Seven Covenants:
The Age of Conscience

Genesis 4:1-16

I. Introduction

A. Review

1. Dispensation of Innocence

   a. **Responsibility**: Serve God and observe His commandment.

   b. **Test of Man’s obedience**: In the Garden, God plants two Trees, Life and Knowledge of Good and Evil. Man is given a single, simple command – do not eat of the Tree of Knowledge. The consequence for disobedience was death.

   c. **Failure of Man**: They ate of the forbidden fruit.

   d. **Judgment**: God pronounces a series of judgments on the serpent, the woman, and the man. They are driven out of the garden and left make their own way through tilling a cursed ground to produce food.

   e. **Covenant**: God institutes a covenant with Adam that promises, through the Seed of the Woman, to undo what had been done by the Serpent.

2. Dispensation of Conscience

   a. **Archetypes**:

      - Cain and Abel (and subsequently Seth) stand as symbols of the two streams of humanity: the righteous (by faith) and the wicked.

      - Their conflict is reflected throughout Scripture and throughout history in the persecution of the righteous by the unrighteous.

   b. **Responsibility**: To master sin and live according to the moral law written on the heart.

   c. **Conscience**:
- In both the English and the Greek the term “conscience” means co-perception, or “know together.”

- In the Greek it can mean to “know with” as in co-eyewitnesses or it can have a reflexive sense such as a self-awareness of one’s own acts. Thus there are two “I”s or “me”s in the same subject.

- The moral sense arises when reflection extends to one’s own moral deeds assessed in the light of responsibility to the moral law.

- While this is at times overt, it is often a suppressed intuition.

- In other words, the moral conscience works apart from the will.

- From his study of natural law and the moral conscience J. Budziszewski has concluded that the conscience operates in three different modes: “In the cautionary mode, it alerts us to the peril of moral wrong and generates an inhibition against committing it. In the accusatory mode, it indicts us for wrong we have already done. In the avenging mode, it punishes the individual who knowingly does wrong but refuses to admit that he or she has done so. Conscience is therefore teacher, judge, or executioner, depending on the mode in which it is working. (Wikipedia, J. Budziszewski)

B. Context.

1. Cain and Abel bring offerings to the Lord. Abel is accepted but Cain is not.

2. Due to the rejection of his offering Cain burns with anger.

II. The Conscience of Man

A. The Cautionary Mode (4:6-7)

“So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

1. The Warning of Conscience

- Cain is encouraged to do what is good and reject what is evil.
2. **The principle of natural law**

   - The notion of conscience is predicated on the principle, “Do right and you will be accepted.”

   - It is impossible for God to reject the truly righteous. That would make Him unjust.

3. **The nature of sin**

   - Sin is both omission and commission. It is doing the wrong thing and not doing the right thing.

   - *James 4:17.* “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

B. The Accusatory Mode (4:8-9)

   “Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?””

1. **An evil conscience**

   a. Premeditation

      - “*Now Cain talked with Abel his brother*”

      - This phrase is oddly placed in the narrative. We are not told what they talked about, leading some commentators to conclude that we are missing a part of the text.

      - However, it should probably be understood as an invitation to go out into the field where Cain subsequently murders his brother.

      - Thus the act is premeditated.

   b. Suppression

      - This premeditation suggests that Cain suppressed the voice of conscience. He rejected the law written on his heart and chose to murder Abel.
- **Romans 1:18–19.** “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.”

c. A seared conscience

- Repeatedly suppressing the conscience can have disastrous results.

- **1 Timothy 4:1–3.** “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”

- Example of listening to Vengeance.

2. Self-deception

a. What we can’t not know.

- Cain, when confronted by God, reacts by acting as if he does not know where his brother is.

- There are some things that we can’t stop knowing, such as the sins we have committed, or that some things are really wrong.

- Cain’s only good option was for confession.

b. There is no escape

- **Romans 2:15–16.** “[The Gentiles] show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

C. The Avenging Mode (4:10-16)

“And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and
And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me." And the Lord said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him. Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.

1. The Judgment
   a. "So now you are cursed from the earth"
      - Like the serpent, Cain is himself cursed. After all, he has committed the same crime - murder.
      - Sin is not just a harmless eating of fruit, it leads to destruction. In fact, Cain has shed Abel’s blood with his "own hand."
   b. "A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth."
      - Because the earth would no longer yield to him, Cain would be forced to wander looking for sustenance.

2. The revenge of conscience
   a. "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"
      - An alternative translation is, "My iniquity is too great to forgive."
      - " ‘Iniquity’ and its ‘punishment’ are both indicated by the one term, so the context determines which is in view."¹
      - If the sense is “iniquity” then there seems to be some level of remorse being expressed by Cain.
      - However, Matthews says, “The context of v. 14 is more in keeping with complaint than request. Cain protests that his penalty is too harsh; he argues that isolation from God’s protective presence effectively results

in a death sentence. “Under the weight of this curse, Cain goes to pieces, though not in remorse.”

- Probably though we should think in terms of the sin being the punishment. **Illustration of homosexuality.**

b. “Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.”

- Cain realizes there is far more at stake than just having to wander about. He realizes he has lost the only real Good in his life – God.

- He has also begun to fear the very sin he has committed – murder.

- Cain is struggling with more than just the punishment, he is struggling with a defiled conscience that produces severe psychological traumas.

3. The Mark of Cain

- God puts a special Mark on Cain to prevent his being murdered.

- The point is, during this dispensation you have to live with the murderer.

4. The Land of Nod.

- Cain then departs from the presence of God.

III. Conclusion

A. The Problem of a Defiled Conscience.

- “The most obvious penalty of guilty knowledge is the feeling of remorse. . . . However] even when remorse is absent, guilty knowledge generates objective needs for confession, atonement, reconciliation, and justification. [These] four "Furies" . . . are "inflexible, inexorable, and relentless, demanding satisfaction even when mere feelings are suppressed, fade away, or never come." But if the Furies are denied their payment in [their proper] coin, they exact it in whatever coin comes nearest, driving the wrongdoer's life yet further out of kilter. We flee not from wrong, but from thinking about it. We compulsively confess every detail of our story, except

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the morale. We punish ourselves again and again, offering every sacrifice except the one demanded. We simulate the restoration of broken intimacy, by seeking companions as guilty as ourselves. And we seek not to become just, but to justify ourselves.”

- We will see all of this played out in the descendants of Cain. It is also the bedrock of some of the greatest literature ever written.

- Example of woman getting abortions

B. The Cleansing of a Defiled Conscience

- Hebrews 9:13–14. “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

- Hebrews 10:19–22. “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”