

In the Beginning – Cain and Abel

The Bible Study



What you will need:

- Bible, pen and note pad for each participant
- A stone to add to the altar. Perhaps this stone could be painted red to represent a “heart”
- Cut large and small heart shapes from red paper and scatter in middle of the table as a centrepiece. The participants can take home one of the hearts to remind them of the main lesson of the study.
- A bowl of apples on the table (to represent the fruit of good and evil in the Garden of Eden)
- Copy of The Salvation Army Doctrines for each person.
- Quiz—Descendants from Adam and Eve from Genesis Chapter 4 Get group to work in pairs to solve this. (www.free-online-bible-study.com)
- Supper—bake heart shaped short bread or wrap as a take home gift for each participant.

Altars of the Heart

Genesis 3-4

“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!’ Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel. When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. Abel also brought a gift—the best of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.” Genesis 4:1-5 (NLT)

Read Genesis chapter 3. (Get someone with a clear voice to read first) In it we see the dramatic exit of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, forever cut off from eating of the tree of life. This chapter relates the account of the deliberate choosing to disobey God by Adam and Eve. They chose to take and eat fruit from the tree of knowledge because they believed the lie, the false advertisement that when they ate of that tree they would be like God. The sad truth was that they were already like God, for God had created them in His image.

Because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve were sent from the Garden of Eden where they had enjoyed a close relationship with God. This relationship was the purpose of their design, but because of disobedience they were sentenced to be separated from God. Their poor choice doomed all of their descendants to the same fate.

See Romans 5:12 “When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.”

- Give out to each person a copy of the doctrines and ask them to find which Salvation Army doctrine speaks about “our first parents” and their fall?

At the beginning of Genesis 4 we have a brief account of the birth of Cain and Abel. When we read about Cain and Abel, we should come to their story with the understanding that Cain and Abel had grown up in a fallen world. After the report of their birth and naming we fast forward in time to when they are grown.

Adam and Eve by that time would have had many other children who had not been mentioned because the purpose of this story was to relay information about Cain and Abel.

Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. In their story we see the first mention of humans making an offering to God. As they were making an offering, it is safe to assume that this was a practice taught to them by Adam and Eve. It was an attempt to regain the favour of God. It most likely involved the placing of the offering on some type of altar

When looking at this brief account we must carefully look at the nuance of the words used to describe the offerings of the brothers. Cain was the older brother and the first male to be born to Adam and Eve after they were exiled from the Garden of Eden. Eve named him Cain which sounds like the Hebrew word for produced or acquired. Eve said that with God’s help she had produced a man. Abel was born some time after Cain and we are not told what his name means or even what Eve’s reaction was to his birth. If you look up the name Abel, you will discover it means breath or vanity.

It is always interesting to watch new parents with their first child. Everything about this experience is new and they do not want to fail this new life in any way. The new baby is treated as though they are fragile and must be protected. The first time the first babies go through the steps of development is a thing to be celebrated. First babies have baby books that are filled out, pictures taken, and lots of special attention. By the time the second and third child arrives the parents understand that babies are not so fragile. While they love these little bundles of joy just as much as the first one they are a lot more relaxed with the way they deal with the needs of the babies. Perhaps that is the difference in how the naming of Cain and his little brother are reported.

- How can our birth order affect our world view and our values?

Cain the older brother takes up farming like his Dad. Perhaps Adam had a sign made for the farm that said "Adam and Son" to indicate the expectation that his number one son would be the one to some day take over the family business. We place a lot of expectations on the oldest child in a family. While Cain would have enjoyed a lot of attention, perhaps the expectations were more than he wanted. His nature would be to shake off the yoke of family expectations and venture out to begin his own life, especially after a hundred years or more of living at home. He had heard the stories of life in the Garden of Eden when farming was so simple. Now farming was hard work. Perhaps there was a bit of resentment toward his parents for rebelling against God and getting exiled from the good life. Then again maybe he did not even really believe the stories his parents told him and giving an offering to a distant "god" was a waste of good food and his time.

Genesis 4:3-5 tells us a little bit about Cain's attitude. We read that when the time for harvest came, he gave some of his crops as a gift from the Lord. The harvest offering would have been a "thank" offering to God for the harvest. Perhaps Cain felt that God did not deserve much "thanks" for the harvest since Cain had been the one to toil and work to make the harvest happen. Or maybe Cain just did not believe it really mattered what he gave as long as he gave something.

We learn from these brief verses in Genesis 4 that Abel was a shepherd. We learn that at harvest time Abel gave the best of his flock. We learn that Abel was a man of faith by looking at Hebrews 11:4 "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." From a very brief encounter with Abel we learn that God expects us to give Him our first and our best of all that we are and all that we do. God expects whole hearted dedication from us not leftovers.

Today we know that God offered His best for us on the altar of the cross. John Baptist called Jesus the Lamb that would take away the sin of the world. The literal giving an offering or bringing an animal sacrifice and laying it on an altar is no longer our practice. However we learn from these offerings and sacrifices and we symbolically give offerings to God on the altar of our heart.

- What kinds of offerings please God? What kind of offering will God accept?

The first altar stone in this Bible Study series is the stone that represents seeking God with all our heart. The offering of sincerity is one of our greatest gifts we can give. In John 4, Jesus tells the woman that true worshippers worship God in spirit and in truth. These are the people who have a real relationship with God.

Today many claim to worship God just as Cain did; however their hearts are not in their worship. They are going through the motions. Abel believed and worshiped God with his whole heart and God accepted his offering.

- What kind of offering do you give when you worship God?

Put the first altar stone, (painted red to represent a heart), on a small tray. Pray as a group and ask God to help each one of you to know the blessing of His Presence and acceptance of your offering.

"But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:23 & 24 (NLT)