

CAIN: GODFATHER OF GREED AND VIOLENCE

©Richard L. Smith, PhD

But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. (Jude 10-12)

The first fratricide testifies to the skewed mentality of the human race after the fall into sin (Genesis 3). Cain's murder of his brother, Abel, is described in Genesis 4:3-5, 8.

- (3) In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground,
- (4) and Abel also brought of the firstborn 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 face fell.
- (8) Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Genesis 4 shows that coveting and violence are interconnected. There is an intriguing connection between the name, Cain, and the Hebrew verb "I have gained" along with similar Hebrew terms of acquisition and wealth that indicate an inherent covetousness associated with Cain's nature. Cain, as the etymology and the passage suggests, possessed a mind enslaved to greed and envy, covetous to the core.

In fact, this negative assessment of Cain appears within ancient Jewish literature. He was viewed as the personification of wickedness, the antitype of righteous Abel. He was an "archetype for those who oppress the poor and the righteous for self-gain" [and] "came to represent all that was reprehensible about humanity." Josephus viewed him as "wholly wicked and only looking for gain." Philo taught that "Cain is the ultimate narcissist" and his "partisans are those in society who are rich, live a life of luxury." Other Jewish writers asserted that Cain desired to "possess the whole earth" and that his lust for gain "motivated him to kill Abel." Jude 11 speaks about the "way of Cain" in a negative context. 1 John 3:12 declares that he "belongs to the evil one." The context depicts Cain as an economic exemplar not for replication (vs. 11-18).

Cain was the first to shed blood over religion and to erect an apostate city linked with his violent and idolatrous lineage (Gen 4:17). Cain was a covetous man, the prototypical narcissist. In fact, Genesis 4 depicts Cain in close parallel to his parents, Adam and Eve, who listened to the counsel of the snake rather than God. He embraced the serpent's noxious worldview embodied in erroneous thought and conduct. One author said about his covetousness: "Cain possessed a new worldview that is radically opposed to God, and by using his sinful mind he *acquired* an understanding that he could be a law to himself." In this way, he resembled his mother, who craved "wisdom," even as he honed his mind in greater diabolic craftiness.

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should 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. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into

life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.
(1 John 3:11-15)