeting to determine the time of its use. We just sort of planned when we could be in there based on everyone else's schedule.

I will not forget my (now) wife's reaction to this! Ling came from Hong Kong, where even though the apartment was very small, there was still more than one bathroom. She also spent several years in Canada where the bathrooms in the house were multiple. The idea that when you needed to go you might well get up to the door and find it closed and locked. Or, you had to be very intentional about what time to wake up so you could "get in the bathroom" was a completely foreign idea.

I was used to it, so I wondered why this was unfathomable to her. But that is because I was used to my family and how we did this dance around who would use the bathroom and when. And we did this for *years*. So, even though I had been in Hong Kong for a few years at that time, when I went back to Boston I fell right back into the invisible schedule.

Well, when it was time to meet my family my wife sure did learn a lot, and she married me anyway. And, as we know, you marry the man, you marry the woman, you marry the family! In pre-marital counseling with couples I tell them this all the time. Do not be fooled. A spouse's family of origin will have a *big* impact on your marriage.

Speaking of families more generally now, the home is too often not a peaceful, joyous atmosphere but rather a place of pain, sorrow, anger, a place where there are bad memories, and even where there is tragedy. I know I speak to many of you right now who come from families that are – to put it frankly – a mess. You are certainly not alone. And as we move deeper and deeper into Cain's life we see that his family was not exactly picture perfect. (Not at all.)

But we are meeting his family. Now that we know something about his father and mother (the world's first sinners), and now that we have witnessed the birth of Cain, let's return to the (true) story at Genesis chapter 4 and verse 2. I am reading Genesis chapter 4, verses 1 and 2 for context. **"Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.' ² Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."**

Verse 2 begins, "Again," meaning that Eve had a second child (also a boy) and she named him Abel. We will come to the meaning of Abel's name in a minute. But let me just say that Adam and Eve had many children not mentioned by name in the Scripture. You will see this if you keep reading in Genesis and make sense of the early population growth and how that would only have been possible had Adam and Eve been fruitful in multiplying. Remember that is God's command for them. I am reading Genesis chapter 1, verse 28, **"²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...'"** That is exactly what Adam and Eve did.

And in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 20, the writer of Genesis (Moses) tells us, **"²⁰ Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living."** (Genesis 3.20.)

And as we consider this word "again" (verse 2 begins, "again") and continues, "...she gave birth to his brother Abel" some people surmise that Cain and Abel were twins. In verse 1 the Bible says, "the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain" but in verse 2 there is no mention of sexual relations between Adam and Eve and conception, therefore some believe the boys were twins. Maybe. I tend to think not. Importantly, the Bible does *not* say Cain and Abel were twins.

And there are many examples in Genesis where the text does not mention sexual relations and conception yet children were not twins. I just have time for one example, Genesis 25 and verses 1 and 2. This is Genesis chapter 25, verses 1 and 2, **"Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ² She bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah."** These six children were not sextuplets. They were children born to Abraham and Keturah at separate times.

The point is this: the Bible does not say Cain and Abel were twins, so I do not think they were. What we do know is that Cain is the elder son and Abel the younger son.

And let's find out what the name Abel means. Abel means vanity. His name can be translated as mere breath, vapor, and futility, even transitoriness. Well now there is likely not a name you're going to give to your newborn son! I cannot see this in the birth announcement you send out, "Welcome Vanity to our Home!" "Welcome Vapor to our Home!" "Here he is, Futility!" "We can't wait for you to meet Breath."

This name reminds us of the vanity of life. I think of Ecclesiastes chapter 1, verse 2, "'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher, 'Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.'" (Ecclesiastes 1, verse 2.)

Or Psalm chapter 39 and verse 5, **"Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; surely every man at his best is a mere breath."** (That's Psalm 39, verse 5.)

And I think of Romans chapter 8 and verse 20, **"²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility..."** (Romans 8.20).

So why did Eve give Abel this name? Find out Monday when you join us for God Is. We will continue here in verse 2 of Genesis chapter 4. We are learning about Cain's family and next week we will find out more about them, including the work that Cain and Abel did. So let me encourage you to be with us each weekday on this fine station and/or via this God Is Podcast.

And for all who might well be introducing your family to someone this weekend, I hope that goes well for you (and for that person)! Families...they really are something. But aren't we glad God speaks to the family in the Bible? He has so much to say to us about how to function with the home. And we must learn and apply as much as we can from the Lord God in this regard. I will meet you again on Monday for God Is.

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