

READ

Genesis 4

REFLECT

It's a story old as time – jealousy gets the best of someone who has been rejected, leading them to make a rash and regretful decision. It's the plot to movies, tv shows, and books. It's sung about. It is seen nearly everywhere throughout our culture. And it played a huge role with our ancestors in faith, as Adam and Eve's family was irrevocably changed by Cain's jealousy of Abel. We don't actually have a reason as to why God liked Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's. Context clues indicate the value of the sacrifices were different – Abel gave the oldest of his flock, and he sacrificed even the choicest part of the animal, while Cain simply offered some of what was abundant to him already. We'll find out later that God expects from various kinds of sacrifices and offerings (Leviticus 1-7) and Abel's offering fits into what was acceptable while Cain's does not. Rather than correcting his mistake, Cain took his anger out on his brother, killing him in cold blood.

Despite the grave sin that Cain committed, we can see God's grace in the face of that sin. Cain was punished for his sin, but he also received promises from God, including the promise of protection to assure him that no one would seek revenge for his crime. Cain's punishment was to live a nomadic existence, never being able to establish roots for himself in any one place. But that doesn't mean that he wasn't able to establish roots of other kinds – immediately after being told of his punishment we read about his offspring, which were numerable. Not only were there lots of family, they were important people, too. Credited as coming from the line of Cain are the creators of the arts and blacksmiths. Neither group farmed the land, in line with Cain's punishment, but they contributed to society and made a name for themselves. It's a sign that despite our own flaws, God can still use us for good. Nothing is beyond God's reach, even when we're at our lowest there is a bright future that God is leading us to.

REACT

- What was your immediate reaction to God's dismissal of Cain's offering? Have you ever given something that was rejected by the recipient? How did you feel?
- When have you felt jealousy toward others? How did you act?
- Has anyone ever expressed jealousy toward you for something you have or have done? How have you reacted to their behaviors?
- When have you received punishment for bad behavior? Has there ever been a time when you used the punishment to seek something better for yourself?

RESPOND

Family History Study: *Genesis loves to talk about family histories – who is offspring of whom. Have you ever thought critically about your own family tree? In Genesis 4 we saw how Cain's punishment reverberated through his family tree, but his offspring turned that punishment into a blessing. God provided a path for abundant living despite the punishment their ancestor faced. Examine your own family tree and the actions that members of your family made. Where or how do you feel reverberations of the actions of older family members? How has God used the trials of the past to become blessings for your present? Imagine how your actions might affect future generations of your family. How might you help them see the blessings God puts in front of them?*