

The Mark of Cain

Cain killed Able. He was the very first murderer. It's likely, certainly it was in my case, that most readers of the Scripture assume him to be the most vile and evil of all the characters mentioned, second only to Judas. There is scant evidence recorded about him, but what there is should, when examined carefully, give us pause and perhaps even cause us to question the strength of our condemnation.

First, after he had killed Able, he and our Lord had a conversation recorded in Genesis 4:9-12. Then we hear him lamenting his earthly punishment in Genesis 4:13, 14, and pointing out to God that "...everyone that findeth me shall slay me." Of course, death was the decreed punishment for murder, and so God would have been just to have slain him or to have allowed him to have been slain. One could correctly say that the Levitical laws, which required this manner of punishment, had not yet been given. True, the laws had not been given formally, but this one along with others which could be cited, had already been given as evidenced by the fact that Cain knew that everyone who saw him would attempt to slay him. Why would everyone feel disposed to slay him unless they already knew that that was the appropriate punishment for murder?

Second, what did God do in response? Read Genesis 4:15. He put a mark on him, some symbol or message, which he somehow carried or wore, and which gave him God's protection from being executed. The "Mark of Cain" is commonly thought of as some symbol or badge of evil. But Scripture makes it evident that it was an expression of God's divine protection. But why? Why didn't God do to him, or allow it to be done to him, what His later codified law would demand as punishment? Perhaps, God saw mitigating circumstances and a repentance in Cain's heart as he pleaded his case in Genesis 3:14.

We must realize that this killing of Able was probably the first physical death of a human being ever to have been experienced up to that moment. We know nothing of the circumstances except that, because of God's rejection of his worship offering, Cain was

“wroth” (to glow worm, blaze up, jealous, angry, grieve, fret self). Sometime after that, “Cain talked with Able his brother, and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him” (Genesis 4:8). It is evident that they had some kind of discussion as they walked to the field, or perhaps it was sometime later, (“it came to pass”) that they continued their discussion in the field. From what is written it seems that Cain was somehow provoked and struck Able. He may well not have intended to kill him. Going out into the field, an open place is not a likely location for a premeditated murder. It likely was accidental, which would explain God’s leniency. If Cain’s actions led to this unintentional consequence, that is, if his act was what we would call manslaughter, the ensuing punishment of exile was appropriate. Premeditated murder, of course, would have demanded the death penalty. Perhaps this, in a way, sets the example of God’s later decreed solution for protecting from the “avenger of blood,” anyone who had killed unintentionally. For later, God set aside “six cities of refuge” within the land of the Hebrews, to where one who committed manslaughter could run and be safe from the avenger’s punishment (Joshua 20). To be an “avenger of blood,” one had to be a close kinsman of the victim. Of course, at that time, everyone was a close kinsman of Cain, because there was no one who was not already closely related. That is why Cain could say that everyone would try to slay him. This “mark of Cain” was Cain’s refuge, his protection in the land of Nod, the exile “city of refuge.”

Also it is evident that for some reason, God chose to give us Cain’s genealogy to the seventh generation beyond Cain himself. From this we discover a number of interesting things:

1. He dwelt in exile east of Eden in a land called Nod: Nod means exile.
2. There he built a city named after his son, Enoch, which means teacher. This was the world’s first city, which indicates that by then a considerable population had developed. Who were they all? Obviously, Cain had married one of his sisters, or if Able had been married before his death, she may have been one of his daughters, but this is doubtful. Obviously, marriage to close relatives was allowed then, and for a couple millenniums longer, until the

genes became so corrupted that God banned such unions to this day. There must have been several generations around by this time when he built the City.

3. Enoch the “teacher” had a son named Irad, which means “fugitive.” So something must have been going on there, about which we are told nothing more, except that he had a son named Mehujael which means “smitten of God” Now this is interesting. Smitten of God, not by God as we might quickly conclude. Smitten of God suggests that he had God in his heart, was Godly! And another son was named Methusael, which means “man who is of God”, So here, we have at least one generation of what we might conclude from their names as being Godly men from the line of Cain! Could they have, all down the line, been exposed to godly teachings and an inspired example from the repentant, now forgiven and saved patriarch Cain? Isn’t it likely that Cain came to realize the awfulness of his crime and repented? Couldn’t it be that he realized gratefully the “mark of protection” that God had given him, revealed a merciful loving God to which he now gave himself, and whom he now worshiped as he witnessed to his grandchildren?
4. Now we come to something else quite interesting when we read about Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the sixth generation after Cain. In Genesis 4:23,24 where Lamech confesses to his two wives, “...I have slain a man to my wounding and a young man to my hurt” (bruise, mark, strip or wound). “If Cain shall be avenged seven fold truly, Lemach seventy times seven fold.” Here we see that the “mark of Cain” was remembered for seven generations, along with the high degree of punishment its violation would cause. We see also that the crime of killing was very serious in that culture, which probably was by then, over a thousand years old, assuming that their life spans were similar to those of the descendants of Seth. What strikes me as very interesting, however, is that Lamech seemed to believe that he himself deserved “seventy times seven” more punishment for his crime than anyone who would have chosen to kill Cain. Perhaps Lamech’s action had been premeditated, or it is possible that because of his upbringing by a Godly father

and uncle, along with the lesson, which must have been learned from Cain's experience, he believed that God could not possibly show him any mercy. So here he is telling his wives to expect the worst.

5. Lastly, we learn that Lamech had two wives. One named Adah (adornment) and Zillah (shade, dark, perhaps darker skinned). Adah's son was Jabal, the father of those who "dwelt in tents and of such as have cattle." He had a brother Jubal, who "was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ." Zillah had Tubalcain an "instructor of every artificer in brass and iron." Just as all of Genesis, especially the first 11 chapters, is foundational to all Scripture, so is this little section regarding Cain, most informational regarding the antediluvian period of history. "Science" would have us believe that very early man, in whatever time frame, was ignorant, lived in caves, and was a wander-gather for thousands of years. Here we see that within seven generations and probably less, brass and iron were in use and there were at the very least, complex musical instruments (harps and organs). These are clearly symbolic of considerable technological advancement. We are told of herdsmen who "lived in tents" and we are told of cities. The distinctions here suggest that cities were collections of some other more advanced and permanent dwelling types than tents. Through the genealogy of Seth we learn very little of significance regarding the history and culture of those times. It is only through these few short verses regarding Cain's descendants that anything of this nature is revealed.

The Holy Spirit chose not to give us any time frame in the eight generations of Cain's descendants. Only Seth's chronology had any time line significance because this led to Noah, the flood, and the continuance of mankind through to the Messiah. But assuming similar longevities of Cain's line, his Lamech would have been a contemporary of Seth's Lamech. It's likely that the various tribes from both lines remained in contact with each other and so exchanged technologies. In this vein it is of great significance to note that Abraham was already 48 years old before Noah's son Shem died, and that Shem had been

around for 100 years before Methuselah died, and that Methuselah had been around for 243 years before Adam died. Even Lamech, Noah's father, lived 46 years before Adam died. This makes it evident that Abraham was effectively separated from Adam by only three generations in terms of handed down word-of-mouth information, even if there was yet no written language, although there very well may have been. Of course, much technological development in terms of "stuff" may not have gotten on the ark, but a great deal of accumulated knowledge must have survived the flood in the heads of Noah and his three sons. When one examines the size and complexity of the ark, its construction alone is very compelling evidence of a very high degree of technology of that time.

I suspect that there is more to this Cain story than I've yet been able to glean from these verses. However, there is one thing that my study has led me toward, and that is that when one gets to heaven, one ought not be too surprised to see the brothers Cain and Able residing there in loving fellowship.