

## Week 2: Trust and treachery (Genesis 3–4)

We've heard how God established the relationship between heaven and earth, forming us in his image to partner with him in caring for his creatures (Genesis 1). We find our identity in relation to God, to his creatures in our care, and to each other (Genesis 2). Any remaining questions on the first two chapters of Genesis?

### Genesis 3: The question of trust

If your Bible adds headings over the text, it probably labels Genesis 3 as “The Fall.” Theologians use that term to describe humans “falling” from their perfect state, becoming sinners subject to death. Christian theology of the fall is based on Paul's letters (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-46).

In reading Genesis 3, Christians often substitute “Satan” for *serpent*. We reason that it must have been the devil, because snakes can't talk. We think humans fell because the devil tempted them. And in the Bible's final book, *that ancient serpent* is identified with *the devil or Satan* (Revelation 12:9; 20:2).

But that approach misses the way the story is told in Genesis where it's about the chain of command. Say you're reading a spy novel and there's a kidnapping in the first chapter. Later in the book you learn the kidnapper was working for a foreign power, aiming to destabilize the government, but you didn't know that in the opening chapter. Let's try reading Genesis 3 in its immediate context.

God had honoured Adam and Eve by crowning them as king and queen of creation. They represented the heavenly sovereign's majesty to all the creatures of the earth. Psalm 8 is a beautiful Jewish commentary on Genesis 1-2:

#### Psalm 8:5-9 (NIV)

<sup>5</sup> You [LORD] ... crowned them with glory and honour. <sup>6</sup> You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: <sup>7</sup> all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, <sup>8</sup> the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. <sup>9</sup> LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

In the context of Genesis, the snake is one of the creatures they'd been told to *rule over*, to *subdue* (1:28). The snake approaches Queen Eve as if it's treating her as the appropriate authority in God's earthly realm. But we're warned that this creature is not being up-front about what it wants:

#### Genesis 3:1-5 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” <sup>4</sup> “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God [or gods], knowing good and evil.”

The crafty creature plants the seed of an idea that Queen Eve could act independently of what God decreed (verse 1). The creature assures Eve she would be more powerful if she bypassed God. It pretends to be seeking their honour: they could be a *like gods* (*ělō-hîm*) if they decide good and evil for themselves (verse 5).

What is the crafty creature really after? Autonomy. If the Queen breaks the line of authority the humans have received from God, then the authority God gave humans over the animals is also broken. The creational order God established will fall.

Every king and queen of the ancient world has faced this kind of request. Citizens present a request as if it will benefit the monarch, when it actually undermines the monarch's authority. Politicians and parents know this strategy too.

In verse 6, we find that King Adam is present as well. In Hebrew, the pronouns give this away: the creature has been addressing Queen Eve, but it's been using masculine plural pronouns—including King Adam as well.

Queen Eve and King Adam don't yet have the wisdom to recognize the ruse. They now see the tree as a way to *know good and evil* for themselves, to be gods in their own right instead of relying on God for the knowledge of good and evil. They take the bait:

#### Genesis 3:6-7 (NIV)

<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.



They experience evil. They feel the shame. Their relationship with God, with each other, and with the creatures will never be the same (verse 7).

It's a cosmic trainwreck, derailing the lines of authority God established. The impact is earth-shattering. They've undermined the peaceful order God established. Earth is now a warzone. People and creatures fight each other because we've rejected God's authority to define good and evil, redefining "good" to mean "what's good for me."

How does God respond? Well, God doesn't react swiftly or violently as human rulers do when someone threatens their authority. God doesn't drop everything and rush to apprehend the rebels who betrayed the trust he placed in them. God waits.

#### Genesis 3:8-9 (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

<sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

After their day's work, at the time when he would normally come to walk with them, God approaches. They hide. He doesn't part the bushes to expose them. He invites them to tell him why they're reticent to appear before him.

**Genesis 3:10-13 (NIV)**

<sup>10</sup> He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

<sup>11</sup> And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

<sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"  
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The coup has been unsuccessful. God is still in charge, deciding good and evil. The creatures (man, woman, and serpent) must each give an account of themselves to the heavenly sovereign. Instead of gaining autonomy, they're ducking for cover, evading responsibility.

This is a court scene, but the heavenly court is less about meting out punishment than getting them to accept responsibility. The court explains the impact of what they have done: the pain and conflict introduced to God's earthly realm through their treachery.

The heavenly sovereign addresses each traitor in turn:

**Genesis 3:14-15 (NIV)**

<sup>14</sup> So the LORD God said to the **serpent**,  
"Because you have done this,  
Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals!  
You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.  
<sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

The serpent's attempt to dethrone King Adam and Queen Eve has backfired. Instead of gaining status and autonomy, it will now be regarded as the lowest of the low: crawling on its belly, eating the dust of the earth.

The serpent has introduced conflict with humans, an enduring battle for the generations to come. As God says later, animals now live in dread of humans (Genesis 9:2-3), while animals harm humans too. The earth is no longer a peaceful place, though Scripture also hints that one day a seed of the woman will restore divine peace to the world (Isaiah 65:25; 11:6).

God explains to Queen Eve the consequences of her attempt to throw off God's authority:

**Genesis 3:16 (NIV)**

<sup>16</sup> To the **woman** he said,  
"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;  
with painful labour you will give birth to children.  
Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

What do you make of “*he will rule over you*”? Originally God decreed that men and women were to reign over creation jointly (1:28). Is God now changing the rules, saying that men must now rule women?

That doesn't fit the context. God is not redefining what ought to be; he's describing what is. God explains the trouble Eve brought on herself with her attempt to become a god in her own right. She has introduced conflict and pain into her most precious relationships. In fighting God for power, she will find herself fighting Adam too. The world is now a conflict zone where control is through physical force, and that's a fight Eve cannot win.

God is not establishing patriarchy as her punishment or protection. Watch how Genesis plays out and you'll see how absurd that interpretation is. By the end of the book, Jacob has all the power in the family, with multiple wives seeking his attention. They give their servants to bear children for him when they feel diminished because they can't. This is not good. It's not God-ordained. This is patriarchal society in a world that has rejected relationships as God established them (2:24), a world where physical strength rules. This is the painful door Eve has opened by rejecting God's authority. Patriarchy and gender wars are the consequence of rejecting what God said.

The first part of verse 16 needs explanation too. It's commonly interpreted to say that God punished Eve by making her labour pains worse. Some of you know what that feels like. While I haven't felt that pain, I was present when two of my children were born. It's intense. But did God punish Eve by making it worse?

The Hebrew words do not support that interpretation:

- The word translated “childbearing” (*hē·rôn*) does not mean childbirth. It means conception or pregnancy.
- The word for “pain” (*iṣ·ṣā·bôn*) is not the word for birth pains. It means grief and suffering in general. In verse 17, Adam also feels *iṣṣābôn* as he struggles to grow food among thorns and thistles. (Adam was not facing labour pains.)

Tim Mackie from *The Bible Project* translates verse 16a like this:<sup>22</sup>

I will greatly multiply your grief and your conception,  
in grief, you will birth children.

What grief and anguish did Eve face as a mother? Having opened the door to conflict by fighting against God's authority, she will see that conflict playing out in her own family. Can you imagine the grief of watching one of your children murder the other?

God was explaining to Eve what she had unleashed by rejecting God's authority to decide what was good for herself. She would now face unspeakable grief as her children did the same.

In summary, by rejecting God's authority and grasping power for herself, Queen Eve has introduced pain and conflict to human relationships, pain she will feel as a mother and as a wife.

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<sup>22</sup> Tim Mackie, “Does God Punish Women with Pain in Childbirth?” (The Bible Project, 2023) at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_zlJtOKpes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_zlJtOKpes) accessed 4 January 2024.

God then addresses Adam as an accomplice in Eve's crime:

**Genesis 3:17-19 (NIV)**

<sup>17</sup> To **Adam** he said,

“Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’  
Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

<sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food  
until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken;  
for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Because Adam participated in the rebellion against God's authority, the creation entrusted to his care is now in rebellion against his authority. The ground that God blessed with fruitfulness (1:11-12) now rebels: it produces thorns and thistles. The world is now a grievous, toilsome place where we fight creation to survive.

Without God's breath, Adam is just dust. *Ādām* (the Hebrew word for human) comes from *ādāmāh* (the Hebrew word for ground):

**Genesis 2:7 (NIV)**

The LORD God formed a man (*ādām*) from the dust of the ground (*ādāmāh*)  
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,  
and the man (*ādām*) became a living being.

But if he has turned from God to become a god in his own right, *adam* is just *adamah*. Inevitably, he *returns to the dust of the ground* (verse 19).

The **Tree of Life** was God's sustaining life that kept them alive. They no longer have access to that privilege, having declared themselves gods in their own right, deciding good and evil for themselves:

**Genesis 3:22-24 (NIV)**

<sup>22</sup> And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”

<sup>23</sup> So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. <sup>24</sup> After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

The humans have betrayed the trust God placed in them when he invited them to share life with him in the garden of his royal house in Eden. Exiled from God's garden, they must fend for themselves in the world that fights against their claims to be gods.

In 2:15, God trusted them with two jobs: to *till* the garden, and to *keep* it—gardeners and guards of God's presence. But they haven't kept God's commands at all. They can no longer be trusted as guards of his presence. God now gives that job to angelic beings instead. Cherubim (the plural of “cherub”) were symbolic heavenly guards who

“served as the traditional guardians of sacred spaces in ancient Near Eastern iconography.”<sup>23</sup> The cherubim now guard God's house ... from the humans!

**In summary**, Genesis 3 describes how the creatures commissioned by the heavenly throne to implement God's dominion over the creatures of the earth had instead joined the creatures of the earth in a rebellion against God and the authority entrusted to them. The betrayal introduced pain and conflict into every dimension of life on earth: relationships with the creatures, relationships between people, relationships with the earth and its productivity. Disconnected from God, they die. *Adam* falls back into *adamah*. They're exiled from God's garden, eking out a painful existence as “gods” of a world that rebels against them as they rebelled against God. Having betrayed God's trust, they're not trusted anywhere near God's house.

God has explained the tragic consequences of their rebellion, but God has not merely handed them over to death. They're banished and dying, but God has not executed the traitors as we might expect. Queen Eve will have offspring to fight the serpent (verse 15). She and Adam will die, but she will be remembered as *the mother of all living*. In a world where there's death and shame, God provides for them:

**Genesis 3:20–21 (NIV)**

<sup>20</sup> Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. <sup>21</sup> The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

God is still deeply connected with Eve's family (4:1-2, 25). Just as Adam was formed *in God's likeness*, he has a son *in his own likeness* (5:1-3). They have descendants who *walk with God* (5:24) and yearn for the day the LORD will give them relief from *the labour and painful toil of our hands* (5:29).

From Jacob's family, God will form a nation that lives around God's house, the temple decorated with garden imagery where cherubim guard God's throne (the ark). They will receive a land as the garden where God lives among them. Heaven's reign will come to them in David, the one God anoints to restore his reign on earth.

Then, tragically, because of their rebellion against God's authority, God's nation will also be exiled from his presence, no longer under his kingship, exiled from the land. They will wait for centuries for God's anointed to come and restore the kingdom of God to the earth.

The snake was wrong. Rejecting God's authority did not make us gods in our own right. Disconnecting from God's life turned us into *mortals*. When we disconnected from God, we didn't become free; we found ourselves under the power of death. This contrast—between God and mortal rulers—is a theme in the Old Testament (e.g. Psalms 9:19-20; 10:18; 56:4; 82:7; 90:3; 103:15; 118:6; 133:3).

Death is the ultimate enemy of our humanity. Death is the final enemy that must be removed to fully restore the LORD God's reign to the earth. We need another human (another *ādām*) to undo the treachery of the first king and queen appointed over

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<sup>23</sup> Stacy Knuth and Douglas Mangum, “Cherubim,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

creation, the ruler to be raised up from the ground, defeating death, restoring God's reign, the gift of life.

That's the promise of the Old Testament, as Paul summarizes it:

**Romans 1:2-4 (NIV)**

... the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures<sup>3</sup> regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,<sup>4</sup> and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Questions (Genesis 3)**

What are your thoughts on Genesis 3?

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## **Genesis 4: The question of justice**

We're no longer in God's royal garden, but we're still under God's governance. Despite the unsuccessful coup, God's providence remains:

**Genesis 4:1-2 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."<sup>2</sup> Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.

God is still caring for his earthly project. Although Adam and Eve are now dying, God gave them a future in their children (as promised in 3:15). The focus moves to the next generation.

**Cain, Abel, and the fight against sin**

**Genesis 4:3-5 (NIV)**

<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Giving gifts to God recognizes his providence. Israel offered food offerings to God every morning and every evening, as did most Ancient Near Eastern cultures. You still see food offerings to the gods in some countries today.

We're not told why God found Abel's offering acceptable but not Cain's. Some Christians assume God wanted a blood offering to cover their sins, but that's wrong on so many levels: it's a wrong view of God, a projection of their sinfulness into the text, a misunderstanding of the purpose of offerings, and a failure to understand that grain offerings were an acceptable form of worship (see Leviticus 2).



There's no point speculating on why God *looked with favour on Abel and his offering* but *did not look with favour* on Cain (verse 4). What we miss is how shocking this was in their culture. Who was the older son?

The firstborn was trusted to lead the family. That's why Cain was so upset: God's favour rested on Abel. It wasn't just about the offering: God *looked with favour on Abel*. Cain was *very angry* (verse 5) because God had bypassed him, favouring his younger brother instead.

This theme is central to the storyline of Genesis. Ishmael was born first, yet God chose Isaac (Genesis 21:12). Esau was born first, yet God chose Jacob (Genesis 27–28). Joseph was younger than his brothers, yet Joseph received the double-blessing to care for the family (Genesis 47).

Cain is angry that God's favour rests on Abel, so Cain plots to murder his rival. That way, in Cain's twisted mind, God has no choice but to accept him.

The heavenly sovereign is aware of the plot:

#### Genesis 4:6-7 (NIV)

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."



This is the first mention of *sin* in the Bible. And what God says here does not match the way Christian theology usually speaks about sin.

"Original sin" is the doctrine that Adam's original sin (in Genesis 3) means we're all born as sinners, because our parents were born sinners—all the way back to Adam:

- **Augustine**—the most important theologian of the first four centuries—taught that we are all born sinful, and that baptism removes original sin. Any child who dies unbaptized is therefore doomed (since we're sinful at birth).
- **John Calvin**—the most important theologian of the Reformation—taught that humans are born in sin. He described our human nature is "totally depraved" so we're incapable of even asking for salvation unless God chooses to save us.

Does that fit with what God says to Cain? Does God say, "Your father was a sinner, so you were born totally depraved, incapable of making the choice to do right"? The warning God gives (in verse 7) implies that Cain does have a choice.

God's understanding of *sin* is different from ours. We think of sin as our acts of disobedience, the things we've done that we feel ashamed of. God wasn't talking about what Cain had done. God described *sin* as something external—an outside force wanting control over Cain.



*Sin* is a power wanting control of God's creation. Throughout the Old Testament, sin wanted control of God's nation. In the New Testament, *Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin* (Romans 3:9). People are *ruled by sin*, ... *slaves to sin* (6:6). We are not to *let sin reign* over us, not to *offer any part of yourself to sin* (6:13). Because Christ has overturned the power of sin, *sin shall no longer be your master* (6:14). Through what Christ has done, *you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God* (6:22).

Romans has much more to say about how Christ overturned the powers of sin and death. Part of that discussion contrasts how the original human used the authority God gave him with how the Messiah used his authority to reverse what Adam did (Romans 5). That chapter is often used to construct the doctrine of original sin. We'll discuss this further if we do Romans next term.

For now, just note that the first use of *sin* in the Bible is God defining sin as a **power seeking control**. At issue is **who** controls us. That's the issue salvation addresses. It's very different to say that every person is born into a world that is under foreign control than to say that every infant is born guilty, a wicked person deserving condemnation.

Perhaps Christian theologians have been quick to condemn because that puts salvation in our hands. By telling parents that their children were condemned unless the church baptized them, Augustine was putting salvation in the hands of the church. Calvin was reacting to the power claims of the Catholic Church when he insisted that only God saves (election) and wicked humans have nothing to do with it (total depravity). Yet, in trying to protect God's sovereignty, Calvin's condemnation of humanity was more vitriolic than Augustine's.

A more balanced view of God's sovereignty would recognize that both judgment and salvation belong to God. Instead of condemning people, we would echo God's gospel (good news) proclamation that his Christ is our Lord because God freed the earth from the reign of evil by raising him from the dead. What do you think?

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## ***How God deals with evil***

### **Genesis 4:8 (NIV)**

<sup>8</sup> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Death is the ultimate destruction of our life. Death entered the world by disconnecting us from our Life-source. Cain sees it as a way to be rid of his rival. When we reject God's perspective of good and evil to do what's right in our own eyes, we don't care what's good for the other.

So who will make Cain pay for the murder? In these early chapters of Genesis, there's no human government deciding whether people have done evil. God delegates that authority only after the flood (Genesis 9:4-6). God reigns directly, so God investigates Cain's crime, just as God investigated the three rebels in the garden (3:9-19).

**Genesis 4:9-10 (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

<sup>10</sup> The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”

As his parents and the serpent had done, Cain evades responsibility. His defence is that God never made him his brother’s *keeper* (*șă-măr*). God had made them *keepers* of the garden (2:15), but that responsibility had been taken from them (3:24). Abel “kept” flocks (4:2) because God gave humans responsibility for the animals (1:26-28). But God had never given people responsibility over each other’s lives.

Cain’s claim that he had no responsibility for Abel’s life doesn’t wash. Cain had in fact taken Abel’s life into his own hands! The blood stain in the dirt was evidence of Abel’s life returning to the ground from which humanity was taken (3:19). Abel’s blood demands the heavenly sovereign’s response (compare Hebrews 12:24).

**Genesis 4:11-14 (NIV)**

<sup>11</sup> “Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.

<sup>12</sup> When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

<sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear.

<sup>14</sup> Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

The blood-stained soil will be unresponsive to Cain. God originally decreed fruitfulness for the earth (1:11), but creation in rebellion bears thorns and thistles (3:17-19), and the blood-stained soil rejects the murderer.

His family will reject Cain too. Our sense of justice demands criminals pay for their crimes. We expect the punishment to match the crime, that what they have done be done to them. But God does not execute Cain. God simply explains the consequences: that Cain can no longer be part of his family. He’s a fugitive now, *a restless wanderer*.

Cain appeals this absurdly light sentence. Since God has not given him justice, he fears his family will. He shows no remorse, only self-interest. Does the sentence God gave to Cain satisfy your sense of justice?

Later, God does authorize the death penalty for murders (Genesis 9:6). The Sinai Law is based on retribution: “life for life” (Exodus 21:23; Leviticus 24:18; Deuteronomy 19:21). But God’s response here is truly astounding. God protects the criminal:

**Genesis 4:15-16 (NIV)**

<sup>15</sup> But the LORD said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. <sup>16</sup> So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

What do you make of that? In the world before human governments, when the heavenly sovereign dealt with crimes and delivered justice, God did not take a life for a life. God protected the murderer, marking him as under royal protection.

Jesus would later describe how some provisions of the Sinai Law represented God's response to the *hardness of human hearts* rather than God's ideal, for *it was not this way in the beginning* (Matthew 19:8). The way God reigned over the world in the beginning may be closer to the kingdom of God ideals than the Sinai covenant laws.

The heavenly sovereign's judgement combines God's love with Cain's trauma:

- Cain is not outside God's sovereignty: God extends protection to Cain (verse 15).
- Cain is outside God's presence: he's a restless wanderer, isolated from those who know God's presence (verse 16).

Tragically, **Cain's sin divides the world**. The LORD still reigns over the whole earth, but Cain's mob are separated from those who live in the LORD's presence. They construct another culture, based on human achievement:

#### Genesis 4:17-22 (NIV)

<sup>17</sup> Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. <sup>18</sup> To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

<sup>19</sup> Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah.

<sup>20</sup> Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. <sup>21</sup> His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. <sup>22</sup> Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

What's it like in this community that lives away from God's presence?

- God gives them children so they can survive, but we don't hear them acknowledging God's provision (verse 17, contrast verses 1 and 25).
- Their cities are dedicated to human honour rather than God's (verse 17).
- Men take more than one woman (verse 19), ignoring what God intended (2:24).
- They're creative with arts and crafts (verses 21-22), but the metallurgy mentioned produces the weapons that define their era (bronze age, iron age).

These early chapters of Genesis reflect the story to come. Even before the flood, humanity was split into two communities: one away from presence of the LORD (4:16); the another in God's likeness (5:3), walking with God (5:24) looking for the comfort he will bring (5:29). Unfortunately, this distinction breaks down as the whole earth is corrupted by violence (6:11), but God will call Abraham to re-establish a nation in God's presence so the nations can see what they're missing (12:1-3).

In each Genesis narrative, a key character responds to the story we've just heard. First it was Adam, responding to God's provision of a partner for him (2:23). Now in

the seventh generation of Cain's city, Lamech describes life in the community that relies on human power:

**Genesis 4:13-24 (NIV)**

<sup>23</sup> Lamech said to his wives,

“Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words.

I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.

<sup>24</sup> If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.”

Lamech looks and sounds like a Hollywood trailer for his culture. With a girl on each arm, he brags of his superhero strength, his ability to enforce justice, his power to take revenge.

Tragically, this is no Marvel comic. This is the world where God did not execute the murderer, so people who live apart from the LORD's presence take matters into their own hands. Just like Cain, the self is valued while the other is not. “A life for a life” is not enough; Lamech wants seventy-seven lives for a life.

The cycle of revenge makes the world a deadly place. What kind of world is God running? What does the world become when the good guy (Abel) dies while the killer (Cain) lives on to produce offspring?

Lamech's wisdom seems right to so many: all it takes for evil to take over God's world is for good people to do nothing. Fighting back is the only way to survive. If it's “kill or be killed,” Lamech's wisdom wins. The killers win the world.

What do you think?

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As we're sinking in despair, the narrator tells us what God does. (Hint: it's not killing.)

**Genesis 4:25-26 (NIV)**

<sup>25</sup> Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” <sup>26</sup> Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

God was not heartlessly saying, “Don't fret over your dead child; here, have another one.” God was saving the family by giving them another child so they didn't die out and leave the world to the killers. Where people like Cain and Lamech save themselves by giving death, God saves by giving life.

Giving life is God's enduring solution: *Enosh* in another generation after *Seth*. Like God said, the offspring of the woman defeats the serpent (Genesis 3:15). The voice of a child is the sound that silences the avenger (Psalm 8:2). The birth of a child is God's strategy to save the world (Isaiah 9:6).

That's how the family that lives in God's presence lives on in the world where people fight and kill. But since God denied them the right to kill the killer (Cain), how do they get justice if they don't follow Lamech's wisdom?

They make their appeals directly to the heavenly sovereign instead of taking matters in their own hands. That's the final sentence of Chapter 4:

*This was the time when people began to call on the name of the LORD.*

They trust in the justice of the heavenly court as they make their appeals. In a violent world, that's the crucial contrast between the two communities.

### **Questions (Genesis 4)**

How do God's actions in Genesis 4 fit with your expectations of justice?  
Is God responsible for the crimes that occur on his watch? Should God have given Cain the death penalty? Should God have prevented the murder?  
What do you expect from God in a world where violence and death are part of life?

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What do you make of the contrast between Lamech's response to violence and the community that remained in the LORD's presence and called on him for justice?

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What else strikes you from Genesis 4?

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### **So what?**

How do these two chapters shape your understanding of God's authority and human nature and responsibility? We're born into a world that's devastated by the power of sin, but does that mean we're born condemned? Is salvation mostly about making a personal decision to receive forgiveness for my personal sins, or is salvation the restoration of God's authority over the world that will ultimately be achieved in Christ?

As God said to Cain, each person's choice matters, so do we have choices? Is it about individuals finding God for themselves, or about recognizing God as present in the community that calls on the name of the LORD?

What do these chapters teach about suffering? Do I suffer because I deserve it (my own sin)? Or do we suffer because we live in a world where the power of sin impacts us all? Is there hope in our suffering? Or will it always be the way it looks on the news each night?

Listening to Lamech's boast, do you recognize the ways that human power makes our sufferings worse? Do you see this in movies? In real life?

What about the theme of God as the life-giver? How does this hope help with our present sufferings as we wait on the Lord, trusting him to sort it all out in the end?

In preparation for next time, please read **Genesis 5–6**.

### ***Going further***

Some posts relating to Genesis 3 and 4:

- [Who's in charge now?](#) (Genesis 3:1-14)
- [What changed with the rebellion?](#) (Genesis 3:15-24)
- [What kind of world is God running?](#) (Genesis 4:1-15)
- [How far does the kingdom of God extend?](#) (Genesis 4:16-26)
- [The faith of Abel](#) (Hebrews 11:4)
- [Original good](#) (Genesis 1–4)