

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 5 January 2014

No. T0814

Speaker: Dr. Yannick Ford

Back to the beginning: The Consequences of Sin

Last autumn, I saw some beautiful, pure white mushrooms as I was walking to work. At first sight, I thought that they might be a kind of beautiful but deadly mushroom known as the “destroying angel”. However, I don’t think my identification was correct, as someone had knocked one of the mushrooms over and I could see the gills on the underside which were brown, rather than pure white which would have been the case if the mushrooms had really been destroying angels. So I don’t really know what they were! Needless to say, I did not pick them to eat!

If the mushrooms had been destroying angels, eating them would have been a potentially fatal mistake. And yet these mushrooms look beautiful! It made me think about the subject for this week’s broadcast. Last week we thought about the entrance of sin into the world. Adam and Eve were deceived into disobeying God’s instructions and eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Let’s just remind ourselves of how this happened. Genesis 3:1-7 tell us: *“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.”*

Today, we’re going to look at the terrible consequences of sin, which are described in Genesis 4 and 5. We will see from that record who was telling the truth - God or the serpent. We’ll start off with a broad overview of these two chapters, and then we’ll look in more detail at Cain and Abel. Finally, we’ll look at the case of Enoch, one of only two men in the Bible who did not die.

Genesis 4:1-15 shows us that the first child born to Adam and Eve became a murderer (Genesis 4:8). Cain did not repent of his murder, but he turned away from God. Genesis 4:16 tells us that *“Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.”* Cain’s descendants settled down and in a sense initiated progress, but there was no relationship with God: *“And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother’s name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute. And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron. And the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah”* (Genesis 4:20-22). Here is a prototype of the world in its alienation from God. Cain’s descendants are trying to make it as pleasant a place as they can manage, but there is no reference to God, no relationship with Him. It is only with regard to Seth’s descendants (Seth being born to Adam and Eve after the murder of Abel) that we read *“as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD”* (Genesis 4:26).

Moving to Genesis 5, we have a list of Seth’s descendants. If you read Genesis 5:3-32, you will read the sad refrain *“and he died”* eight times - Enoch is the only exception. Even Methuselah, the longest-lived person in the Bible, 969 years, still came under that terrible end: *“and he died”* (Genesis 5:27). God had said to Adam, *“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Genesis 2:16-17). The serpent said, *“You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”* (Genesis 3:4). The fact that we read eight times *“and he died”* shows us that God was right. The serpent had lied to Eve.

This was not the full extent of his lie. The opening of the eyes to know good and evil was not fully truthful either. It was one of those cases where what was said was true (in contrast to *“you will not surely die”*, which was an untruth), but it was not the full story - it was not the whole truth, as we say. In that way, it was deceptive. What the serpent did not say was that they would not have the strength in themselves to choose the good and to refuse the evil. Cain’s murder, and what we read in Genesis 6:5 highlights this: *“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”*

We see a great contrast in Psalm 45:7, which is quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9, showing that the Psalm is speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 45:7 says, *“You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”* The Lord Jesus loves what is good and hates what is evil. This is much more than simply the knowledge of good and evil. I often think that Psalm 45:7 is a good description of holiness. What Adam and Eve gained was the knowledge of good and evil, but not a power for good. This was not explained to them by the serpent, but we can see the effects of it in Genesis 4 onwards. It is not until we reach the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans in the New Testament that we have the basis for this clearly set out. Romans 8:7-8 tell us that *“the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*

Cain and Abel

Now that we’ve had a broad look at Genesis 4 and 5, let’s look more closely at Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. Let’s remind ourselves of the story by breaking in half-way in Genesis 4:2: *“Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him”* (Genesis 4:2-8).

It’s difficult at first reading to see why Cain’s offering was not accepted, but we are given clues in the New Testament. Hebrews 11:4 tells us that *“by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”* The first epistle of John, 1 John 3:12 says that Cain *“was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.”* What can we learn from these two New Testament references?

Both men brought an offering to God which they took from their livelihood - Abel was a shepherd, and he sacrificed a sheep. Cain grew crops, and he brought some of his crops. What was the difference? Hebrews 11:4 tells that that Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice **by faith**. Faith is trusting God, and believing what He says (see Hebrews 11:1). One can assume therefore that God must have spoken to Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, about how to approach Him now that sin had entered into the world, or at least He must have made it clear in some way. Otherwise, Abel could not have exercised faith in that matter. We get a hint of this in Genesis 3:21, where we read that God made tunics of skin to clothe Adam and Eve, instead of the fig leaf aprons that they had made for themselves. Sadly, an animal had to die for tunics of skin to be made. This would have illustrated the truth that we see all the way through the Bible, that a substitute needs to be found to bear the judgement for sin. The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament are all a picture of this. We know that animal sacrifices do not really take away sin (see Hebrews 10:4), they are a picture of the Lord Jesus’ sacrifice for us. This is the essence of the Gospel - that He died in our place. 1 Corinthians 5:7 tells us that *“Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”*

Abel, it seems, understood to a certain extent that a sacrifice was necessary, to show that sin needed to be judged, but that God in His mercy would provide a way in which men and women could be righteously spared judgement. As I mentioned earlier, I say this because Hebrews 11:4 tells us that Abel made his offering **by faith**, and furthermore that through this Abel obtained testimony that **he was righteous**. John’s first epistle says the same thing, that Abel’s works were righteous (1 John 3:12). Righteousness - being right with God - is never obtained by our own efforts and by our own good deeds, but always through the work and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul sums this up in his letter to the Philippians, Philippians 3:9, where he says that he wants to be found in Christ, *“not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”*

Cain did not follow this pattern. Instead, he brought an offering of his crops - *“the fruit of the ground”* as the Bible puts it (Genesis 4:3). But the ground had been cursed as we read in Genesis 3:17: *“Cursed is the ground for your sake.”* Cain was bringing an offering from a cursed earth! Symbolically, he was ignoring the fact and the presence of sin, but this would not do for God. Now of course, Abel’s sheep was also a product of the ground - after all, it was part of the original creation and it had presumably been eating grass. That is why I think the sacrifice of the sheep was what constituted the faith of Abel - he understood in some way that a substitute had to be found if sinful man was to approach God, and this sacrifice of his sheep illustrated that.

Cain’s further actions show that he was unconcerned about sin, at least as far as his responsibility towards God was concerned. He was angry that Abel’s offering had been accepted but his had not. I was reading a book about this section of the Bible recently, and the author pointed out that God personally pleaded with Cain. I found that quite

striking. Let's read Genesis 4:6-7: *"So the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.'"*

Cain did not listen to God. He would not accept that Abel was righteous in God's eyes but that he was not. Perhaps he was thinking something like, "Why should Abel be accepted just because he sacrificed a sheep, and not me? I'm just as good a person as he is." At any rate, his anger became murderous: *"Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'"* (Genesis 4:8-9).

Cain kills, he lies, and shows no concern or sorrow for his brother. His only comment is *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* But God knew what Cain had done. God said, *"What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth"* (Genesis 4:10-12).

What was Cain's response? Did he admit his guilt, and seek forgiveness? Was he sorry for what he had done? On the contrary, he was only concerned about himself. *"And Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.' And the LORD said to him, 'Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him. Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden"* (Genesis 4:13-16).

So we have the sad tale of Cain's sin, his refusal to repent, and his alienation from God. As I mentioned earlier, his descendants started off the world system without God, seeking to make things better down here, but with no acknowledgement of the problem of sin. Threats were given to keep folk in order, as we see from one of Cain's descendants called Lamech, but there was no movement towards God, no seeking to obtain righteousness from Him. Lamech said, *"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold"* (Genesis 4:23-24).

Threats of force and punishment can keep a certain degree of order, but it does not deal with the ever present problem of sin. Cain's world did not deal with sin, and did not seek to obtain God's righteousness by faith. This is why the Apostles teach us to be separate from the world. Paul says, *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Romans 12:2). John says, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."* (1 John 2:15-17).

Enoch

There is one bright spot in these sad chapters. The bright spot is the case of Enoch. I mentioned before that in Genesis 5:3-32 we have the sad refrain, eight times, *"and he died"*. But there is one exception. Let's read Genesis 5:21-24: *"Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."* We have an explanation of this in the New Testament, as we read in Hebrews 11:5-6: *"By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, 'and was not found, because God had taken him'; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."*

Why did Enoch escape death? What did he do to please God so much? Genesis 5:24 tells us that *"he walked with God"* in other words, that he lived his life with reference to God, and in close fellowship with Him. Hebrews 11:5 tells us that Enoch pleased God, and then underlines that we can only please God by faith - it is impossible to please God without faith. So putting these two passages together, we can say that Enoch lived a life of faith. One of the great, grand truths of the Bible is that *"the just shall live by faith"* (Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38).

Why is faith so important? In a sense, faith is the opposite of what Adam and Eve did. Adam and Eve chose to believe the serpent, and disobey God, although they had no reason to distrust God (see Genesis 3:1-7). God had provided everything they needed for their well-being and happiness, and He wanted them to enjoy His company. The

serpent had not done anything for them - there was no reason at all why they should have believed him instead of God. Or to put it another way, there was no reason at all why they should have thought that God was lying to them, or keeping something good back from them. But the devil sowed the seeds of doubt and mistrust, and Adam and Eve believed the serpent's lies, with the disastrous consequences that we have been thinking about today. Was there a way back to God? Would there be a way to escape the awful results of sin? There was, and there is - it is by placing our faith in God. As we have seen, Abel had faith, and so he offered a sacrifice, that in symbol points forward to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. Enoch had faith, and so he pleased God (Hebrews 11:5), and escaped the sentence of death that otherwise fell on every human being. We can have faith in God, by listening to His voice and believing in what the Lord Jesus has done. Jesus says, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life"* (John 5:24). Adam and Eve did not believe God when He said that they would surely die if they ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The devil told them that they would **not** die. Today, God tells us that we can have eternal life, and that we will not come into judgement if we trust in the Lord Jesus. Let's make sure that we believe Him!

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.