



BY FAITH

MAY 24 - AUG 2

(1) "Abel"

HIGHLIGHT: *Hebrews 11:1-2; Hebrews 11:4; Genesis 4:1-16*

H

Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.

Hebrews 11:1-2 NLT

1 Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. **2** Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.

Hebrews 11:4 NLT

4 It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith.

Genesis 4:1-16 NLT

1 Now Adam had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, "With the Lord's help, I have produced a man!" **2** Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. **3** When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. **4** Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, **5** but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

6 "Why are you so angry?" the Lord asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected?" **7** You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master."

8 One day Cain suggested to his brother, "Let's go out into the fields." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

9 Afterward the Lord asked Cain, "Where is your brother? Where is Abel?" "I don't know," Cain responded. "Am I my brother's guardian?"

10 But the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! **11** Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother's blood. **12** No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth."

13 Cain replied to the Lord, "My punishment is too great for me to bear! **14** You have banished me from the land and from your presence; you have made me a homeless wanderer. Anyone who finds me will kill me!"

15 The Lord replied, "No, for I will give a sevenfold punishment to anyone who kills you." Then the Lord put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him. **16** So Cain left the Lord's presence and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

EXPLAIN

E

The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone's understanding of the Word.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, in Vol. 7 of his *Expository Encyclopedia*, "In [Hebrews 11] we read of the wonders of faith; but I have never read a chapter setting forth the wonders of unbelief. Unbelief is barren, impotent, a mere negation, a dead and accursed thing; but faith bears fruit, faith produces good works; faith achieves marvels." For the next several weeks we will study some of the characters that found their way into the "Faith Hall of Fame." Some are obvious inductees; some are surprises.

Hebrews 11:1-2

William Barclay says that "faith is a hope that is absolutely certain that what it believes is true, and that what it expects will come. It is not the hope which looks forward with wistful longing; it the hope which looks forward with utter certainty." What **earned men of old a good reputation** was not a faith built on the sand of "I think so", but a faith built on the solid rock of "I know so." It is a faith that acts on what it has heard from God because it trusts God to be faithful (see Matthew 7:24-29). It is the conviction that will carry you through the roughest storms of your life (see Daniel 3:16-18 and Hebrews 11:34).

Hebrews 11:4

This is a condensed account of Genesis 4:14-16 which we will deal with shortly. The writer of Hebrews doesn't tell us much about Abel's offering except that **God showed His approval of it and it gave evidence that he was a righteous man** (the italicized words translate the same Greek word, and also "earned a good reputation" in v.2). The word translated **righteous** carries the idea of *conforming to the expectations of the one who sets the rules and regulations*. Whatever it was that Abel did, God was pleased. And **although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith**. Our lives live

long after we die. What will I leave? Will I leave something that is spoiled and, like a poison, seeps through life? Or will I leave something that brings a fragrance to those who walk in my footsteps? Every one of us still speaks long after we die.

Genesis 4:1-16

vv.1-2 Several things in this passage help us to get a somewhat clearer picture of **Cain and Abel and the gifts they brought to the Lord**. Cain is the oldest of the two brothers (some think that the wording of the text indicates they were twins). **Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground** is not an indication one occupation is better than the other. Both were respectable occupations and most people did some form of both. As you will see in the following verses, God is more interested in the motive of the offering, than the actual offering.

vv.3-7 Cain presents some of his crops as a gift unto the Lord. Abel also brought a gift—the best of the firstborn lambs from his flock. When the smoke cleared, Abel's gift was consumed and Cain's gift was still on the altar. Both **Cain and his gift were unacceptable** to God. A heart that is right toward God will produce offerings that are pleasing to God. A heart that is not right toward God can never be pleasing—no matter the size of the gift (see Psalm 51:16-17 and Romans 12:1). **Cain was angry** (burned; ignited; incensed) that God had rejected him and accepted Abel. We want *our* thoughts to be the program on which God operates. Hardly ever does it work that way. We see the loving and gracious heart of God in His question to Cain: **"Why are you so angry?"** Rather than shutting out Cain for his arrogant heart, God reaches out to him with an offer of redemption: **"You will be accepted if you do what is right."** God always desires to bring us back into fellowship with Him. He sent Jonah to Nineveh with a message of warning before he executed destruction (Jonah 1:1-2; 3:5-10). "Cain, it's time to do something now because **sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you.**" Repent!

vv.8-16 In these verses we see the connection between insult and murder—a connection that runs through the Bible (see Matthew 5:21-24 and Ephesians 4:26-27). Though **Cain attacked his brother and killed him** God's merciful heart still shows for Cain. **The Lord put a mark on Cain** to protect him from those who would seek vengeance for Abel's murder. No matter how far away we run, His love always watches us.

APPLY

Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don't have to answer every question.

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. Discuss the role of faith in the Christian life.

3. Before Cain kills his brother, Abel, we see God counseling Cain. What can we learn about God from this conversation? What can we learn about Cain?
4. In Genesis 4:7 God tells Cain, "Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it". How can someone rule over sin?
5. Even after murdering his own brother, God made some provisions for Cain. He put a mark on his head so that no one would attack him. He still had consequences, like being exiled. What can we learn from this?

R

RESPOND

The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.

1. Abel gives generously out of what God has blessed him with, *the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock* (v.4). God accepted him and his offering because of it. Where have you given generously out of where God has blessed you? Where could you start giving or give more generously?
2. In Hebrews 11:4, Abel's faith in God, knowing God had blessed him and would continue to show favor on him if he honored God, led him to have a heart that was right toward God and produce offerings that were pleasing to God. What concrete truths about God do you put your faith in on a daily basis?

How will these truths help you produce offerings that are pleasing to God?