

CAIN AND ABEL OFFER SACRIFICES

Daily Bible Readings			
M	May 26	Prov. 3:1-10	Honor God with Your First Fruits
T	May 27	Heb. 10:26-34	Struggles of Faith
W	May 28	Heb. 10:35-11:4	The Righteous Will Live by Faith
Th	May 29	Acts 5:1-11	Half-hearted Giving
F	May 30	Luke 20:45-21:4	Give Your All
Sa	May 31	Rev. 6:9-17	The Martyrs' Cry for Justice

MAIN IDEA

From their very livelihood, Cain and Abel offer gifts to God, but Cain grew angry because Abel's gift was more pleasing to God.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Genesis 4:1-25

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?" (Gen. 4:6-7a)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Reflect on lesson 1, "Cain and Abel Offer Sacrifices" (Participant's Book, p. 1).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of Genesis 4 and the characters of Cain and Abel.
- Provide Bibles, Participant's Books, Worship Leaflets for lesson 1, name tags, paper, and pens.
- Obtain a white pillar candle, as well as a means to light it.
- Step 6 offers additional options from which to choose.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Greet participants and provide name tags. Invite them to identify main characters in the stories in Genesis: Adam, Eve, and so on. Discuss which characters they most identify with and why.
- Distribute Bibles, Participant's Books, and Worship Leaflets for lesson 1.
- Formulate and get consensus on some simple ground rules for the study (for example, welcoming diverse points of view, maintaining confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Light the white candle, noting that it is a tangible reminder of the presence of the risen Christ.
- Encourage participants to settle into silence.
- Invite volunteers to lead portions of Morning Prayer from the Worship Leaflet, beginning with the Opening Sentences and ending after the Hymn.

Teaching Tip

The inclusion of this early biblical example of making sacrificial offerings to God is accompanied by a tragic twist. Two brothers give from their livelihoods: Cain, the farmer, from the fruits of the ground; Abel, the sheep-keeper, from his firstlings. But God only “had regard” for Abel’s gift. Scholars are unclear as to why.

What follows is anger, violence, lying: sin. Cain murders Abel. God answers this act with curse and suffering: consequence. God’s pronouncement of Cain’s curse is a consequence for his actions rather than an imposition of punishment. The vengeance God threatens for whoever would take Cain’s life indicates that the value of life held primary over a curse of death.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 4:1–16

4:1 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the LORD.”²Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.³In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,⁴and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,⁵but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.⁶The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

⁸Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”¹⁰And the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen, your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!¹¹And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.¹²When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”¹³Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear!¹⁴Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.”¹⁵Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.¹⁶Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant’s Book, p. 2

- Read Genesis 4:1–16, Compare Cain and Abel, noticing their different occupations, offerings, status, and attitudes.
- Option: Read Genesis 4:1–16 twice. On the first reading, consider Cain’s and Abel’s offerings (vv. 3–4). The second time, focus on God’s response to Cain (vv. 5–7). Discuss whether the two offerings were given in gratitude or obligation.
- Option: Read Genesis 4:1–16, Deuteronomy 26:2, and 15:19–23. Note how both of Cain’s and Abel’s offerings adhere to the later Levitical system outlined in Deuteronomy. If each brother follows God’s instructions, identify the difference between their gifts.

4. Cain and Abel

Participant's Book, p. 3

- The author describes connection in Genesis between creation and worship. Discuss how creation is a gift from God. Identify ways that participants respond to God for this gift. How do their responses compare with the offerings Cain and Abel present to God?
 1. Why was Abel's offering received over Cain's?
 2. What makes one act of worship more pleasing to God than another?
- Invite participants to talk about their feelings when giving gifts to God or to others. Encourage them to identify a specific or favorite gift they have given. Continue discussion with these questions:
 1. What feelings do they associate with giving out of obligation?
 2. What does it feel like to be on the receiving end of a gift given out of obligation?
- Read Hebrews 11:4 and discuss what this verse adds to the story of Cain and Abel.
 1. What does it look like to offer something in faith?
 2. What example does Abel give in how to make offerings to God?
 3. What negative example does Cain give?
- Cain's resentment toward his brother is exposed in his uncooperative answers to God. He is tempted toward anger and jealousy by the sin that is "lurking" in the doorway, waiting for him.
 1. What sins "wait in the doorway," tempting you to negative thoughts and actions?
 2. How do these sins keep you from giving your whole self to God?

5. Worship and Reconciliation

Participant's Book, p. 4

- Genesis 4:1–15 demonstrates the link between loving and worshiping God, and caring for fellow human beings. Jesus summarizes the teachings of the law, making the link clear: "Love God, love neighbor" (Luke 10:25–28).
 1. Where are love of God and love of siblings demonstrated in the Genesis verses?
 2. Where is God's love demonstrated for Abel? For Cain?
- The guidelines for what Christians offer God have developed away from Levitical law, but the invitation to give God our whole selves remains in effect.
 1. What gifts can you offer to God that show love for God and neighbor?
 2. How can you offer these in the way of Abel?

- Reconciliation involves restoring our relationship with others as well as with God. Why does it seem easier to ask God’s forgiveness than to ask the same of a relative, friend, or neighbor whom we’ve wronged?
- People try to worship God while bearing grudges against their neighbors. When people bring personal grievances into the sanctuary, is it any wonder that people are not drawn to that worship?
 1. How might worship allow for naming and claiming people’s hurts, grudges, and animosities while embracing God’s love and acceptance of our whole selves?
 2. What happens in worship that displays God’s love? That displays our love for God and neighbor?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant’s Book, p. 5

- Discuss together:
 1. When has someone sought your forgiveness for having wronged you?
 2. What did you learn from that experience about seeking someone’s forgiveness yourself?
 3. How did the experience enhance your reconciliation with that person? With God?
- Distribute index cards and pens. In a time of prayer, have participants respond to these questions:
 1. Who have been the Abels in your life? The favored one? Pray for their lives with gratitude.
 2. Who have been the Cains in your life? The one who lashed out verbally or physically? Pray for forgiveness for them.
- Invite participants to identify gifts unique to them, then decide how best to offer these to God. Encourage them to share their plan with the group for accountability.
- Discuss ways the group can give gifts to God:
 1. Practice tithing to the church to show trust of God with their life and finances,
 2. Ask the pastor for ways to be involved in leading congregational worship as a gift to God.
 3. Write a prayer of confession and reconciliation. Include words of assurance of God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet, and enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of Morning Prayer.

- Begin with the Prayer of the Day, pray the Lord’s Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Bless and challenge participants as they leave, saying, “(Name), offer your gifts to God with thanksgiving which is your spiritual worship.”
- Extinguish the candle.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today’s Scripture.

1. Both brothers’ offerings, in themselves, were acceptable. Cain’s “fruits of the soil” was as appropriate for a farmer as Abel’s “firstfruits of his flock” was for a shepherd. Perhaps the designation “firstfruits” propels Abel’s offering above Cain’s. (Lev. 3:16 says that the fat of the fellowship offering was the Lord’s and was to be burned on the altar.) Motivation and heart attitude are critical. God looked with favor on Abel and his offering because of Abel’s faith (see Heb. 11:4).
2. “Lurking” (4:7) refers to a well-known Mesopotamian demon (*rabisu*) who lingers around doorways. “Sin” is pictured as a doorway demon waiting for its victim to cross the threshold. Such demons were considered evil and were thought to ambush their victims.
3. In Mesopotamia, the ideal lifestyle is urban. Civilized life in the city is the gift of the gods and highly valued. Agricultural and pastoral activities are part of the urban landscape and are foundational to the success of the city. Nomadic groups are considered uncivilized and a threat to society. Cain’s status as a wanderer marks him as undesirable. His wandering is in contrast to being a farmer rather than being a city dweller. In fact, the arts of civilization are developed from his descendants (vv. 17–22).
4. Violence escalates from the murder of one brother by another to Lamech, the last in Cain’s line, who commits murder to be avenged eleven times more than his ancestor, Cain. In the ancient world, the family avenged the death of one of its members. Biblical law includes provisions for cities of refuge and the avenger of blood (Num. 35; Deut. 19:1–14).

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Encouraging them to resist the urge to draw comparisons, seeing themselves wanting. When they feel the urge to compare themselves with others, offer a prayer of gratitude instead.
2. Challenging them to think about when they have felt truly grateful. Why were they grateful? How did this gratitude affect their mood and actions?