GENESIS: THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS · STUDY NOTES

Study 4: Cain and Abel

For personal study or groups

Your name

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How to use these notes. Watch each part's video on biblehelp.net, or read the text below. Look up each passage in your own Bible and write the answer on the lines. The verses are printed at the back if you need them. At the end there are questions to think about on your own or to discuss in a group.

📖 **Before you start: read Genesis 4:1–26.** Read it in your own Bible, all the way through, before the videos. Then in this study we go through it together, a few verses at a time. (About 3 minutes.)

PART 1

Am I my brother's keeper?

Genesis 4:1–16

Genesis 4 shows what life outside the garden became: two brothers, two offerings, and the first murder. It shows how quickly sin spreads, from the parents to their children, and from the heart to the hands. But it also shows us God: patient, just, and merciful, even to a murderer.

1. The first family. God had said to the woman, "in pain you will bring forth children". There was pain, but there was also a child: God's word came true in both judgement and mercy. Eve says, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man": she knows the child is the LORD's gift. Abel looked after sheep, and Cain worked the land. Both were honest work. The difference between the brothers was not in their work, but in their hearts.

1 **Read Genesis 4:1–2**

What did Eve say when Cain was born? What work did Abel and Cain do?

2. Two offerings. Cain brought "some of the fruit of the soil"; Abel brought "the best portions of the firstborn of his flock". And "the LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering": God looked first at the man, then at what he brought. "Man sees the outward appearance, but the LORD sees the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

2 **Read Genesis 4:3–7**

What did each brother bring? How did God look on each of them? What did Cain feel?

3. By faith. The Bible itself gives the deepest answer: "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did" (Hebrews 11:4). Abel came trusting God's mercy; Cain came, it seems, as if God owed him something. Many Christians have seen something more: Abel's offering was a lamb, whose blood was shed, as God Himself had covered Adam and Eve through the death of an animal. Genesis does not say so, but it would fit all that the Bible later teaches.

3 **Read Hebrews 11:4**

How did Abel offer his sacrifice? How does he still speak?

4. Trying, or trusting? There are two ways of coming to God. One says, "Look at what I have done. Surely this is enough." The other says, "I have nothing to bring but my need. Have mercy on me." The first is the way of Cain; the second is the way of Abel, the way of faith. We do not come to God with our best efforts, but with empty hands, trusting in the sacrifice God has provided: His own Son.

4 **Read Luke 18:13–14**

What did the tax collector pray? Which man went home justified?

5. "Why are you angry?" Cain was furious, with God and with his brother. But God was patient. He came and asked questions, giving Cain the chance to stop and think. And He gave a promise: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" The door was still open.

6. "Sin is crouching at your door." Sin is like a wild animal, waiting to spring: "it desires you, but you must master it". Anger is like that: it grows in the dark. Do not open the door to it; bring it to God before it masters you.

5 **Read Ephesians 4:26–27**

What must we not let the sun set upon? What must we not give the devil?

7. The first murder. "Let us go out to the field": it was planned. Then, asked "Where is your brother Abel?", Cain lies to God's face: "I do not know!", and answers back: "Am I my brother's keeper?" See how sin grows: a heart that did not trust God, then anger, then murder, then a lie. Sin always goes further than we meant it to.

6 **Read Genesis 4:8–12**

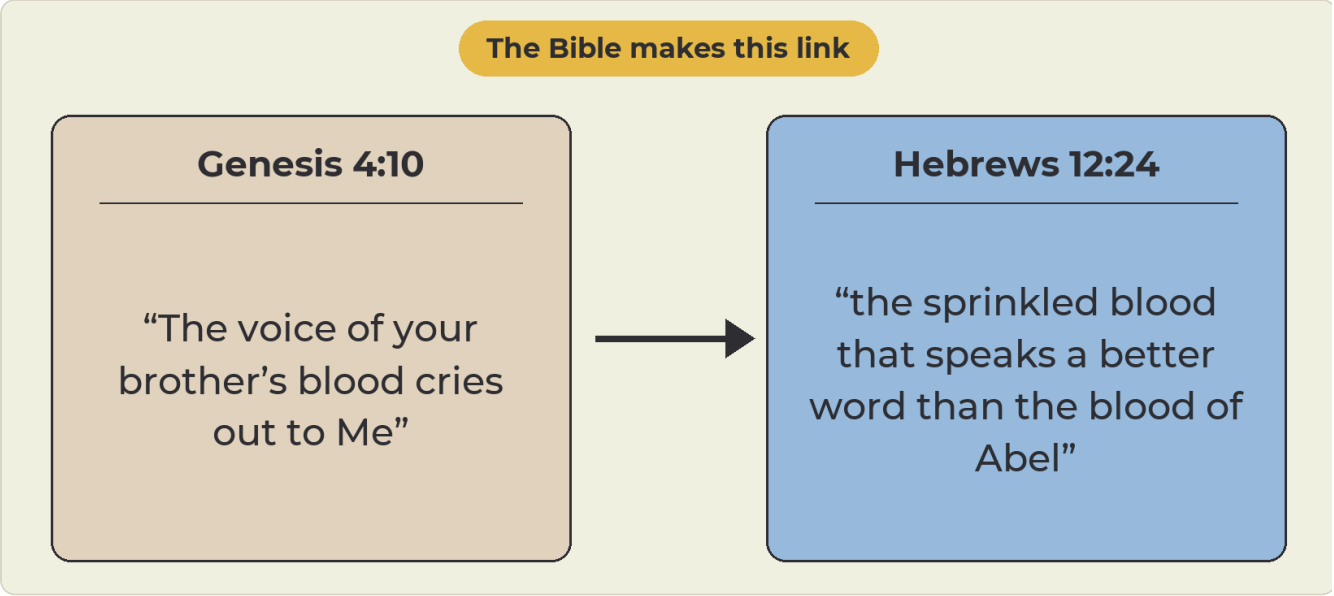
What did Cain do in the field? What did he answer when God asked about Abel? What cries out to God from the ground?

8. Do not be like Cain. John tells us why Cain killed his brother: "Because his own deeds were evil, while those of his brother were righteous" (1 John 3:12). And "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). Cain "belonged to the evil one": he is the first of the serpent's seed of Genesis 3:15, and Abel the first of the woman's seed to suffer for doing right.

7 **Read 1 John 3:11–12**

What is the message from the beginning? Why did Cain kill his brother?

9. "The voice of your brother's blood." Nothing is hidden from God. For the first time God says to a human being, "you are cursed". The ground that drank Abel's blood will not yield to Cain, and he will be "a fugitive and a wanderer". That is what sin does in the end: it leaves us restless, never at home.



A link the Bible itself makes: "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me" (Genesis 4:10); "the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24).

10. A better word. Abel's blood cried out for justice. The blood of Jesus "speaks a better word": not of punishment still to come, but of punishment already borne, of sins forgiven, of peace with God. Your own sins cry out against you; but the blood of Christ speaks a better word, for everyone who trusts in Him.

8 **Read Hebrews 12:24**

What does the sprinkled blood of Jesus do?

11. Sorry for the punishment, not the sin. "My punishment is greater than I can bear." Cain never says "I have sinned", and never mentions his brother. There is a difference between being sorry we were caught and being sorry we have sinned against God (Psalm 51). Yet God spared Cain's life and put a mark on him, so that no one would kill him: mercy, to a man who had not even asked for it. Then "Cain went out from the presence of the LORD", to Nod, a name that sounds like "wandering", east of Eden.

9 **Read Genesis 4:13–16**

What did Cain complain about? What did the LORD do to protect him? Where did Cain go?

12. East of Eden. Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden; Cain went further away, by his own choice. So many lives follow that path: one wrong thing, then another, further and further from God. But while God is still calling, it is never too late. The way back to God is open in Christ.

PART 2

Two lines

Genesis 4:17–26

1. Cain's wife. Adam and Eve "had other sons and daughters" (Genesis 5:4), and all mankind came from that first couple. So in the first family, brothers married sisters: there was no one else. Later, in the law of Moses, God did not allow marriage between close relatives. Genesis does not stop to tell us more.

10 **Read Genesis 4:17–22**

What did Cain build? What did Jabal, Jubal and Tubal-cain each begin?

2. The gifts of Cain's family. Cain built the first city. His descendants began the life of herdsmen in tents, music ("all who play the harp and flute"), and the working of bronze and iron. These are good things, and they came from the family of Cain. God gives good gifts even to those who do not know Him: He "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good" (Matthew 5:45). Christians call this "common grace". So we can thank God for every good invention and every beautiful song, whoever made them.

11 **Read James 1:17**

Where does every good and perfect gift come from?

3. But something is missing. In all these verses, God is never mentioned. Cain was told he would be a wanderer, and he built a city, naming it after his son. Here is a society that is clever, gifted and successful, and lives as if God did not exist: they have His gifts, but have forgotten the Giver.

4. Lamech. The seventh from Adam takes two wives, the first in the Bible to break God's pattern for marriage. Then he sings a song about killing: "I have slain a man for wounding me". And he boasts: "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold." Cain lied about his sin; Lamech boasts of it. Violence and the breaking of marriage: the marks of a society without God.

12 **Read Genesis 4:23–24**

Why did Lamech say he had killed a man? What did he boast about?

5. Seventy-seven times. Many Christians have noticed that when Peter asked how often he should forgive, Jesus answered, "not just seven times, but seventy-seven times!" (Matthew 18:22). The way of Cain's family is to pay back; the way of Christ's family is to forgive. We can leave justice to God, because God is just.

13 **Read Matthew 18:21–22**

What did Peter ask? How many times did Jesus say we should forgive?

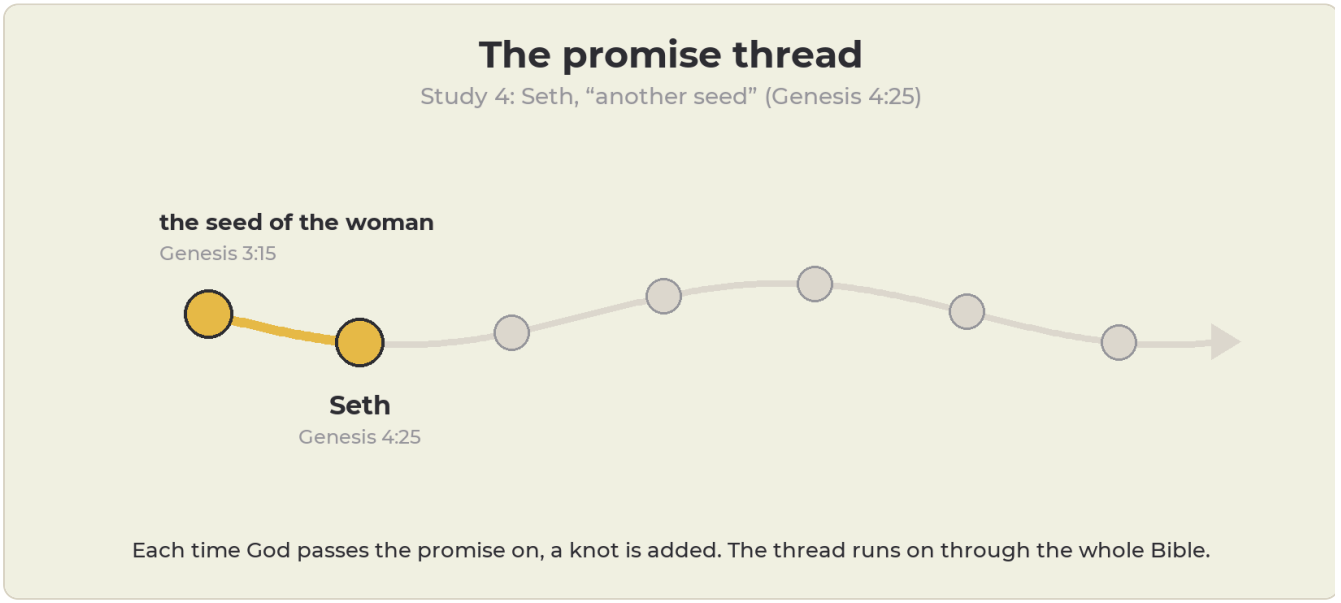
See also: Romans 12:19.

6. "Another seed." Eve names her new son Seth: "God has granted me another seed in place of Abel". "Seed" is the very word of Genesis 3:15. For a moment it looked as if the serpent had won

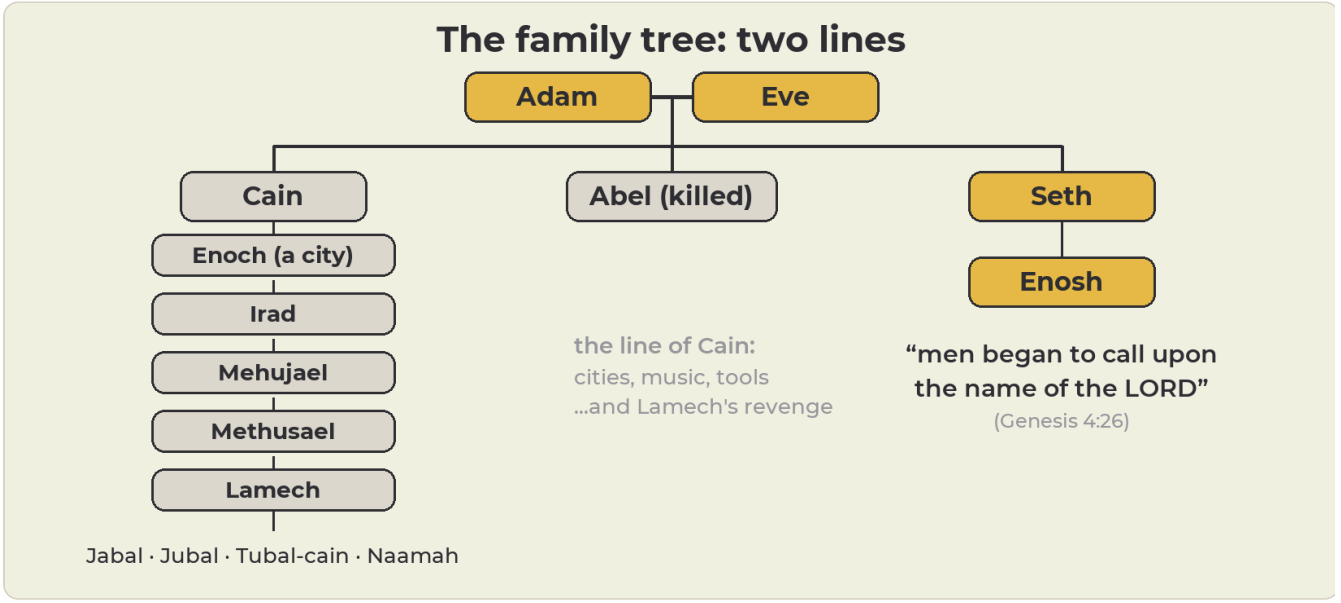
and the promise had died with Abel. But God gave another seed. No one, not even the devil, can stop God from keeping His word.

14 **Read Genesis 4:25–26**

What did Eve say when Seth was born? What did people begin to do in the time of Enosh?



The promise thread: a second knot is added. Seth, "another seed" (Genesis 4:25), after the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15).



The family tree: two lines. The line of Cain, down to Lamech and his children; the line of Seth, in whose days "men began to call upon the name of the LORD".

7. Calling on the name of the LORD. Cain's family is remembered for what they made; Seth's for whom they worshipped. They prayed to the LORD, trusted Him, and spoke of Him to others. So there are two lines of people in the world. The difference between them is not money, cleverness or culture: it is God. Which line are you in? Not whose family you were born into, but whom you are trusting.

8. Everyone who calls. You do not have to be born into the right family to belong to the line of Seth. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13): anyone, whatever you have done, however far you have walked away.

15 **Read Romans 10:13**

Who will be saved?

Study 4 in summary

Two brothers brought offerings to God. Abel came by faith, and God accepted him; Cain came without faith, became angry, and killed his brother. He lied to God and was sorry only for his punishment, yet God spared his life. Cain's family built cities and invented music and tools, but lived without God, and the line ended with Lamech's song of revenge. Then God gave another seed, Seth, and people began to call on the name of the LORD. All through the chapter the Bible points us to Christ: the sacrifice that makes us acceptable to God, the One whose blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel, and the promised seed, whom no enemy could stop.

THINK IT THROUGH

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What was the difference between Cain's offering and Abel's?

2. Do you come to God trusting in what you do, or trusting in His mercy?

3. Is there anger "crouching at your door"?

4. What does the blood of Jesus say, that is better than the blood of Abel?

5. Why did God accept Abel's offering, and not Cain's?

6. How does sin grow in Cain's life, from the heart to the hands?

7. What good gifts do you enjoy from God, and do you thank Him for them?

8. Which of the two lines are you in?

HIDE IT IN YOUR HEART

Memory verse for study 4

Learn this verse by heart this week. Cut out the card and keep it where you will see it.

GENESIS · STUDY 4 · MEMORY VERSE

“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous when God gave approval to his gifts. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.”

Hebrews 11:4

Berean Standard Bible · biblehelp.net

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11, BSB)

AT THE BACK

The Bible passages (BSB)

1 **Genesis 4:1–2** *[1]And Adam had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man," she said. [2]Later she gave birth to Cain's brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, while Cain was a tiller of the soil.*

2 **Genesis 4:3–7** *[3]So in the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruit of the soil as an offering to the LORD, [4]while Abel brought the best portions of the firstborn of his flock. And the LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, [5]but He had no regard for Cain and his offering. So Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell. [6]"Why are you angry," said the LORD to Cain, "and why has your countenance fallen? [7]If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you refuse to do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires you, but you must master it."*

3 **Hebrews 11:4** *By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous when God gave approval to his gifts. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.*

4 **Luke 18:13–14** *[13]But the tax collector stood at a distance, unwilling even to lift up his eyes to heaven. Instead, he beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner!' [14]I tell you, this man, rather than the Pharisee, went home justified. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."*

5 **Ephesians 4:26–27** *[26]"Be angry, yet do not sin." Do not let the sun set upon your anger, [27]and do not give the devil a foothold.*

6 **Genesis 4:8–12** *[8]Then Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. [9]And the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I do not know!" he answered. "Am I my brother's keeper?" [10]"What have you done?" replied the LORD. "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. [11]Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. [12]When you till the ground, it will no longer yield its produce to you. You will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."*

7 **1 John 3:11–12** *[11]This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. [12]Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did Cain slay him? Because his own deeds were evil, while those of his brother were righteous.*

8 **Hebrews 12:24** *to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

9 **Genesis 4:13–16** *13But Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14Behold, this day You have driven me from the face of the earth, and from Your face I will be hidden; I will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." 15"Not so!" replied the LORD. "If anyone slays Cain, then Cain will be avenged sevenfold." And the LORD placed a mark on Cain, so that no one who found him would kill him. 16So Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*

10 **Genesis 4:17–22** *17And Cain had relations with his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. Then Cain built a city and named it after his son Enoch. 18Now to Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methusael, and Methusael was the father of Lamech. 19And Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. 20Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and raise livestock. 21And his brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. 22And Zillah gave birth to Tubal-cain, a forger of every implement of bronze and iron. And the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.*

11 **James 1:17** *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, with whom there is no change or shifting shadow.*

12 **Genesis 4:23–24** *23Then Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, listen to my speech. For I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. 24If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."*

13 **Matthew 18:21–22** *21Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22Jesus answered, "I tell you, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times!*

14 **Genesis 4:25–26** *25And Adam again had relations with his wife, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another seed in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." 26And to Seth also a son was born, and he called him Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD.*

15 **Romans 10:13** *for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Scripture: Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain. Quotations keep its American spelling. Like many English Bibles, it often says 'man', 'he' or 'brothers' where it means people in general, men and women alike.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Study 4: Cain and Abel

> **Memory verse:** “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous when God gave approval to his gifts. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.” (Hebrews 11:4). Say it together at the end, and ask who can say it without looking.

Aims

- See from Genesis 4:1–16 why God accepted Abel's offering and not Cain's (by faith, Hebrews 11:4), how sin grows from the heart to the hands, and God's patience, justice and mercy, even to a murderer.
- See that the blood of Jesus "speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24).
- See from Genesis 4:17–26 the two lines of people: the line of Cain, gifted but without God, and the line of Seth, "another seed", who called on the name of the LORD.

Suggested timing (about 70 minutes)

- **5 min** Welcome and short prayer. Ask the group to read Genesis 4 before the meeting.
- **35 min** Part 1 video (16 min); Genesis 4:1–16, with Hebrews 11, Luke 18, Ephesians 4, 1 John 3 and Hebrews 12.
- **25 min** Part 2 video (11 min); Genesis 4:17–26, with Matthew 5, James 1, Matthew 18 and Romans 10.
- **5 min** Reflection questions. Close in prayer, asking God for faith like Abel's and hearts that forgive.

For most groups, take one part each week. If you do, read the passage for that part aloud together before the video.

Tips

- Keep the main point in view: God accepts those who come to Him by faith, trusting His mercy, not their own efforts. Ask the group gently which way they come: "trying, or trusting?"
- The study says that Abel's offering was accepted "by faith", which is the Bible's own answer. The thought that it was a sacrifice of blood is offered as something "many Christians have seen". Present it as the study does, without making it the main point.
- Part 1 speaks about anger and hatred in families. Some in your group may carry this, with a brother, a sister or a parent. Speak with care, and point them to Ephesians 4:26–27 and to the open door of God's mercy.
- Someone will probably ask where Cain's wife came from. The study answers plainly (Genesis 5:4): she was one of Cain's sisters; later God did not allow such marriages. Answer briefly and return to the passage.
- Part 2 thanks God for the gifts of Cain's family ("common grace"), and warns against gifts without the Giver. Both are true; keep them together.
- The family tree and the promise thread grow in this study. They are useful for a short recap at the start of the next meeting.