

## **Genesis 4**

**4:1** Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." **2** And again, she bore his brother Abel.

"Adam *knew* Eve his wife...": a Biblical euphemism for "had sexual intercourse." The very first thing the humans do after being expelled from Paradise is have sex which might give testimony to the strength of this drive in humans. Were they afraid their "kind" might go extinct as a result of God's death-threat punishment of them and so felt the need to procreate immediately?

In Genesis 3:16, God imposes the following consequence on Eve for her sinfully disobeying His command: "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." But in the immediate aftermath of her and Adam's expulsion from Paradise, there is no indication that any of the punishment is enforced – no pain in childbirth is reported, Eve shows no desire for Adam (credits the baby to the Lord!), and there is no report that he ruled over her in any sense of the word. Eve speaks, Adam is speechless. There may be a feud between Eve and Adam. Eve credits both the birth of Cain and Seth to God (4:1, 4:25). In Adam's genealogy (5:3), Seth is said to be in Adam's likeness and neither Eve nor God are mentioned in relationship to Seth's birth.

Adam was made from the dust of the earth, Eve from the rib of Adam, and now Cain from the sexual union of Adam and Eve. Cain is the first human not directly created by God but born of the flesh and of human will. Our Lord Jesus Christ alters this process and transforms the children of sexual procreation once again into children of God. "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Christ restores in us through adoption that childhood born of God which belonged to Eve and Adam naturally from the beginning. The begetting of children which Christ inaugurates is also not sexual procreation, but is being born again of water, the Spirit, and of the faith of the one being born.

Cain is the first human conceived by sexual union and born of a woman. In some sense all humans are more like Cain than we are like Adam who had no human parents. And though in the Scriptures the first born male child will be special to the Lord (Thus says the Lord,

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

"Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." Exodus 13:2), not so of the first human conceived and brought to life by the first human parents. Our lineage is not traced through Cain but through the 3<sup>rd</sup> born son, Seth. The line of the first-born Cain will be wiped out according to the story of the great flood. Is this a harbinger of the bad fruits humanity seems to produce? Not only will our hearts be continually inclined toward evil (Genesis 6:5), so will the fruit we produce - our offspring?!? The first born and the first fruits are normally special in God's eyes, but not so of the first born son of a sexual union.

"Adam knew Eve his wife..." There is no indication in the text that the first humans actually had sexual intercourse or even sexual feelings while in Paradise. The scripture's silence on the issue led to the **Patristic** conclusion that Paradise was a sexless state of existence for the humans and that virginity was thus the normative and natural state for humans. The fact that the Theotokos Mary conceives as a virgin - conception without sex - was viewed by some Patristic writers as the fulfillment of God's original intention. Mary's ability to procreate without sex was interpreted to prove sex is not essential to being human. Sexual relations from this point of view belong to the fallen world and to the Old Covenant. They are interpreted as a concession by a loving God so that the human race doesn't become extinct. With the New Covenant in Christ and with the resurrection of the dead, procreation itself becomes unnecessary, and thus sex no longer has a role in salvation but is seen as purely recreational, superfluous and unspiritual. The resurrection brings humans to life - without sex.

Eve - this is the last mention of Eve by name in Genesis or anywhere in the Old Testament. She will be mentioned in Genesis 4:25 when Seth is born but only as "Adam's wife." Besides giving birth, no parental/motherly role is ascribed to Eve in Genesis. Before she gives birth to any children Adam calls her "the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20) but this seems to mean only that she gives birth and is not a description of her role as parent. No interaction or dialogue is described between Eve and her children and motherhood seems mostly to consist of childbearing. Eve is also referenced in the Septuagint prayer of Tobit as he asks God to bless his own union

with his wife. The only use of Eve's name in the New Testament occurs in the writings of St. Paul who connects Eve to the first disobedience of God's commands, to sin and the fall of humankind. Eve is nowhere in the Bible connected to any positive qualities or characteristics. In post-apostolic Christianity, the Virgin Mary will be called the "new" Eve, but this refers not to Eve's virtues but to Mary as the one who replaces/corrects/heals the first Eve. Eve who is the only other human in the Bible described as being directly created by God rather than coming from human birth seems to have no positive role to play at all. She was created by God to correct what was "not good" in His original creation, but the story indicates she made things a whole lot worse for creation, for humans, for God! In the Muslim Quran which appears in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD there are similar creation stories as appear in Genesis. However Eve is never mentioned by name in the Quran - her existence is implicit only. Eve, the first woman, created directly by God according to Genesis 2, is virtually excluded as having any positive role in the history of humankind.

Adam's role as parent/father is also never described, nor is any conversation or even interaction between Adam and Eve or Adam and his children described. Fatherhood seems to imply only providing the sperm. Despite Adam's role in the fall of humanity, he is mentioned as fathering other children, and his death is recorded, unlike Eve's whose death was unmemorable. His name does appear in the ancestry of Christ the Lord in Luke's Gospel (3:38). Adam in the New Testament is seen as the prototype of all humans with Christ being the New Adam (Romans 5). Adam's role as the first human and first male is noted in the New Testament, and his name is not repudiated though he sinned against God as Eve had done.

"I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." For the first time in the Biblical story Eve has a role in bringing forth life. Adam had been used by God to bring Eve into existence. Now Eve sees God helping her to bring forth life. The woman who Adam had called "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20) had so far only brought death into the world. Now she lives up to her name.

It is interesting that Eve alone has something to say about the first human birth. Adam says

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

nothing, and seems to have been nothing more than the sperm donor for the baby. In Genesis 3:16, in what some consider to be the proto-evangel (the first prophecy of the good news of Christ) God foresaw the seed of woman as engaging in a continual warfare with the serpent's descendents. That the story places this battle through the seed of woman and does not mention the male in this salvation warfare is unusual in an otherwise male dominated story. Eve's punishment is linked to childbirth in Genesis 3, but Adam's punishment is not linked to fathering but only to farming and mortality. In Genesis 3:23, God expels Adam from Paradise so that Adam will not be able to live forever. Adam is neither able to keep himself alive, nor will he be able to propagate the human race without a woman. But in the story God does not overly link Adam with the continuation of the human race, nor in Genesis 4 does Adam have any say about the process. For as much as we play up that we all are descendents of Adam, Eve is the more significant personage in the story of the continuation of the human race after the Fall as recorded in Genesis.

"...gotten a man with the help of the LORD." The English translation adds a bit to the original text. Eve only says she has gotten a man with God (or through God) – "with the help of" is not in the text. Eve really is saying it was she and God who did this. Is Eve still thinking about the serpent's promise "to be like God" –even if she didn't achieve that status through eating the forbidden fruit, maybe she can pass that trait along to her offspring by claiming they are God's children? Eve ignores Adam's role in procreation.

Eve was created to be the man's helper, Here she credits and praises God for being her helper in procreation. Being a helper is obviously not a denigrating position and certainly would not suggest the helper's subservience as some want to read into Genesis 2. Note also that Eve credits her pregnancy and giving birth to divine help, not to Adam's virility. She is crediting the continuation of the human race to God and herself. Does she in some prophetic way foreshadow the Virgin birth? Certainly if we look back to Genesis 2 we see that Eve was created by God from Adam. God used Adam to create Eve. Now Eve is saying she and God are responsible for the next generation of humans even though the text clearly says the

child resulted from Adam "knowing" Eve. Does she not want to credit her husband with the child? Adam says nothing to defend his masculinity. Was there a war between the sexes ever since **the Fall**? Or is it that Eve intuits that the procreative process in bringing into existence new life imitates the Creator? Is procreation one way in which we are in God's image? Is it the moment in which humans are most like their Creator? Certainly in the Psalms God is credited with forming the baby in the womb: "For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13) and also with bringing the child forth from the mother's womb (Psalm 71:6). The mother has an experience of God that no father can ever have – God knitting the child in her womb, and bringing forth new life from her body.

For as important as modern Christians assume parenting is, one can't help but notice the total lack of emphasis on parenting in these texts. The parents give birth to children, but God never offers any parenting advice, instruction or rules. Not even a basic Ten Commandments are offered for the upbringing of children. The absence of any parental advice or instruction is particularly glaring in the case of Adam and Eve who would have had no examples from whom to learn. They have to do the parenting on their own. We are not told how they did the parenting, though the rapid downward spiral of human morality might be indicative of their failure as parents, and certainly offers some explanation for the need for rules, order and civilization.

If as it is said we know a tree by its fruit, the first fruit of Adam and Eve's sexual union is Cain, and he turns out to be a murderer. Once outside of Paradise the fruit that is produced by Adam and Eve turns out to be rotten fruit. Sexual procreation was ordained by God, but outside of the Garden of Eden that which is conceived and that which is born is somehow defective – not oriented toward God but at the mercy of human desire. God had warned Eve that child birth would be accompanied by pain. God warned Adam that his farming efforts would meet with stiff resistance from the earth. But it is not just the soil that now will produce problems. As Adam and Eve will learn, there own son is to show himself a noxious being. For those who like to think of sex as always

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

good and a human right, the story of Cain is going to show that sex though blessed by God and being a good **in this world** is not an ultimate good, but a relative one. It is not a good from all eternity – its value and goodness comes only in this fallen and mortal world. Sex in the fallen world turns out to produce fallen children. This is probably why many Patristic writers didn't see sex and procreation as an ultimate good, but a conditional, relative and temporal one. By their thinking the end result of sexual procreation is a world full of sinners and corruption. By embracing celibacy, monastics are defiantly saying we will not live according to the values and demands of the fallen world where death still reigns. They are denying that death has any ultimate value also – they are not afraid that death will cause the extinction of the human race. The faithful saints are but a rare remnant in the world, holiness a recessive trait. Humans find the sex drive very powerful and sexual attraction intoxicating. Because we experience sex as so pleasurable we want to define sex as an ultimate good, but it has no eternal value. It is a relative good, belonging to life in the fallen world. There is no direct mention of sex in the perfect Paradise of God. In the New Testament it is said that in the kingdom of God there is no marriage. The sense that sex may belong only to the fallen world and that it should be engaged in only with all caution, does not sit well with modern humans who find recreational sex on demand to be not just pleasurable but a God-given right – as if sex in itself is always good. But outside of procreation it is not even clear in Genesis what value sex has. It certainly is not portrayed as being worth living for or dying for. And it is never in Genesis described as a virtue. Sex like everything else we experience is part of this fallen world. It can be very enticing and alluring, but like the forbidden fruit, being attractive doesn't make it ethically good. Because it is such a powerful force in our lives, and because our thinking and our passions are distorted by the Fall, the sexual drive becomes one of the things in life humans must learn to master or they will become a slave to it.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

:2 Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.

Adam and Eve are now replaced as the main characters in God's story by Cain and Abel.

"...keeper of sheep...tiller of the ground..." For the first time the humans are identified with and by their work. Life outside of Paradise necessitates work in order to survive. Adam the first man is not associated with any job or skill though in Genesis 3:23 God banished him from Paradise to "till the earth." We are not told if he ever took up that job, but his son Cain did. Work is generally viewed in the Scripture as having dignity. "We gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

"...keeper of the sheep..." This is the first mention in Genesis of the domestication of animals. There was no mention in the opening chapters of Genesis of God creating domesticated animals – the animals were all wild. It is humans apparently who domesticated the sheep – as part of the human mandate to subdue the earth and have dominion over the animals (Gen 1:26). Abel is keeping the sheep. Genesis does not tell us how this came about, but perhaps we are to assume that since Adam and Eve would have lived peaceably with the animals, the fact that sheep and humans still can live together is reminiscent of Paradise. How did Abel learn to keep sheep? And for what purpose is he keeping them? Remember a carnivorous lifestyle emerges for humans only after the flood. The text assumes sheep keeping is normative for humans though no "use" of sheep has yet been mentioned in the text. Humans have not been blessed by God to use animal products for food, and other than the clothes that God made Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:22, the opening 11 chapters of the book make no mention of wearing or making clothes, nor the tools to do it with.

Cain is "a tiller of the ground" which is actually the role God envisioned for humans before (Gen 2:15) and after (Gen 3:19, 3:23) the Fall. Noah is the only other person in the Bible who is identified as a tiller of the earth; the end result of his labors is his getting drunk and passing out (Genesis 9). Cain tills the ground to bring forth fruit from it – the same ground from which God created Adam. And the tiller of the ground will eventually spill his brother's blood on the ground – returning it to "from which it came."

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

“...tiller of the ground...” One would assume this implies some sort of till or farm implement to help him do his work. If so this would be indicative of some advancement in human innovation. The Genesis story is amazingly free of anachronisms. The first people are basically primitive. Only slowly do culture, technology and civilization emerge. Farming also implies a somewhat stable lifestyle – owning a land and possessing a defined property. Farmers will not be the common image of God’s people who will be much more a nomad and shepherding people. The Jews will spend so much time in exile and in search of a homeland that the image of themselves as wanderers remains. However the imagery of an established nation of Israel is found in the promised land and the city of Jerusalem both suggest a permanency to them. As the famous creedal confession of Deuteronomy 26 says, "And you shall make response before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the LORD the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey'" (Deuteronomy 26:5-9).

Cain is doing what God willed for the humans – to till the ground. Abel is the one engaged in a new and hitherto for unmentioned occupation - shepherding. It is shepherding which will become such a significant role and image in the leadership of God’s people: King David was a shepherd, Christ is the good shepherd. The tiller of the soil will not have the metaphoric role that the shepherd will have in the Old and New Testament. And we know it is not simply seed with which Cain will scatter on the ground, for soon he will spill his brother’s blood. And the ground which Cain tills will after he murders his brother become cursed.

Though the text does not offer us any deep insight into why or how one occupation is valued or measured against the other, certainly in the text Cain and Abel are viewed differently by God

as are their offerings. Is it possible that Cain as the tiller of the earth somehow symbolizes what has happened to humanity? No longer are humans viewed as being in God’s image and likeness as they are being creatures of the dust of the earth. Sin has reduced and dehumanized God’s favored creatures. Cain tills the earth, looking to it to give him life, rather than to God. Is this what annoys God about Cain? Does Cain remind God how far his humans have fallen and to what they have been reduced? Cain is not even looking to the animals as Abel does for finding purpose in life. Is this why God shows disdain for Cain and his offering? It is possible that the story is offering the two brothers as signs of humanity - Abel has dominion over the sheep in fulfillment of what God promised in Genesis 1:26. Cain on the other hand has to till the soil which has become hostile to the fallen humans and no longer freely produces the abundance of food found in Paradise. Does God see the two brothers as prototypical symbols of his fallen humanity – capable of doing His will and also suffering the result of their own sin?

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

**3** In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, **4** and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, **5** but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

“An offering...” In the **Septuagint**, Cain brings an offering or sacrifice to God. God sees Cain’s offering and has no regard for it, but He regards Abel’s as a “gift.” Perhaps because we cannot fathom how God views our actions, we are left puzzled as to why the LORD viewed the two offerings differently. The text offers us little in terms of a justification for God’s varied response. We are the ones who don’t like being left with uncertainty and mystery when it comes to God. We want God to be effable, comprehensible, conceivable and obvious, even though we claim at the Cherubic Hymn to believe in a God who is none of these things (the priest’s prayer says we worship the God who is ineffable, inconceivable, invisible and incomprehensible). St. Basil the Great said that a God who is comprehensible is no God at all. God surpasses our understanding, and is not limited by human reasoning nor human imagination – otherwise he would simply be a figment of our rationality and creativity. We are forced rather to deal with the sovereign God as He reveals Himself, not God as we want or need Him to be. The story is about God revealing Himself, not God justifying Himself or justifying His behavior. God’s decision is revealed to us but not the rationale for the decision. We are the ones who are not satisfied with God revealing His judgment. We want to know “why?” We want to subject God to human reason and demand that God’s revelation be consistent with our logic. To our dismay, God however sometimes leaves us with “My ways are not your ways.” Believers through history have tended to take theology seriously; God is love and that must be part of the rationale for His judgments and actions however mysterious or inexplicable they seem to us.

In all of Genesis so far, God has never commanded the humans to make an offering to Him of any kind. From where did they learn this practice? Why did they begin making sacrifices? Both Cain and Abel make an offering to God without any Law demanding this of them: “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

excuse them...” (Romans 2:13-15). Perhaps Cain and Abel discerned that it is good and right to worship God without ever being commanded to do so. Genesis assumes the naturalness of the sacrificial offering – probably reflecting an anachronism – the text was written later in time when sacrifice was the normal way of approaching God to seek his favor. Otherwise the text offers no command or clue as to why sacrifice was begun as a way to seek God’s favor. Since the humans have not yet been given permission to eat animal flesh and since no mention of carnivorous animals has yet been made, the sacrificial slaughtering of animals seems out of place. The notion that this text comes from a much later time period in Judaism seems justified. The earlier chapters in Genesis have few anachronisms, but this does seem to be one. Orthodoxy does assume that humans are by nature worshipping beings. In the Divine Liturgy the priest recites the following prayer at the anaphora: “It is meet and right to hymn You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, and to worship You in every place of Your dominion: for You are God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing and eternally the same, You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit.” The prayer asserts it is proper for us to worship God. However in Genesis 4, God had yet to command any type of worship. What is surprising is that nowhere in these early chapters of Genesis do the humans ever offer thanksgiving to God.

“In the course of time....” Did Cain have to wait a season or two, or perhaps even years of farming before his plants and trees could produce fruit? Obviously the story is now dealing with our world as we know it. Time has to pass for things to happen, no more instant and spontaneous creations. But this is as true for Abel who would have had to wait until the right time for him to have a flock and to have firstlings. While Genesis generally is concerned with time and ages, the murder story lacks such precision. Nowhere in Genesis are we told the ages of Cain or Abel. Were they teenagers or adults? We do not know the age of Cain at his death, nor the ages of his descendants. All the other men in the story have their age at death recorded. Obituaries seem fairly important to the author(s) of Genesis, unusual that Abel and Cain’s age at death are missing. This is perhaps a hint that the Cain and Abel story comes from a hand other than the one who so

carefully recorded the ages at death of the story’s other personages.

“the LORD had regard for Abel ... but for Cain ... no regard.” We all feel angry whenever we feel we have been treated unfairly. The scripture certainly introduces a notion of the capricious universe in this text for it offers no explanation for the Lord’s behavior. God is made to appear to have favorites for no apparent reason. The text does not help the reader understand the situation. Was Cain left equally clueless? Does he see himself victimized not just by mindless acts of nature, but by the Creator of the universe? Is God unfair and arbitrary in His actions? Is this part of the lessons we humans must learn – that “life” is at times unfair, that because we live in a fallen world where we are separated from God we sometimes cannot know what God thinks or wants, that God’s sovereign will includes His favoring some over others without His having ever to explain why? Living in a world which is alienated from God due to sin leaves us very vulnerable to misunderstanding what God is doing or what God wants from us. As it says in the Wisdom literature, “I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man’s mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11). Certainly the text does introduce us to the mysterious favor of the Lord. God who favored Abel for reasons not known to us will also choose and favor Israel. When God told the Prophet Samuel to anoint a king to replace the discredited Saul, “the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:7). We cannot see what God sees, nor do we always know His judgments. This does cause us great grief in the world. Even though God favored Abel over Cain, God continued to speak to and encourage Cain. God did not totally reject Cain but exhorted Cain to look into himself and master his own thoughts. When we are displeased, we can let anger and jealousy rule our hearts, or we can look into our selves to see what changes we need to make to please God and we can learn to master our emotions thus gaining a benefit from our unhappiness.



## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

“for Cain and his offering (the LORD) had no regard.” This is perhaps one of the most difficult lessons for believers: if God is truly free and sovereign, He can reject our offering. He is not under any constraint to hear our prayer let alone respond to it positively. The Divine Liturgy fully understands that God is not predestined to act if we pray to him. One prayer of the priest before the Cherubic Hymn acknowledges this terrible reality: “Do not turn Your face away from me, nor cast me out from among Your children; but make me, Your sinful and unworthy servant, worthy to offer gifts to You.” We are not worthy to approach God as that same prayer states: “No one who is bound by the desires and pleasures of the flesh is worthy to approach or draw near to serve You, O King of Glory...” We approach God in worship because He commands us to, not because we are worthy to approach Him. And approaching Him comes with some risk, for He might be displeased with us! The world is not so “perfectly” designed as is claimed by one character in a John Updike novel who said that we are destined to sin and God is destined to forgive us. God is love and is good, but He is also free to look upon our offerings and reject them if He finds fault with them. The priest asks God in the Liturgy to “Accept also the prayer of us sinners, and bear it to Your holy altar, enabling us to offer unto You gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our sins and the errors of the people.” We actually ask God to accept our prayers, we do not assume that He has to.

Cain brings an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Is the Lord displeased because the fruit offering reminds Him of Eve and Adam eating the forbidden fruit and all that has been lost? Is God displeased because that which is now offered to Him is not from His Garden of Delight, but an inferior produce which is the result of human labor and thus another reminder of humankind’s sin? The text offers no explanation for God’s reaction. In the New Testament the Book of Hebrews claims what is wrong with Cain’s offering is related to Abel being a man of faith. “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking” (Hebrews 11:4). Hebrews appears to say, “we see how God reacted so we know one offering was more acceptable to God, we don’t really need to know what Cain or Abel did

– our concern is God’s reaction.” Is it possible that Cain made his offering purely out of some sense of obligation or superstition but not believing in the God whom He worshipped? Is it possible that the entire story hinges around faith in and love for God, which Cain lacked? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”; and he was called the friend of God” (James 2:23). Perhaps Cain lacked any faith in God – he had no trust in the Creator and so does the sloppy minimum He thinks he has to do, but has no intention of really giving God His due.

Patristic writers from the earliest days also puzzled over why Cain’s offering was not acceptable to God. Scripture is silent on this point. Among the explanations put forth by the Fathers of the Church: Cain didn’t offer God the first fruits of his garden – he had already satiated his own appetite and only then turned to offer thanks to God; Cain didn’t offer the best of his fruits but only that which he couldn’t use himself; Cain’s intentions were wrong; Cain was lackadaisical in making the offering; Cain made the offer grudgingly; Cain was indifferent to God and offered only out of a sense of obligation but not joy or thanksgiving. Genesis offers no moral rather reporting the story with objective indifference.

Abel offers an animal sacrifice, which at least so far in the text, has not been commanded by God. But God has regard for the shedding of the sheep’s blood. Somehow this seems incongruous with the God of Paradise, who gave the humans only plants and fruit to eat, not other animals. Why has blood sacrifice become pleasing to God? Humans still are not permitted to eat flesh/meat in Genesis, nor has any killing of animals been authorized by God.

Abel the killer of animals is to be killed by his brother Cain who offers only the bloodless offering of fruit. Did Cain learn to shed blood from Abel? Did Cain think that perhaps the shedding of blood is what pleases God? He apparently has no sheep to offer, so he sacrifices his brother instead.

Abel’s offering inspired Orthodox hymnographers. “I have not resembled Abel in his righteousness, O Jesus, never having offered to You actions worthy of God – pure gifts, an appropriate sacrifice, an unblemished

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

life.” “Like Cain, O my wretched soul, my offering to the Creator of all has been filthy deeds, a polluted sacrifice, and a worthless life – and like him I now stand condemned” (Tuesday Canon of St. Andrew of Crete). The hymn assumes Cain is rejected because of sin, but the Genesis text still at this point has sin “crouching at the door” (4:7). In other words, Cain has not yet sinned, but the chance for sin is there. He doesn’t need to repent, he needs through self control to deny himself and thus refuse to sin. Cain’s sin occurs after God’s rejection not before it.

Cain seems to be doing the right thing – he brings an offering of fruit. We are not told why God has regard for Abel but not Cain. St. John Chrysostom, ever the moralist, suggests it would have been better if Cain had not brought an offering at all, rather than offer something which is not pleasing to God. Chrysostom advises people to be cautious of what they offer to the Lord, and to make sure the offering was honestly earned and not some ill-gotten gain. Chrysostom postulates that Cain’s offering was not well thought out, not the first fruits or the best fruits of Cain’s garden, but merely whatever he had gathered up or gleaned – this is why God won’t accept it as it is an offering of carelessness and indifference. “Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness” (Jeremiah 48:10).

The Patristic writers were always quick to defend the goodness of God in every biblical story. So though the text offers no explanation for God’s rejection of Cain’s offering, they each found justification for God’s action. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Patristic writer now called the Pseudo-Macarius believed Cain’s offering was insincere, done only for show to keep up with his brother rather than done to please God.

“...regard...” The text offers no clue as to how exactly the brothers knew God regarded one offering and rejected the other. It is clear however that the brothers were somehow able to discern God’s reaction to their offerings. Cain is aware not only how God responded to his offering, but also acutely aware of God’s response to Abel’s offering. Apparently the response of God was not just internally intuited but could be objectively observed by both brothers.

Cain’s reaction – feeling rejected causes him to be angry (a new emotion for humans – this is the first time it is mentioned in Genesis), but still his reaction seems normal for humans. He feels God’s rejection after all. Anger is not presented in a pejorative sense – it simply is an emotion which Cain is expected to gain mastery over. Instead Cain allows the passion to control him and his anger turns to murderous sin. Nothing in the text suggests anger must naturally result in sin – his anger could motivate Cain to change his own ways, instead he looks at his brother as the cause of his passion. In Cain’s thinking it is his brother’s fault that he is angry. He does not look at himself, at his own jealousy as the cause of his anger, disappointment and depression. Instead of owning his anger (I am angry), Cain blames Abel (“you make me angry”). He wrongly attributes his inner emotion to his brother. He distorts brotherhood into that which allows him to blame his brother for all his unhappiness. The Lord Jesus Christ attempts to heal this sinfully distorted thinking in us. “What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man” (Mark 7:20-23). Passion and sin are within us. The other person may stir our passions, but that only reveals what is in our hearts. The other, the brother or sister, cannot put sin in us – anger, cursing, rage, murder are in our hearts, they are not the fault of someone else. This is the level of healing we try to attain in Confession – to admit the sin which is within us. We might feel angry as a result of what someone else does. This anger can motivate us to change the situation, to correct a problem, to flee from danger. Anger can serve a good purpose. But when it smolders in our hearts, it is a dangerous passion that leads to further sin. We then use our anger to justify our own sinfulness.

By St. Paul’s understanding, Cain’s grief was certainly worldly grief not godly grief. The fact that his offering does not measure up to God’s standard does not bring Cain to repentance but rather through envy cause him to hate his brother and ultimately to commit fratricide. “... God, who comforts the downcast ... As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:6,9-10).

The story is not only about the sin of Cain. It is about passion in each of us. It is a story of sibling rivalry, of jealousy, and of the rage we feel when someone else is favored over us, or the fury we feel when we believe we have been unfairly treated. Such anger and rage appear in us because we often suffer from doubts about ourselves, we fear we are of little value in the eyes of others and so we feel the need to assert ourselves, violently if necessary in order not to lose a position of favor or simply not to be forgotten. The story can help us put our own emotions – jealousy and rage – in the safe context of a biblical story – so that by being able to see the wrong in another person, we might be able to correct the fault in ourselves. It is a warning that a passion which you do not control will control you. The control of one's passions is a major theme of any Lenten period.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

**6** The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? **7** If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

We are not told how Cain would know God is talking to Him. God is not visible, He has no body, no mouth, so how did Cain "hear" God and know it was God's voice when there was no form to project the voice?

God does not advocate law or the police to force Cain to make the right choice. God appeals to self-control. The theme is very Lenten, very ascetic. Fasting is part of self denial and self control. God wants us to exert dominion over our own appetites and passions.

Though God has not looked favorably on Cain's offering, God notices Cain's sadness and anger and speaks to Cain to mollify, encourage, exhort and correct him. God does not reject Cain himself or turn away from Cain because He has rejected Cain's offering nor because of Cain's bad attitude. God's action toward Cain still shows love and concern. God does not threaten Cain or command Cain to do anything. Rather the Lord acknowledges Cain's emotions and encourages Cain to be master over his passions. Cain does not comprehend the opportunity which God has placed before him and will end up acting on his own emotions and by his own will, totally ignoring the loving exhortation from God. God is optimistic that Cain can overcome sin. God does not assume that the human is depraved and incapable of choosing the good. But neither does God take away the choice of Cain nor intervene to make this spiritual battle easier. Cain is left to choose the good or not, to cooperate with goodness or reject it. Cain has free will and must decide which way he will go. God encourages him to choose the good but leaves the choice to Cain. St. Paul speaks about the choices that are before us and reminds us that pleasing God cannot be reduced to following law, rules, rituals, or regulations. "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). "All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). Being godly cannot be reduced to obsessive and compulsive keeping of the details of the Law. Righteousness demands of us going beyond the demands of any law to overcoming our selfishness and of practicing love for others.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

God is patient with the troubled Cain. “Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works...” (Romans 2:4-6)

In Genesis 3:15 God cursed the serpent saying there was going to be enmity between the serpent's seed and the women's seed. Are we seeing this enmity at work in Cain? Instead of loving his brother as his mother would have wanted him to do, Cain is tormented with destructive and wicked thoughts about his brother. Is the serpent starting the warfare against humanity?

Note in the story that Abel hasn't actually done anything to his brother. Abel did simply what he believed was right. It is Cain's offering which falls short and for this Cain is enraged and directs his rage at his brother instead of considering whether he himself might be at fault or if he should make some change in himself. Cain apparently can't imagine that he has done something wrong or that he has not measured up in some way. His thinking is purely “if I haven't measured up there must be someone else to blame.” The very purpose of the Sacrament of Confession is to challenge the Cainian thinking within each of us. “Grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother.” Help me to see the log in my own eye and not worry about the speck in the eye of the other (Matthew 7:3-5).

Judaism does not see in its scripture a sense that humans are predestined to sinfulness and evil. As it says in the Septuagint's Wisdom of Sirach: “It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him. For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and sees everything; his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every deed of man. He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one

permission to sin” (15:14-20). Humans have the capacity to choose the good and to overcome evil. This belief was held by Eastern Patristic writers who do not embrace the Augustinian sense of predestination toward sin. If we are not predestined to sin, we then have to admit that we sin by choice, and so have little defense and no excuse for what we do. As one of the prayers of the Church says, “Laying aside all excuse we sinners offer to You as Master this supplication: have mercy on us.” Our sins are inexcusable, so we must beg for God's mercy.

In the Divine Liturgy the priest prays to God, “who does not despise the sinner but instead has appointed repentance unto salvation...” God knows what is on the heart of Cain, but calls Cain to change his thinking. God does not reject Cain despite his murderous thoughts but ever hopes that we will repent.

What is perhaps more amazing, God does not speak to Abel whose sacrifice God blessed, rather God speaks only to the less favored brother. Being God's favored doesn't mean one will have close conversation with God. Being disregarded by God does not mean God will not speak with you.

“If you do well, will you not be accepted?” St. Peter in his First Epistle perhaps gives us a hint as to what God wanted from Cain. “For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly... But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval.” (2:19, 20). Was God giving Cain a way to get His approval? Did God hope that Cain would realize the injustice of God having no regard for Cain's offering, and that Cain mindful of God would choose to endure the pain and in the end he too would receive approval? Perhaps God was providing opportunity for Cain to choose virtue. Abel as far as we can tell from the story was simply enjoying God's unmerited favor. Was Cain being given opportunity to learn that one could also receive favor from God by choosing the good? If so, Cain missed the opportunity and not only does not choose the good but far worse chooses to do evil. For us, we can see Cain's example and what happened to him – how by not choosing the good, he rushed headlong into deadly sin. St. Peter tells us on the other hand, “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:21-23). Cain failed to trust Him who judges justly, and/or he failed to trust His judgment. Cain felt he knew better how things should be done, and he will literally take matters into his own hands, murdering his brother.

Sin. This is the first time the word is used in Genesis. It is used in relation to Cain. The word sin did not occur in Genesis 3 in relationship to Adam or Eve.

As God exhorted Cain to overcome the sin of anger which was lurking in ambush, we too are taught by St. Paul: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Ephesians 4:26). We have power to control our anger. We are not just instinctive and irrational animals. We have free will and can control our passions.

Chrysostom warns that envy is passion worse than fornication or adultery. He says adultery is confined to the one who commits it, but envy is the mother of murder and has caused entire wars. Cain was possessed by envy and even God's reproach could not cure him of this affliction.

What kind of God is it who allows his creature (Cain) to consider murdering the man with whom God is pleased (Abel)? God is certainly mystery. He respects the free will of humans, even when the humans oppose Him (as did Eve and Adam) and when they threaten His favored son (as did Cain). God practices great restraint with His creation, or perhaps limits His own power and confines His power within the constraints of the created world. He is not a God who constantly and always intervenes in every human thought or action. He is not a God who needs to control everything the humans do even if they do something wrong. He is not a God who always prevents wrong doing from occurring, nor does He prevent people from experiencing the consequences of their own choices. He is not a God who punishes in an "eye for an eye" fashion. And yet the scriptural witness is also that He is a God of love, justice, mercy, truth and judgment.

We pray "thy will be done" in the Lord's Prayer. We see this in action in Cain's life. He feels a certain way toward his brother, and God gently confronts Cain about his thinking and his feelings. God tells Cain to master his sin, his anger. This is the will of God for Cain: master your sin. God however does not force Cain to do His will. We often know the will of God (forgive those who have offended you, love your enemies, give expecting nothing in return) and we pray "Thy will be done." And yet our own emotions and beliefs and rationalizations argue against doing the Lord's will. We think we are generally good and generally we want to do the Lord's will – or at least as long as that will coincides with what we want. Each of us is Cain, and Cain is each of us. We have been hurt by many others in life. We are jealous of the success of others. We feel neglected. We are angry about our lot. God tells us also to master these thoughts, these emotions, these sins. Will we do more than pray, "Thy will be done"? Will we do it?

"... master it..." Cain must either master his anger or become a slave to it. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). This is the first instance of slavery in the bible, and it is a direct result of sin. The humans created to have dominion over the entire created order, cannot even control themselves and their emotions.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

**8** Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

"Let us go out to the field..." Cain has premeditated what he is about to do. He invites his brother to follow him. It is an absolute betrayal of what it means to be a brother. His action is not an uncontrollable fit of passion. He coldly calculates where and how he will kill his brother. And he leads his brother out into the field where there will be no witnesses to his action. He intentionally hides what he is going to do from his parents (who the author of the text has faded out of the story in any case). He obviously knows what he intends to do is wrong and must be concealed. He knows murder is wrong even before there is any law that says "You shall not murder." God has not given any law forbidding murder. Cain has not witnessed murder but conceives of this new thing in his own heart. And though many will see his act as a deed promoted by Satan, nowhere does the scripture mention or blame Satan for what Cain has decided on his own to do. Evil truly comes from the heart of a human.

"...out to the field..." Does Cain imagine that he can find a place where even God cannot see what he is doing? Certainly his parents had attempted to hide from the presence of God after they sinned (Genesis 3:10). Had they somehow conveyed to Cain that they thought God hadn't actually seen them sin, but only discovered their crime later since God didn't intervene while they were sinning but only appeared after the fact? Eve and Adam apparently had no awareness of God's presence until after they sinned so maybe they suspected God didn't really know what they had done until Adam let slip that something was wrong. By going out into the field did Cain hope he was beyond the watchful eye of God? How very human we are when we try to hide our sins, misdeeds and mistakes from others and from God thinking since no one witnessed what we did we can walk away free from our misdeed. Healing and forgiveness come only when we acknowledge the sin, not when we escape being detected and fingered for what we did.

Since human death was an unknown concept to Cain, is it possible that he had no concept of the enormity of his act before he killed Abel? It is a most interesting question in the light of the story

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for Cain takes his brother Abel out into the field away from his parents and quite apparently with and for the intention of killing Abel. So though

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

death was an unknown concept, Abel planned the death of his brother. In the story to this point no animals are carnivores, and so Cain would not have witnessed much killing except for the animal sacrifice which Abel did. Possibly he didn't understand the finality of death, but then why kill his brother? He could have just bullied him or run him off. Did he know what he was doing? Could he understand the concept of death? What made him believe the death of his brother would resolve his own anger/unhappiness? God disregarded Cain and this is what made Cain unhappy/angry. So why did Cain imagine that killing his brother would make either God happy with him, or Cain happy with himself since he still wouldn't have God's favor? It is possible that Cain concluded, "I cannot strike at the invisible God who is prejudiced against me, but I can strike at the one whom God favors."

"Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him." How fast and how far humans have fallen. Death which was a consequence of human willfulness and disobedience is now being used by humans to accomplish their selfish and sinful ways. Had God not foreseen this? Did God not understand that when He introduced death as a consequence for sin that the sinful human beings would then use death to sin even more? Whatever God understood about the role death would play in humanity, the picture of fallen humanity is one of depravity. There still is no mention of love between any of the characters of the story. This certainly is noticeable in the early chapters of Genesis. The humans each are very self centered and show little concern for their fellow human beings. There is as of this point in scripture no commandment from God not to kill and at least by the literal reading of the story Cain would not have seen animals killing one another as there are no carnivores. Once again humans turn something from God into their own distorted purposes. And again God will take a human invention, murder, and by allowing it to become the means for His own Son's death will transform what the humans deformed into the salvation of humanity. Why God did not intervene and stop the fratricide is not known, but in allowing this event, God is setting the stage for His own Son's death. God is going to experience all that becomes part of human existence. God does not allow any human experience that He Himself is not willing to suffer.

Someone once said that every generation is faced with an invasion of barbarians – their own children. Were Adam and Eve also caught by surprise as to how uncivilized their son could be? There is no indication in the text that Eve and Adam reared Cain or taught him any values or morality. Is this a lesson that had to be learned by humans coming out of paradise – assume nothing from or for your children, you must teach and discipline them? All was provided for Adam and Eve in Paradise, but now they must learn the importance of discipline and rules in their own lives and that of their offspring. Having the image of God in us, is not sufficient for a human becoming a moral being. Beings of free will must be taught consequences and responsibilities. This is a lesson that self-centered, self-loving, consumption-loving modern people do not appreciate.

"...killed him..." By what means Cain killed his brother the story doesn't tell us. No weapons of any sort have been mentioned in the Genesis narrative to this point. As a tiller of the soil, one would imagine Cain had some sort of farm implements and so it is possible that he used one to murder his brother. However in the story Cain simply lures his brother out into the field – no indication he is carrying anything. Did he murder his brother with his bare hands? Did he use something that nature provided to kill his brother? In either case we see God's "good" creation being used for violence and sin. Was Abel caught off guard? Was he truly a righteous man who had never even considered the possibility of murder? The story doesn't tell us if he resisted the evil of his brother, if he begged for mercy, if he accepted martyrdom rather than give in to the evil passions which possessed his brother. The Church through time has tended to see Abel as that righteous martyr, a prototype of Christ himself.

The first reported death in Genesis is not Adam or Eve who had been told if they ate the forbidden fruit that they would die (Gen 2:17). Adam according to the story will live about 800 years after Abel's death. He certainly had plenty of time to think about how his sin contributed to his son's death, and ample time to consider the death sentence under which he lived. The first death is not the "natural" result of their disobedience, but rather occurs due to human violence. No human had yet died, even though that had been promised, but now Cain hastens



## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

the fulfillment of the promised mortality. To add to the sin, Cain does not kill his enemy, he murders his brother. God's dire warning to Adam about death is not even given the chance to work itself out. Cain takes matters into his own hands and brings about the first death of a human being. The violent violently hasten death's mastery over humanity. If God intended to help the humans cope with the eventuality of death, Cain circumvents that process and makes death a permanent part of human existence right then.

Theodoret of Cyrus, 5<sup>th</sup> Century, asked why it is that Abel is the first to die when it was Adam that sinned. He concludes it was God's way of showing that death is unjust. "God wanted Death's foundation to be unsound. If Adam had been the first to die, Death would have established a strong base by taking the sinner as his first victim. But since he first took the man unjustly slain, his foundation is insecure."

The Greek Patristic writers almost all agree that envy is the culprit vice in Cain, and that envy is the father of the sin murder. Chrysostom said of Cain's action, "Nothing is worse than jealously and envy; by them death came into the world."

God had reproached Cain to get control of his passion, but even God's direct counsel did not move Cain to rid himself of the envy which gave birth to murder. The story shows the importance of confession – of confessing not only our misdeeds, but our sinful thoughts. To gain mastery over our passions, we need to confess our sins and renounce them. Do you feel envy and jealousy in your life? Do you think these passions are unimportant and not worth confessing? God counseled Cain to master his envy, but he refused and allowed the envy to go full term, and its offspring was murder. Here we come to see confession as a real gift from God to help us overcome our sinful thoughts and feelings. Not only does God counsel us to overcome our passions, in the sacrament of confession He provides a tool and medicine to help us achieve the goal.

One of the themes we find repeated in scripture is the wicked lying in wait to harm and even kill the righteous. The Psalms, Prophets and Wisdom literature frequently raise that theme (Psalm 119:95, Proverbs 12:6, Jeremiah 5:26, and of course Judas in the Gospel). And though

they do not shy away from exposing that reality of life, their ability to explain it satisfactorily is not always there. Sometimes the writer can only lament, "Why, O Lord?" Why do the wicked succeed? Why do the righteous or innocent suffer at the hands of the wicked? (see Job 21:7, Jeremiah 12:1, Habakkuk 1:13) The theme is worsened by the fact that sometimes it is a familiar friend, not an enemy, who treacherously harms an innocent friend (Psalm 55:12-13, and Judas). Of course Genesis provides the whole background as to "Why?". It does have to do with the Fall of humans, that ancestral sin which has tainted humanity. It has to do with the human willingness (and even gleefulness!) to choose evil, to decide that vengeance is a right and that unfairness in life demands that others be slain or forcibly injured. God sorrowfully notes in Genesis the inclination of the human heart to do evil from the time a human is young. Is this a defect in humans – did God goof when He made us? One of the difficult lessons of Genesis is that for humans to have true free will, humans must be capable of horrible evil – that is the only way there can be real freedom of choice if we can actually do the evil. For humans to be able to love others, it must not be pre-programmed in their hearts but rather must be a choice. For the universe to have true love, their must be true and risky choice which includes failure and evil. God sees this reality in the human heart and does not treat it as a defect, though it brings Him to grief. Even God wonders in Genesis whether having a being capable of love (and thus capable of evil) is worth it. Genesis 6-9 (Noah and the flood) presents God facing up to this dilemma. God created beings He loves, beings who are capable of loving Him. But the capacity to love is the capacity to reject and to do evil. To God's dismay the humans constantly and continually are willing to reject love – love for others, love for Him, His love for them. And thus is born the repeated pattern in history that there are a few who actually choose righteousness and love, but they live in a world where that choice is often an unusual one and the person who makes the choice becomes the target of those who choose a way which rejects God, rejects love, rejects holiness. So to love God, to live a life of love means one may be subject to the same bitter disappointment and grief that God Himself experiences in relationship to His creation. There is a sad reality that humans frequently want "love" but are less often willing to give it, or to joyfully suffer for it.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

Fratricide. Seemingly common human foibles, sibling rivalry and jealousy become in the fallen world the basis for fratricide – murdering one's own brother. In Genesis 3 the Fall of humanity led to a world of alienation, division, isolation, opposition. Humanity against God. Male versus female. Mankind versus the rest of the created world. Death. And quickly after death becomes part of the human condition, murder becomes part of human activity. Humans die not only from natural causes but in Genesis 4 the first recorded death is from intentional human violence against another human being. God gave procreation for the continuance of the human race, humans, even brothers cannot get along and act to kill one another. Humans use death to accomplish their own goals – and also reveal the evil within themselves. God will intervene again into the human order and use death, even murder, to accomplish His Plan for the world. That is the story of His Christ.

The shedding of blood - Abel shed the blood of the sheep and God was pleased. Has Cain misunderstood God? It is not the shedding of blood in the animal sacrifice which is important, but something else. Cain's shedding human blood is not going to find favor with God. Keep in mind the Ten Commandments do not exist yet. There is no command from God forbidding murder, but God will not let Cain escape with a plea of ignorance of the law.

In Wisdom 10:1-3, the blame for Cain's shameful action is said to be that he abandoned wisdom to follow his own anger: "Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression, and gave him strength to rule all things. But when an unrighteous man departed from her in his anger, he perished because in rage he slew his brother." Wisdom protected Adam despite his sin because Adam did not attempt to drive Wisdom away. Cain rejects Wisdom (God's Word) and follows his own heart to the murder of his own brother. "Because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin" (Wisdom 1:4).

In Matthew 23:35, Abel is called both righteous and innocent. He is not seen as having provoked his brother in any way. Cain is completely at fault for the murder.

St. John in his first epistle proffers a damning critique of Cain: "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:11-12). In his Gospel St. John says Judas is "a devil" (John 6:70-71), perhaps showing how far humanity has truly fallen. In Luke's Gospel genealogy, Christ, the Son of God, has his ancestry traced through Seth to Adam who also is son of God. Cain is portrayed in St. John's epistle as not being in a godly line but rather being a descendent of the evil one. Nothing in the Genesis text remotely suggests that any human is or could be a child of Satan as all humanity is traced through Adam to God.

St. Cyprian of Carthage praises Abel's offering as coming from someone who is peace-loving, with simplicity of heart, and innocent, and says we all should approach the altar of God at Communion with this same attitude. He says Abel is the first martyr – a man who possessed peace and harmony is struck down by one intent on doing evil. Abel is the prototype of the righteous person who suffers at the hands of sinners.

St. Gregory the Great the Pope of Rome notes somberly, that all of us on earth live between heaven and hell, and no good person can live without coming into contact with those who are evil. "No good person is left untested by the wickedness of the bad," he says. The wickedness of the wicked is opportunity for each good person to hone their righteousness.

Cain's murder of Abel introduces into the biblical text a theme of the unjust suffering of the righteous. Christ Himself mentions the righteous Abel in His warning to His fellow Jews about a coming judgment day: "that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechari'ah the son of Barachi'ah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar" (Matthew 23:35). This is one of the few instances in the Gospel where retributive justice is suggested – upon the current generation will be visited the justice demanded by the murders of righteous people.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

In John 8:44 Jesus says to the Jews, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning..." St. Makarios of Egypt interpreted "your father the devil" to refer to Cain not to Satan. He says everyone who chooses sin is a child of Cain.

Interestingly St. Maximos the Confessor (7<sup>th</sup> Century AD) partly blames Abel for his death saying that Abel should have been vigilant regarding the things of this world, and uses this as a lesson for all Christians not to be lulled to sleep by sin or by associating with sinners.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

**9** Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" **10** And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

"Where is Abel your brother?" The Patristic Authors tended to see this question, like the one posed to Adam ("Where are you?"), as God in His mercy inviting Cain to confess his sin. Cain like his father will not confess or repent. In his commentary on the story, Chrysostom moralizes that like God we should never condemn a fellow Christian before asking questions and seeing evidence that proves their guilt.

In the Divine Liturgy before singing the Trisagion ("Holy God! Holy Mighty!..."), the priest's prayer says that God is one "who does not despise the sinner, but instead has appointed repentance unto salvation..." God gives His people opportunity to confess their sins and to repent. Cain will not avail himself this opportunity, but instead denies his brotherhood with Abel. Similarly, Peter denies the Lord Jesus when Christ is on trial before Pilate, swearing, "I don't know the man."

"brother" - a new concept in the Genesis story introduced with the births of Cain and Abel is that of brotherhood. What are the responsibilities of a brother? The brothers are not portrayed as doing all that much together and have different occupational interests. God's dialogue with Cain suggests brotherhood in fact means one is responsible for one's brother. Cain's question denies his brotherhood with Abel. The notion of brotherhood among all disciples is a key element in early Christian thinking. Cain does not kill an enemy, he murders his only brother. One need only think about Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) to see that for Jesus being a neighbor means to show mercy to another (10:36-37). One would think that at a minimum that is required of being a brother to someone.

"...am I my brother's keeper?" Abel was the keeper of sheep. Cain was not listed as keeper of anything. Is Cain challenging God - "How should I know where he is? YOU are his keeper. After all he is YOUR favorite, why don't YOU know where he is? Have You lost him?"

"...am I my brother's keeper?" Cain slyly (skillfully?) parries with God, question for question. Does Cain hope God doesn't know what actually happened and that he can avoid detection by deflecting the question with a question? Is Cain inventing a new human behavior - playing dumb? Unlike his father

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

Adam who blamed both Eve and God for his sin (Genesis 3:12), the polemical Cain cannot think who to blame. God does not answer Cain, but flays him with a new question revealing that God is quite aware what has transpired. God knows Abel is dead and he demands Cain to explain whether he (Cain) understands what he has done. Is it possible that Cain didn't really know what happened to his brother? Cain had physically killed his brother, but perhaps he had no clue what happened to the breath/soul of his brother. The idea of heaven or the place of the dead is not part of the narrative yet. Maybe Cain felt ignorance of the true state of his brother gave him some excuse. "I didn't really know what would happen to my brother's soul after death, so I can't be responsible for what has occurred." Many a sinner tries a similar excuse – I didn't intend for these results to happen, I was only trying to..." We do not want our sins to count if we never really intended them to do all the harm they do. But the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), whether or not we intend death to occur.

"your brother's blood ..." The Ancients believed life was in the blood of a being. This idea might be a contrast to life being associated with breath (Genesis 2:7) or the notion of the soul/psyche/living being the center of life (also in 2:7). Biblical imagery is richly varied and thus has a greater depth than the rather narrow thinking of pure literalism which wants only one possible meaning for any text. But since in the ancient perspective "life is in the blood", blood is basically synonymous with the soul. It is Abel's soul which cries out to God. Hebrews 12:25 mentions Abel's blood which speaks. It is perhaps the first indication in Genesis of a life beyond/after death, and that the dead continue to exist and that at least the righteous dead can speak to God. In Genesis 3:19 when God sentenced the sinful Adam, He pronounced the words, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" – words oft repeated at Christian burial. And while we may be dust, obviously that is not all we are, or the only thing we are. For humans have both blood with life in it, and a soul. And the blood of Abel cries from the ground showing that a human is more than dust even if he or she returns to dust at death. The text does not assign any place to the dead Abel except for the ground which had absorbed his blood. Eventually Judaism forms a notion of Sheol, the place of the dead which originally was conceived of as being somewhere beneath the surface of

the earth. Burial sends the dead on their journey to Sheol. In early Jewish thinking, Sheol had a purely shadowy existence and were not capable of doing anything, even praying to God ("For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?" Psalm 6:5) because in Jewish anthropology a human needs his or her body to do anything and the dead were somehow separated from their bodies ("for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going" Ecclesiastes 9:10). Later Jewish thinking imagined the day when the dead would be reunited to their bodies in the resurrection – only then could they enter heaven. The concept of Sheol changes over time, as belief in the resurrection of the dead grew in ancient Israel, from a shadowy emptiness to a place where the righteous dead can hope in God's promised resurrection and eternal life. Late Judaism envisioned even God filling Sheol in the redeemed world. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!" (Psalm 139:7-8) For Christians God's presence in Sheol is fulfilled in Jesus who through His death enters into Sheol and rescues all the dead beginning with Adam and Eve, an event memorialized in the icon of Holy Saturday.

"your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground..." If Cain believed he could hide his sin from God, the story has his crime being exposed by his brother's blood crying from the ground. If God had decided to stay out of the picture and give free reign to human and thus Cain's free will, Abel's blood demands justice, and God will not ignore the cry of Abel's blood. If God respects human free will, the murdered man's blood demands action from God, and God for the sake of the blood and the ground chooses not to ignore what Cain had done. (In the book of Revelations we have this imagery: "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before You will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?'" (Revelations 6:9-10) While Abel's blood cries from the earth to God, in the New Testament, the blood of the crucified Christ which is shed for the life of the world speaks of forgiveness for humanity. "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

than the blood of Abel” (Hebrews 12:24). An interesting phrase that blood has a voice – a prefiguring of Christ’s own blood saving us?

“The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.” The ground was cursed as a result of Adam’s sin, but now it is defiled and made unclean by Abel’s blood being shed upon it. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:22-23). The earth which God fashioned into a living being now receives back the body and blood of one of God’s creations. The consequence of Adam’s sin and curse is now fulfilled for the first time and the human surely dies and returns to the dust from which he was fashioned, despite the serpent’s promise that this wouldn’t happen (Genesis 3:4). There is no discussion of the soul or of life after death. The earth has simply swallowed Abel’s blood (“the ground... has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood...”). Biblical physiology has the life of the person being in the blood.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

**11** And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. **12** When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

"cursed from the ground..." Humans who were made from the ground in Genesis 2 have a very close connection to the earth. Cain's murdering his brother has even cut his connection with the earth from which he was made. The effects of the Fall on humanity are worsening, and the alienation between humanity and the rest of creation is widening. In Genesis 1 God blesses the human, but now for the first time the human is cursed – cursed by the ground from which he came.

At one point, Chrysostom argued that Cain's sin is even worse than Adam's. "...understand how much greater this sin was than the transgression of the first formed human being. In that case, remember, he said, 'Cursed shall be the soil as you till it,' and it was on the earth he poured out the curse, to show his care for the human being, whereas in this case, where the crime was deadly, the outrage lawless and the deed unpardonable, he receives the curse in person: 'You shall be cursed from the earth,' the text says, remember. You see, since Cain perpetrated practically the same evil as the serpent, which like an instrument served the devil's purposes, and as the serpent introduced mortality by means of deceit, in like manner Cain deceived his brother, led him out into open country, raised his hand in armed assault against him and committed murder. Hence, as he said to the serpent, 'Cursed are you beyond all the wild animals of the earth,' so to Cain, too, when he committed the same evil as the serpent. In other words, just as the devil was moved by hatred and envy, being unable to bear the ineffable kindnesses done the human being right from the outset, and under the impulse of hatred rushed headlong into the deception that introduced death, so too Cain saw the Lord kindly disposed to his brother, and under the impulse of hatred rushed headlong into murder." (HOMILIES ON GENESIS 18-45, TFOTC Vol 82, pp 27-28) In calling Cain's sin equivalent to the serpent's deception, Chrysostom is also revealing that he does not embrace a strict "original sin" theology which would condemn all humans as a result of what Adam did. To some extent Chrysostom is saying each of us has to answer for our own sins, not for the sins of our ancestors. He also is saying that each sin will be judged by God based on the evil which is done by that person. In this sense Adam must answer for Adam's sin just like each of us will be judged for our own sins, not for the sin of Adam even though we do receive a mortal nature as a

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

result of the original sin. St. Basil the Great said, "Do not go beyond yourself to seek for evil, and imagine that there is an original nature of wickedness. Each of us, let us acknowledge it, is the first author of his own vice."

"...a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." Though today humans think of the earth as their home, in Genesis there is always a degree to which humans must recognize that there is no true homeland on earth, as the human homeland is Paradise from which we have been exiled. We are all sojourners on this earth.

Cain serves as a **prototype** for all humans whose sins will forever cause them to feel like and to be homeless wanderers. Cain is forced to become a nomad – this is an interesting detail as generally it is assumed by anthropologists that humans moved in the opposite direction from being nomadic to becoming sedentary. In the Genesis account it Abel as shepherd would have had the more nomadic life when compared to Cain the farmer. Now Cain's life is nomadic because it is cursed. Nomads are not all rejected by God, since Abel's offering was more acceptable to God than the sedentary Cain's farm produce. It does seem that God had more regard for the pastoral way of life than for that of the farmer. Indeed David the shepherd who becomes God's favored king, and Jesus the Good Shepherd carry this theme throughout the Bible.

"fugitive and wanderer..." St. Makarios of Egypt (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Century AD) offered a figurative interpretation of Cain's punishment. He writes that Cain is the image of every one of us who sins. "For the race of Adam, having broken the commandment and become guilty of sin, is shaken by restless thoughts, full of fear, cowardice and turmoil. Every soul not reborn in God is tossed hither and thither by the desires and multifarious pleasures of the enemy, and whirled about like corn in a sieve." St. Markarios obviously thought believers were much more stable and didn't suffer such inner turmoil.

"cursed from the ground ... When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." When Adam was expelled from Paradise he lost the abundance of the fruit of the Garden of Delight and was forced to return to the earth to till the ground in order to receive the

fruit of it. Cain's punishment is even more severe for now the ground is cursing him and will resist his agricultural effort and he will be forced to become nomadic. As a result of sin humans have lost wholeness and wholesomeness with separation and alienation causing humans to be at enmity with the very soil from which they were originally created (Genesis 2). Humans as holistic beings – at peace with the Divine and in harmony with nature – have been undone causing humans to experience a divide between the spiritual and the physical that was not originally part of God's creation or plan. The story also picks up on another theme found in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise – alienation and exile. Sin causes humans to lose any sense of "home" and causes them to be exiles everywhere on the earth, endlessly searching and restlessly searching for what they have lost. This will become a main biblical theme in the Book of Exodus with the Jews in search of a homeland. The theme of exile is an integral part of Jewish spirituality, which Orthodoxy picks up during Great Lent when we sing Psalm 137: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" (Ps 137:1-4) Christianity embraces the theme of exile further expanding it to include all of humanity in search of a homeland. (They)... "acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:13-16). Additionally in Christian imagery the entire earth is a foreign land and even Jerusalem itself becomes a mere shadow of the true Jerusalem which is a heavenly reality. Christians see all of humanity as being restless in this world as they search for God's homeland which is beyond this world. "For Christians are distinguished from the rest of men neither by country nor by language nor by customs. For nowhere do they dwell in cities of their own; they do not use any strange form of speech or practice a singular mode of life...but while they dwell in both Greek and barbarian cities, each as his lot was cast, and follow the customs of the land in dress and



## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

food and other matters of living, they show forth the remarkable and admittedly strange order of their own citizenship. They live in fatherlands of their own but as aliens. They share all things as citizens and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign land is their fatherland and every fatherland a foreign land" (Epistle to Diognetus, ca 150 AD). St. John Chrysostom has a related thought: "For the person who says 'I am a Christian' has revealed both their country and family history and occupation. Let me explain how. The Christian does not have a city on earth, but the Jerusalem in heaven. 'For the heavenly Jerusalem, which is our mother,' scripture says, 'is free' (Gal 4:26). The Christian doesn't have an earthly occupation, but arrives at the heavenly way of life. 'Our citizenship,' scripture says, 'is in heaven' (Phil 3:20). The Christian has as relatives and fellow citizens all the saints. 'We are fellow citizens of the saints,' scripture says, 'and God's own' (Eph 2:19)" (TCOTS, p 72).

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

**13** Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. **14** Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me." **15** Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him.

Now suddenly Cain shows some remorse. As is often the case with humans, it is not committing the sin which bothers us, it is getting caught. Our sorrow is often related to the consequence we suffer, rather than lamenting the suffering we inflict on others.

"My punishment is greater than I can bear..." In one sermon Chrysostom portrays Cain as trembling uncontrollably at this point in the story. St. John sees Cain's punishment as being worse than death. "God wanted men of later times to exercise self-control. Therefore, he designed the kind of punishment that was capable of setting Cain free from his sin. If God had immediately destroyed him, Cain would have disappeared, his sin would have stayed concealed, and he would have remained unknown to men of later times. But as it is, God let him live a long time with that bodily tremor of his. The sight of Cain's palsied limbs was a lesson for all he met. It served to teach all men and exhort them never to dare do what he had done, so that they might not suffer the same punishment. And Cain himself became a better man again. His trembling, his fear, the mental torment that never left him, his physical paralysis kept him, as it were, shackled. They kept him from leaping again to any other like deed of bold folly. They constantly reminded him of his former crime. Through them he achieved greater self-control in his soul." (AGAINST JUDAIZING CHRISTIANS)

"...from thy face I shall be hidden..." Cain has a legitimate fear. He has been trying to hide his activities from God's presence, but now is terrified to realize that in fact God might never look upon him with favor again. We all in Psalm 51:11 pray that God will not cast us away from His presence and that He will not take His Holy Spirit from us. Cain's spiritual lesson is a difficult one. As with most of us, Cain does not want God observing his every word, deed and thought. He wants God to ignore him for most of what he does, especially that which is wrong. But when Cain wants God present, he expects God to be at his beck and call to rescue him and protect him.

Cain fears that those who find him shall slay him. But who on earth was there to find and kill him? Obviously the text assumes there are in fact other people existing on earth whose existence is not explained by the Genesis story. The text is focusing on one set of humans but

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

the existence of other humans not in this particular lineage is implicitly admitted.

“...a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth...”  
The implication of the text is that Cain will never be able to be a citizen of any civilized people. He has in fact cut himself off from society.

Chrysostom comments that just as Cain’s repentance came too late – only after the punishment was ordered – so too those who fail to repent before the Judgment Day will be sorely disappointed when they attempt to repent after God has pronounced judgment. Yes they will at that moment be sincerely sorry for their sins, but no it will not save them from eternal punishment. It is not the sorrow that saves, but changing one’s life while there is still time. God promises to accept our repentance and promises to forgive our sins. He does not however promise us a tomorrow. Now is the time of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

God puts a mark on Cain to protect him so that no one kills him. Why didn’t God so mark Abel whose sacrifice was pleasing to Him?

God does not immediately requite the death of Abel by slaying Cain. Why? Perhaps to give Cain the chance to repent. “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord GOD; so turn, and live” (Ezekiel 18:30-32). God is not demanding retributive justice, but rather hopes for the conversion of the sinner.

“...the LORD put a mark on Cain...” The apparently physical interaction between the LORD and a human is remarkable. To our dismay, the text does not tell us how this happened or what the mark was, but gives the impression that God in an **anthropomorphic** fashion is able physically to touch the human. This would imply some form of “incarnation” of God or of God’s action. God is able to physically touch/mark that which is “not God.” In this we see that the Bible does not embrace any form of dualism – neither a

complete spiritual vs. physical dualism, nor a divine vs. created dualism which would totally separate these realities. The divine can indeed touch and even mark the physical. This is the very basis for the Christian affirmation of the incarnation of God.

What was this “mark”? It is not described at all. Yet somehow anybody who would encounter Cain would be able to “read” the mark and know that Cain was not to be killed. What kind of “mark” would be universally understandable by any person is not known. Why would people who aren’t related to the story and who don’t know God honor a sign that came from this God? What perhaps is more interesting is that God putting the mark on Cain seems to imply that killing was almost common place or both Cain and God realize it is about to become so. The early chapters of Genesis report only two murders – Abel’s and the unknown man killed by Lamech. Yet despite the few deaths reported, Cain is fearful that just about everybody in the world will want to kill him and God seems to think it is necessary to provide Cain with this extra protection because either murder was already common or it is going to about to become an everyday occurrence. No other murders are reported in the Genesis 1-11, yet God will come to regret having made humans because they are so violent. This all certainly suggests that a lot more was going on with humanity than the Bible is reporting. Apparently the Bible is following the story of but a select few men, but many others exist beyond the scope of the text.

Cain was the only brother to whom God spoke directly. Now after Cain murders his brother, God decides to protect Cain from any act of vengeance. “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). God does not at this point will that humans practice capital punishment, nor does He inflict the death penalty on Cain. The God who is love demonstrates tremendous patience and mercy with his violently sinful creation. “As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11) God does not desire the death of the sinner, not even the murderer. His constant goal for His favored human creatures is that they would always choose the

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

good. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live..." (Deuteronomy 30:19). Failing that, humans are given by God the grace to repent, to confess their wrongdoing, to change their heart and mind, to return to their God, begging His mercy and mending their way. The story of the scriptures though is that humans constantly abuse God's mercy in order to continue sinning. "Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4)

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

**16** Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. **17** Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. **18** To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Me-hu'ja-el, and Me-hu'ja-el the father of Me-thu'sha-el, and Me-thu'sha-el the father of Lamech.

“...away from the presence of the Lord...” Is this possible? Has humanity fallen so far that a person can actually move somewhere away from God's presence? It may be that this is what Cain had in mind when he lured Abel into the field - he hoped it would be away even from the presence of the Lord. Is there such a place on earth that is in fact away from God's presence? Literally speaking the text does not make sense though we can understand its figurative sense. But theologically speaking we profess a belief in the Holy Spirit which is “everywhere present and fills all things” so there is no place which would be away from God's presence. Psalm 139:7-10 bears witness that there is nowhere in the cosmos that we can go where God is not present: “Whither shall I go from your Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.” The created world is by definition “not God” but literally speaking there is nowhere on earth that is away from the presence of the Lord.

The threat of being cast away from God's presence because of our own failures as Christians even if figurative in language is still a spiritual reality. The story of Cain is a lesson for us; it is not just a sad story about a man who lived long ago. In the Divine Liturgy the priest prays during the Cherubic Hymn, “Do not turn Your face from me nor cast me out from among Your children...” Just because we pray (even for priests!) does not mean that God must accept our prayer. It is possible that we can approach God in an unworthy manner, with an unclean heart, and God can cast us out as He did Cain. Remember Cain's problems started with God not accepting his offering. Cain's being sent away from God's presence began not with sin, but with Cain's offering not being acceptable to God. This led to Cain's murderous sin; it wasn't murder that led to God rejecting Cain's offering. The prayers of the Orthodox Church constantly call for our own humility in approaching God – calling us first to humbly repent and to cast all evil from our heart before we even begin to pray. Before the Lord's Prayer in the Divine Liturgy, the priest says, “And make us worthy, O master, that with boldness and without condemnation we may dare to call upon You, the heavenly God as Father and to say...” Modern sensibilities which

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

assume God must listen to our prayers find such groveling prayers to be offensive to human dignity. But the modern attitude where God has no choice when it comes to listening to prayers, deprive God of His sovereignty. Such an attitude reduces God to servitude – He is nothing more than our servant who must respond to our every beck and call. Orthodox spirituality does give full respect to God as our Lord, and recognizes that because of our sinfulness and human limitations we are not just servants of God, but frequently unworthy servants who have no sway over the Master. Rather all we can do is approach Him with the greatest reverence, acknowledging our sins, and begging Him to consider our requests. We recognize the reality that our prayers are that of feeble sinners. We do not want to provoke God's goodness by presuming He has to listen to us. We always approach God acknowledging our sinfulness and begging His forgiveness and mercy. This is also why the Orthodox so rely on the prayers of the Theotokos and God's saints on our behalf. Even if God will not listen to our pleas, perhaps He will listen to the saints which He loves as He has found their prayers worthy.

Note well, though Cain is a murderer God never threatened to punish him eternally in hell (such a concept does not exist in the Genesis account) nor does God threaten Cain with the death penalty. Cain's punishment is banishment from the rest of his family. Only, as more people come to exist on the earth does God determine a greater need for "law" and various forms of punishment to influence or control the humans. When law fails is the next level of threat an eternity in hell?

"land of Nod" The fact that lands beyond those of the current humans already have names suggests there are in fact other people on earth not accounted for by the Genesis tracing of humanity through the descendents of Adam.

"east of Eden" In Genesis 2:8, Eden itself is said to be "in the East" and now Cain is moving east of Eden (the east). The east is where the sunrises, yet it appears that Cain and his descendents are not people of the light.

"Cain knew his wife..." Even in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century the Patristic writers puzzled over from whence Cain's wife could have come since the scriptures are silent about their origin. Some thought God

simply populated the earth with other people, some felt she must have been a daughter of Eve and that incest was justified at that time in order to secure the continuation of the human race. The text seems to be following only a particular people, keeping the others outside the purview of the story. It's not denying that there are other humans created by God, but they are clearly secondary characters in relationship to those the Bible focuses on.

"...he built a city.." The notion of Cain building a city seems to contradict the curse that God placed on him in verse 14 where is made into a wanderer. Such contradictions may indicate different traditions have been blended into the final text (so Source Theory would argue) or that the text is not meant to be read with an inflexible literalism.

The first mention of a city occurs in the lineage of Cain. "Civilization" is not presented in the best of light in this passage. The "city" is seen as founded by sinful and violent men. There is no mention of God in the city. The fact that a "city" would be built suggests there are many more people in existence than our Genesis story is accounting for. Cities can only exist if people (the farmers) have learned how to produce more food than they need for their own survival. City life assumes the residents can purchase needed food or otherwise everyone would live on their own farms to sustain life. City life implies a certain level of social development – life developed beyond that of nomadic tribesmen. The story doesn't tell us what constitutes a "city" at this point, so we have no way of knowing what building a city requires; it probably implies, however rudimentary, some architecture, engineering and building skills, and also the tools and simple machines to do the job. In Sirach 38 we read the following ancient ideas about what it takes to establish a city: "So too is every craftsman and master workman who labors by night as well as by day; those who cut the signets of seals, each is diligent in making a great variety; he sets his heart on painting a lifelike image, and he is careful to finish his work. So too is the smith sitting by the anvil, intent upon his handiwork in iron; the breath of the fire melts his flesh, and he wastes away in the heat of the furnace; he inclines his ear to the sound of the hammer, and his eyes are on the pattern of the object. He sets his heart on finishing his handiwork, and he is careful to

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

complete its decoration. So too is the potter sitting at his work and turning the wheel with his feet; he is always deeply concerned over his work, and all his output is by number. He moulds the clay with his arm and makes it pliable with his feet; he sets his heart to finish the glazing, and he is careful to clean the furnace. All these rely upon their hands, and each is skilful in his own work. Without them a city cannot be established, and men can neither sojourn nor live there. ... But they keep stable the fabric of the world, and their prayer is in the practice of their trade" (38:27-33).

Unusual in the genealogy of Cain is that his death and that of his descendents is not recorded, nor are their ages listed. Did the inspired author of Genesis want their memories forgotten as soon as is possible?

The names of Cain's descendents are going to be paralleled almost exactly in the family tree of Seth (Genesis 5:15-25). The names Enoch, Me-hu'ja-el, Me-thu'sha-el, and Lamech all have corresponding names in the genealogy of Seth in the same order of birth. The significance of the repeated list is not known. One theory of scholars is that the list of names is unquestionably ancient but through time oral tradition which carried the memory of these forefathers became unclear as to whether it was Cain or Seth's lineage. So both possibilities were recorded in Scripture. We see perhaps a similar issue in the New Testament in which the names in the ancestry of Christ in Luke 3:23-34 and Matthew 1:3-16 do not completely coincide.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

**19** And Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. **20** Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. **21** His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. **22** Zillah bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Na'amah.

**23** Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say: I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. **24** If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

Unusual in these early genealogies Lamech's wives are not only mentioned but their names are given – Adah and Zillah. Some scholars think they are mentioned because they are disapproved of. Is it possible that the author of the text so despised these women of Cain that their names are in the text for the same reason that Pontius Pilate's name is in the Creed? As can be seen in the other genealogies, not only are woman seldom named, often no woman is even mentioned with men fathering sons without reference to woman. The first mention of wife's names in the Seth lineage will come only in 11:29 with Sarai wife of Abraham.

"...took two wives..." The first mention in the Bible of polygamy occurs in the genealogy of the accursed Cain. Originally God intended the man to leave his parents and cling to his wife implying monogamy. God does not command or bless polygamy here, Lamech simply takes two wives just as Eve took the forbidden fruit. Lamech son of Cain is the only man in Genesis 1-11 to practice polygamy. Later in Genesis Abraham will take a concubine to bear him a child, but that is not within the scope of our interest.

"...the father of those..." In some sense the text introduces an inconsistency. Since all these people will supposedly be destroyed by the flood, in what sense they can be claimed to be the father of all tent dwellers, or musicians or metal workers is unknown. Perhaps if different sections of the bible were actually written by different authors as Source Theory suggests, this source may be one that did not know of a flood tradition.

"Jabal...dwell in tents... have cattle" This is the first mention of domesticated cattle. It also is the first mention of any dwelling place for humans – tents. Tents are the only housing mentioned directly in Genesis 1-11. Noah also slept in a tent (9:21). There are references to cities which one would assume implies some form of housing. Genesis remains surprisingly barren of references to tools, transportation, furniture, housing, clothing, cooking utensils, food, weapons, commerce, or technology of any kind.

"Jubal...lyre and pipe..." The first mention of musical instruments. Civilization and culture are appearing. The fact that this is occurring in



## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

Cain's lineage may indicate the scriptural author somewhat disapproved of this development. Same is true of "Tubal-cain...forger of bronze and iron." This is the first mention of industry and technology. The Iron and Bronze Age have arrived. A certain degree of sophistication and technical knowledge is needed to make iron and bronze yet the text gives us little evidence of these emerging technologies.

"sister...was Na'amah" This is the first mention of a daughter/sister by name. Among the descendents of Seth, the lineage which the Bible clearly favors and follows, neither wives nor daughters will be named until Abram takes Sarai to be his wife in Genesis 11. We are given virtually no insight into the domestic lives of these men of God.

"Lamech said to his wives..." This is the only time in Genesis 1-11 that a man says something directly to his spouse or that any man directly addresses a woman – and he addresses them by name. Adam spoke in the presence of his wife but the Scriptures record no words directed to her. St. Paul commented that women should learn from their husbands at home (1 Corinthians 14:35), but Genesis might give an idea as to how hard that would be since the only man who spoke to his wife in these chapters is a vile and violent man. In the more godly lineage of Seth through Noah, there is no record of the men talking to their wives.

"Lamech said..." This is considered to be the first poem recited by a human in the bible. Historical scholars do consider it to be poem from antiquity – thus representing the development of culture.

Oddly, Chrysostom sees Lamech's "confession" as a positive sign that Lamech is choosing not to repeat the sins and denials of his father and grandfather and so he confesses his sin without even being asked. Chrysostom uses the passage to encourage Christians to likewise openly confess their sins.

"I have slain a man..." This is the second death of a human mentioned in Genesis and once again it is not a natural death but is done at the hands of a human. The first two human fatalities were both murders. We know nothing of the man Lamech murdered, but the existence of other people again suggests there were other

human lines not recorded in Genesis. Genesis is not actually reporting on all human history and experience but focuses on what will become known as "the people of God." In this sense Genesis is not pure history as we understand it. Rather Genesis is an archetypical story of what it means to be human. It is in fact "our own" story even more than a history. In Genesis we learn about ourselves and what it means to be human. We learn about our relationship to God and to creation. We learn about why we don't live in a perfect world, why there is death and why there is sin in God's creation. We learn from the story of Cain and Lamech that by God making mortality – death – to be the consequence of Adam and Eve's sin, He allowed death to become part of human experience. And we see in these stories how humans take death, that consequence of human sin, and turn it into a weapon for further sin – murder! In fact humans now knowing that they are mortal will use that knowledge to violently kill others. Death which is the enemy of humanity becomes in the distorted human heart a tool for accomplishing human sinful will. We often think that sin leads to death, but humans are so wicked that they use death to do more sin!

The Ten Commandments are given long after the events described in Genesis 1-11. The commandment not to kill is thus a response to human behavior rather than a pre-determinant of human behavior. God does not prohibit humans from killing and then impose mortality on humans. Rather he forbids humans to sinfully misuse the punishment – death - He had imposed on them for their sin.

Law of vengeance. "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold." In the text it appears that the law of vengeance and revenge is being extended greatly, not only allowing for but legitimizing even more violence in a tremendous spiral. Lamech claims the right to have killed someone who merely injured him. Lamech is praising violence and boasting about how vile he can be. Lamech is justifying terrible vengeance on any who oppose him. He is suggesting he will kill 77 people for every one he loses. This is just advocating mass murder. Some scholars feel that the Torah's later "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" (Leviticus 24:20) was actually a move toward mercy and severely restricting both vengeance and violence, limiting punishment to nothing more

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

than whatever damage had been done. Lamech's vengeance amounts to a constant scorch the earth policy – there would never be any peace as each act of violence would bring about a 77 fold increase in violence by the opponent. His policy would engulf every town, village and tribe in total warfare for every little offense between two people. And nowhere does he suggest the injury he received was intentional - simply for being injured he killed the person who injured him. This was not justice but brute force. Lamech will not allow someone to apologize or repent. Christ himself countermands the law of vengeance entirely, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also..." (Matthew 5:38-39). Jesus then turns around Lamech's vengeance, in answering a question about forgiveness. "Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy seven times'" (Matthew 18:21-22). Jesus uses the exact same number as Lamech, except where Lamech sees this as how many times he will avenge himself, Jesus says this is how many times we must forgive the brother who sins against us. As Christ undoes all of the effects of the fall, he casts out vengeance in favor of forgiveness.

The use of the scriptural texts in Orthodox hymnography often "spiritualizes" the text so that the lesson can be applied personally to our lives. This method does not deny the literal reading of the text, but moves the scripture reader to apply the text to his or her own life. "Lamech cried, 'I have killed a man for wounding me, and a young man for hurting me!' ... How well have I imitated those first murderers, Cain and Lamech! Through the desires of the flesh, I have killed my soul as did Lamech a man, and my mind as once he did a young man. I have also murdered my body as Cain murdered his brother." (Thursday Canon of St. Andrew of Crete)

The genealogy of Cain will not be followed in the next chapters of Genesis. It certainly represents a "dead end" especially with the cataclysmic flood of Genesis 6-9. It is noteworthy that the ages of Cain's descendents are not mentioned –

but age is a pronounced feature in the Adam genealogy that is traced through Seth. The Wisdom of Solomon in the Septuagint offers this observation: "But the prolific brood of the ungodly will be of no use, and none of their illegitimate seedlings will strike a deep root or take a firm hold. For even if they put forth boughs for a while, standing insecurely they will be shaken by the wind, and by the violence of the winds they will be uprooted. The branches will be broken off before they come to maturity, and their fruit will be useless, not ripe enough to eat, and good for nothing" (Wisdom 4:3-5).

As God looks upon the world, it must be agonizing for Him. First there are genealogical lines, such as Cain's, which are cut off from God, and whose descendants pursue an ungodly life. But then in the family trees which actually produce the righteous ones, God sees people whose hearts are continually on imagining and doing evil from their youth. The Lord in choosing humans to be His favored creatures has not given Himself much to work with for accomplishing His will in the cosmos. When God shaped the soil into the first human in Genesis 2, did He imagine that working with and shaping inert dust was going to be easier than working with or shaping supposedly "intelligent" humans? The entire universe does the will of God, except for humans who are the only ones who possess God's image and supposedly are rational beings (Is that not the gist of the Vespersal Psalm 104 hymn of creation? – all created things do the very things they are appointed by God to do; only humans created in God's image and favored by God resist doing the will of God). Human synergy with God is sorely lacking, and the history of salvation is reliant on the grace of God. This is why the Virgin Mary is such a unique person in history and so honored by the Orthodox Church. Though she is upheld as the fulfillment of humanity's synergy with God, she also goes against the common grain of human intention – the continual wickedness in the human heart. She truly is full of grace (Luke 1:28). Indeed she is more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim. The Cherubim and Seraphim have positions close to God – they are constantly in God's presence - but they do not come from a race of beings whose hearts are constantly bent on evil. Mary on the other hand precisely has the same heart as any of us, and yet her heart is not continually conceiving evil, and in fact she is

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

able to conceive God in the flesh. The fact that a woman was capable of being the Theotokos by her willful acceptance of God's way and despite her being of the lineage of Adam and Eve is truly one of the greatest miracles recorded in the Bible. It explains the great reverence for Mary as Theotokos in Orthodoxy. And it tells us that we each do have the capacity to resist evil and to love both God and our neighbor.

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

**25** And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him." **26** To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Though her name is not explicitly used in the text, this is the last reference to Eve in the Jewish Old Testament. Eve speaks as she did when Cain was born and she is the one to name the son. Adam who had little to say in Paradise remains mute after the fall of humankind. Adam engages in no conversation nor are any more words attributed to him. Despite being a man of so few words, his name will be remembered throughout the history of the people of God.

As with Cain, Eve names the child – an interesting twist since the mother's name is excluded from the text and women will not be named in the genealogical lists until long after the flood when Abram takes Sarai to be his wife. Sarai will be the next named wife and mother in the Sethite lineage.

It is through the lineage of Seth that St. Luke will trace Christ the son of God back to Adam the son of God. "Shem and Seth were honored among men, and Adam above every living being in the creation" (Sirach 49:16).

With the murder of Abel, Adam and Eve lose both sons – Abel to death, and Cain is banished from their company. Eve laments only her dead son and finds comfort in the new child who replaces the deceased Abel.

"To Seth also a son was born..." Unless the text is suggesting that the men of yore were able to bear children, we have to assume there was a mother. Mothers and wives get short shrift in the Seth family tree. They are implicit in the text, but never explicitly mentioned. The question is often asked, "Where do the wives of these men come from anyway?" While some think the wives were their sisters and that early on God allowed incest, this seems unlikely as nowhere in the text is incest ever blessed. Polygamy was mentioned in the text in relationship to Lamech son of Cain. Incest is not mentioned let alone approved. In fact, incest is needed to explain the source of the nameless wives only if one reads Genesis literally and assumes there are no other people on earth other than those specifically mentioned in the text. Genesis does not deny the existence of people outside of the purview of the text, and seems to imply their existence. The story only focuses on a very particular lineage, and is already developing the Biblical theme of the chosen people. The text mentions the main characters have "other sons

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

and daughters” but it has no interest in these other children and gives us no account of what becomes of them. Genesis narrowly follows a very particular genealogy, shows little interest in the mentioned “other” children of the main men (they are in fact called the “other” son and daughters – those children not pertinent to “our” story), and absolutely no interest in the humans that are unrelated to the chosen lineage. The story does not deny the existence of other humans which God created, it ignores them. Ignoring the “other sons and daughter” is indicative of the author’s focus and his totally disinterest in people who are not of this particular pedigree. The Bible contains truth, it is the revelation of God, but it never claims that all the facts of human history are contained in Genesis. It never claims that it is co-terminus with all that can be known about humankind and human history. It does in fact give strong hints of “other” peoples not part of the main story – the Nephilim for example. When it comes to people, the Bible has a very narrow and precise focus and interest. It is showing how God worked in and through a very particular people on earth. The sense of election and favor are essential to the biblical revelation and message. Genesis does offer us the truth about being human, but does not claim to give the history and name of every human that ever existed. Genesis is the true story of what it means to be human – it really is doctrine in the guise of narrative as St. Gregory of Nyssa claimed. In this sense in every generation it is the story about “us.” St. Paul wrote about Adam being a prototype (1 Corinthians 15) – his story is the story of all humans that ever existed. We don’t have to be genetically related to Adam to be spiritually related to him. The same is true of Christ who is the new Adam, the new prototype of all humans. St. Paul who knew nothing about genetics sees our human relationship in this way: “For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God. ... We say that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without

being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but also follow the example of the faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (Romans 2:28-29, 4:9-12). This is as close as Paul gets to a genetic conversation. He is not much interested in those related to Adam or Abraham according to the flesh. The real issue is if we are people of faith. The importance of Genesis 1-11 is not lost if we are not all related genetically to Adam. The fact is Adam is a prototype of all humans – we are related to him spiritually and are his descendants because we have his same mortal nature not because we have his genes.

Seth has a son named Enosh, but no wife is mentioned, unlike Lamech who though in a discredited lineage mentions the names of his wives.

The “name of the Lord” seems to imply that the relationship with God is being made “personal” – now on a named basis do people approach God. The claim that people begin to call upon the name of the Lord is unusual since earlier in Genesis 4:3 Cain and Abel are both offering sacrifice to the God who has a name. LORD (Lord in all capital letters) in English bibles is used to replace the name of God (YHWH in the Hebrew) and follows the practice of Hebrew Scriptures where God’s Name is too sacred to actually say.

“men began to call upon the name of the LORD.” The scriptures do not give a totally consistent picture as to how Israel came to worship the God whose name is YHWH. In Exodus 3:14, God first reveals His Name to Moses at the burning bush, which is why the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai is such a holy place. But in Genesis 4:26 the implication is that from the earliest times people knew the Name of the Lord and worshipped the God whose name is YHWH – long before the Name was revealed on Sinai. How they learned the Lord’s Name is not detailed in Genesis. Certainly they didn’t learn the Name from scriptures as they weren’t even written yet. But it is to be assumed that God wanted humans to call upon His Name and so He revealed it. The holiness of God’s name is never in doubt throughout the scriptures. God’s name (YHWH)

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

is in the name of the Word incarnate, for the name "Jesus" means "YHWH saves."

Seth is honored in both Jewish and Christian tradition. "Seth's fervor for the Creator is sung throughout the world, for he served Him truly with a blameless life and disposition of soul. Now in the land of the living, he cries aloud: 'Holy are You, O Lord!'" (From the Canon of the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers)

'...began to call upon the name of the LORD." If this is meant to imply prayer, it is the first mention of prayer in Genesis. There is no record of Adam and Eve praying to the God who has a Name. The word "prayer" in fact occurs only once in the entirety of Genesis in chapter 25. The word "prayed" occurs only twice in Genesis, the first time in chapter 20. There is very little mention of, let alone emphasis on, prayer in the Book of Genesis and none in the opening 11 chapters. Abel, Cain and Noah will each offer sacrifice to God, which implies some type of ritual. But prayer itself does not seem to have been a major part of their lives. Is this perhaps because they still felt closeness to God that will be lost later as the effects of the fall widen the divide between humanity and divinity? Noah is given in the building of the ark a superhuman project to complete but is not recorded as ever praying to God, or asking for God's help or mercy. No one before the Flood ever asks God for anything in prayer – for themselves or for others. Nor does anyone ever offer thanksgiving to God or express any form of love for Him. Cain's lament in Genesis 4:13 that his punishment from the Lord is too severe is as close to prayer as we can find in these opening Genesis stories.

The Name of the Lord. God's Name is sacred, yet we know what it is - YHWH. The Name is sometimes written as Yahweh in English Bibles, but in Judaism no vowels are listed in the Name and it is a name even too sacred to pronounce. Some English Bibles preserve this ancient Jewish sense that one never uses the Name of God and will substitute in the bible "the LORD" in place of YHWH, God's Name. Some Jewish texts will not even use the generic word God for the Creator Lord and following the Jewish practice of leaving out vowels will write only "G-d". In Christian theology, Jesus is the Word of God incarnate - Jesus is God revealed to us. Jesus' own name contains the Name of God for

Jesus means "YHWH saves." Christianity believes God's Name is a significant part of God's revelation which is recorded in the Scriptures. Moses at the burning bush specifically asks God for His Name. There he learns that God's Name is YHWH, or in the Greek, "ego eimi o On" – "I am who I am" or "I am the One Who Is." In almost every Orthodox icon of Jesus Christ in the halo around his head, there is the image of the cross in the halo, and within this image of the cross are the Greek letters for God's Name, "o On." Christianity affirms the revelation in Christ that Jesus is fully God and fully human. Jesus is "The One Who Is" for He is of the same essence as God the Father. So in every icon of Christ we encounter the Name of God. In the Church we bless with and are blessed by the Name of the Lord. God's sacred and holy and powerful Name is an integral and essential part of our Orthodox Faith.

Why is God's Name so important? It has to do with Judaism's absolute monotheism. Because Judaism abhors idolatry, there is an absolute prohibition against thinking that God has any form whatsoever.

"Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, ... And beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them" (Deuteronomy 4:15, 19). The Genesis stories which describe God in anthropomorphic terms (J-Source stories) represent an alternative tradition to the absolute monotheistic prohibition on idolatry of the transcendent God found in the P-Source stories. The texts describing God in graphic anthropomorphic terms remain as authoritative Scripture. They will be however ultimately filtered through the lens of the tradition which says God has no form and are interpreted in a non-literal fashion. It is another example of more than one tradition being fully accepted in the scriptures especially when it comes to describing God, who cannot be completely understood by humans. But the God who has no form, is incorporeal and non-anthropomorphic, because He cannot be seen in any way and is "invisible" to humans, thus to some extent non-existent. For such an invisible God there would be no sign of His existence, though there might be signs of His activity in the

## God Questions His Creation: Genesis 4

world. The invisible God does take on a real existence in His Name. His Name makes Him real and present. The Genesis witness is we are not worshipping an invisible God with no name. To know His Name in this world is to experience His presence. His Name is in some ways an incarnation of the invisible God. His Name makes Him real to people who can talk but who are forbidden to make any image of Him. A totally transcendent and formless God would be totally unknown to us. But knowing His Name virtually brings Him into our experience – causes Him to have as “tangible” an existence as an incorporeal being can have. His Name makes Him personal and real – not an impersonal force or natural power – but a personal being. When we pray “in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, we are invoking the presence and power of that particular divine being who has a Name and who wants us to be aware of His presence and wants us to worship Him.