

FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES

STUDY TWO

Cain: The Farmer Who Murdered His Brother

Genesis 4:1–15

When you search the Scriptures and see, in the beginning, the beauty of innocence and life as it was meant to be—lived before God in purity of heart—and you see how far we have drifted, it is nothing short of shocking.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll



To deepen your
study, scan to listen.

MURDER is a chilling, horrific, and frightful reality of our world. Barely a week goes by without news of another murder—whether a local homicide or some shooting headlining the national news.

If we dare investigate the backstory surrounding these cases, we identify common factors—jealousy sparked by anger, igniting explosive rage. It's easy to chalk up such evil as something committed by a mentally deranged individual or as a recent development of a godless, decadent, and shameless culture. However, murder has been part of human history since the beginning.

The opening scenes of Genesis reveal humans living in innocence, perfection, and blissful fellowship with God. By Genesis 4, however, the door to paradise had been bolted shut and a pall of gloom darkened the skies. Humans now lived in sinfulness, imperfection, and broken fellowship with God. With death making its catastrophic and regrettable entrance into the world through Adam and Eve's sin, why should murder come as a surprise?

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study revisits the “first family”—Adam and Eve, and their sons Cain and Abel. Let's examine Cain's series of treacherous decisions, which led to the world's first killing. This was the original murder. Murder number one.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked,” wrote Jeremiah (Jeremiah 17:9). Orient your heart toward this study by reflecting on David’s dark depiction in [Psalm 10:7–11](#) of killers on the loose. Offer a prayer expressing your need for God’s protection from evil and grace to be godly. Ask Him to open your eyes to His truth in this study’s passage.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Adam and Eve introduced sin into God’s perfectly created world by yielding to the serpent’s temptation and eating the fruit God commanded them not to eat. In righteous judgment, God cursed the serpent (Satan) and the entire created order.

The sinful condition entered Adam and Eve’s spiritual DNA and spread to their children. Likely, Adam taught his sons Cain and Abel the proper manner of approaching God through a blood offering. Cain knew what God expected of him, but, like his parents, he followed his own way and it led to tragedy.



Observation: Where Is Abel Your Brother?

Put on your detective’s hat as you investigate the crime scene of the first murder in Genesis 4:1–15, using the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method.¹ Look especially for:

1. The who, what, where, when, why, and how
2. What you can see, touch, taste, hear, and smell
3. The logical connections, flow of thoughts, and range of subjects
4. What’s repeated, emphasized, related, alike, and unlike

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The Background—Genesis 4:1–5

A joyful tone marked the early years of Adam and Eve’s family with the birth of two sons, according to [Genesis 4:1–2](#). When the boys grew to manhood, Cain “cultivated the ground” as a farmer, and Abel “became a shepherd” (Genesis 4:2). What happened when they presented their gifts to the Lord in [4:3–5](#)?

Why did God reject Cain’s offering and accept Abel’s? The New Testament gives us clues to the answer. What did God see in Abel’s heart that He didn’t see in Cain’s, according to [Hebrews 11:4](#)?

What was Cain’s reaction when God “did not accept Cain and his gift” (Genesis 4:5)? Who was he angry with? Why? Was he in the right?

God didn’t have regard for Cain and his offering. Why? Because he didn’t bring what God required. God is loving, and He is kind, but He is also a just and very discriminating heavenly Father, who has spelled out in His Word how we are to come to Him. He patiently waits for us to come. But until we come His way, He will not accept our offering. Cain came his own way. Abel came God’s way.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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The Warning—Genesis 4:6–7

God, who sees and knows all things, immediately confronted Cain. What twofold promise did God make to Cain in [Genesis 4:6–7](#)? What warning did He give?

How did God's words to Cain demonstrate His grace?

Like an animal, with long claws and big teeth, hiding in the shadows of the doorway, sin crouches! And it is ready to POUNCE, to dig its claws into us, and to take charge. When it does, it masters us. But it need not do that. “Sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, and you must master it.” See the word master? It’s the Hebrew word that means “dominate.” You must take charge. You must dominate it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Act—Genesis 4:8–9

Recount the events in [Genesis 4:8](#). How do you see Cain's treachery exemplified in David's depiction of a killer in [Psalm 10:7–11](#)? What emotions do you feel?

When God confronted Cain in Genesis 4:6–7, He asked “Why?” to give Cain a chance to search his heart, yet, remarkably, Cain said nothing. What attitude toward God spilled out from Cain when God questioned him in [4:9](#)? What opportunity was God giving Cain?

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The Judgment—Genesis 4:10–15

In [Genesis 4:10–12](#), once again, God questioned Cain, but this time He also exercised judgment. Summarize the consequences of Cain's sin. Because Cain was a “cultivator of the ground” (a farmer), how would God's verdict impact his livelihood and his lifestyle?

Contrast Cain's responses to God in [4:13–15](#) with his earlier response in 4:9. Did he ever show genuine sorrow for how his sin hurt his family and offended God? Who was the only person he was thinking about?

Despite Cain's selfish and hardened heart, God still showed him compassion. In what ways?

Cain made no effort to confess. He didn't fall on his face and say, “I am guilty. I have done wrong.” He stood with folded arms and his fists doubled up tightly. He thought others would treat him as he had treated his brother. So God put some sort of visible or invisible fence around him that kept him from being murdered. I see it as an act of grace. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: Lessons from Cain and Abel

We can draw several principles from the tragic story of Cain and Abel. Cain deliberately disobeyed God by bringing an alternative type of offering other than what God required. How do you see Cain's misguided approach to a relationship with God play out in the world today?

Cain's murder of his brother illustrates the power of sin once it sinks its claws into a person. Given the broken condition of the human heart, God necessarily included in His Ten Commandments the simple statement, "You must not murder" (Exodus 20:13). He did this because He knows what drives us. What core sin do you think drove Cain? How did this sin escalate to other sins?

Review God's words to unrepentant Cain in [Genesis 4:10–15](#). Write a couple of principles—timeless statements of truth—that describe how God responds to sinners, despite their self-absorption and self-preservation. How did God display both judgment and grace?

God explained to Cain that "sin is lurking at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:7 NASB). For clarification about the words *desire* and *master*, read about them in the online [NET Bible Study Notes](#) at netbible.org (note 20 in Genesis 4).

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What truth about sin and how to handle temptation can you draw from the meaning and significance of these words? What was God’s warning to Cain?

Man is a murderer not because he murders. He murders because he is a murderer at heart. We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. The problem is in the heart. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Faith, Love, and Anger

Cain and Abel illustrate two types of attitudes toward God. According to [1 John 3:10–12](#), what was absent in Cain’s life, and why did he murder Abel?

After Cain’s disobedient offering and unrighteous anger, God warned him that “sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you” (Genesis 4:7). How does Paul’s warning in [Ephesians 4:26–27](#) echo God’s warning to Cain?

Rather than clucking your tongue at Cain, saying, “How in the world could that man have lived a life like that?” just realize, the same potential rests in your heart. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Don't Let the Sun Set on Your Anger

Let's bring home our study with three applications on jealousy and anger.

1. *God's way is the only acceptable way. Take it!* With God, obedience is not negotiable. Only *one way* leads to life, and the Lord has shown us that way through Jesus Christ. Just as Abel offered God his best lamb, the perfect Lamb of God offered Himself as the only acceptable sacrifice for our sins. Our part is to believe, submit to His authority, and follow Him.
2. *Jealousy is a sin that cannot be hidden. Release it!* Jealousy is a killer that plants seeds leading to envy, strife, and even violent conflict.
3. *When anger is ignored, it never corrects itself. Confess it!* Some things don't correct themselves. Anger never vanishes and only multiplies. Confess it and let Christ remove it.

Which of these three applications most impacts you? Why? Where and how might you apply it to your current situation?

Have you ever been jealous or angry because God seemed to accept and bless another person over you? Give an example. Are you still harboring resentment? Have your feelings resolved?

As you close your time in the Word, invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart for any “hurtful way” in you (Psalm 139:24 NASB)—perhaps a smoldering hotbed of jealousy, resentment, or anger. In the space below, ask the Lord to cool the heat with His peace and heal your wounded heart with His love. What is He asking you to do to master sin before it masters you?

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As Paul advised, don't delay in dealing with your anger. God's mercy and grace are available for you today.

We are responsible for our own reactions to God and to others. No one else is.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Our Father, I acknowledge that You know me better than I know myself. I see my own soul in the mirror of these ancient accounts. Thank You for Your Spirit who takes the living Word and drills it into my life. Forgive me for running ahead when I should have stopped and faced the truth. Thank You for Your compassion, for Your forgiveness, and for giving me time to change, grow, repent, and become the person You want me to be. I pray in the name of Christ my Savior, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1991, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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