

## Prayer

Jesus, Light of the world, enlighten our darkness ...  
Dispel the gloom of hesitancy and doubt, of weariness and fear,  
Chase away the gathering shadows of temptation and transgression,  
Pour into our lives the light of joy and confidence, of peace and hope,  
Flood our hearts with the precious gifts of knowledge and understanding,  
Jesus, light of the world, lift the darkness, so we may see You! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Local Services

*Pray today for those who live in the streets around you. Pray for those you know, and those who perhaps you ought to know better, for their care and protection and safety.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for world leaders as they try to deal with global recession*
- *Give thanks for those who are working to find peace in the world*
- *Pray that the benefits of science will be shared for the good of all*

## Meditation

Breathe on us, Holy Spirit; breathe.

So we may feel that rush of air which comes from You,  
And breathe more deeply of the things of God.

So we may seize the unconditional love of Jesus Christ,  
Which does away with all the stress of living.

So we may accept the challenges of the Spirit's power,  
To achieve the impossible within this world.

So we may take the gifts God gives us unconditionally,  
The guarantee of faith and means of ministry.

So we may be blessed by the attention of the Holy Spirit,  
And know the healing presence of our Maker.

So we may wonder at the mysteries of His power  
Which points to what is greater than ourselves.

Breathe on us, Holy Spirit; breathe.

## Bible Study - Genesis 4:8-16

<sup>8</sup> *Cain spoke to his brother Abel. Then, when they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel, and killed him.* <sup>9</sup> *Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' He replied, 'I don't know; am I my brother's keeper?'* <sup>10</sup> *So the LORD said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!'* <sup>11</sup> *And now you are cursed, alienated from the earth, which has consumed your brother's blood from your hand.* <sup>12</sup> *When you work the soil, it will no longer give you of its best; you will be a restless wanderer on the earth.'*

<sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear!' <sup>14</sup> Today You have driven me away like the earth, and I shall be hidden from You and be a restless wanderer on the earth; and anyone who finds me may kill me.'

<sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to him, 'Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.' And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who found him would kill him. <sup>16</sup> Then Cain went out of the LORD's presence, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

## Review

As we read on further into the story of Cain and Abel, it becomes tragically clear that as sin follows sin, scripture describes further degrees of alienation from God. Yesterday we read about the growing discord between Cain and Abel, the two sons of Adam and Eve, as they had to deal with what appeared to them to be favouritism on the part of God. They might have been the first people to say 'life isn't fair' but they were not the last! In our reading today, the alienation between the two brothers swiftly develops to the point where Cain kills Abel (4:8), and the subsequent conversation between Cain and God (4:9f.) demonstrates the almost complete lack of spiritual understanding between God and Cain, who as Adam's only remaining son at this point in time, represented the future of humanity.

**Alienation** The original sin committed by the Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was the first act of disobedience against God, and it led to the alienation between people and God we call the 'Fall'. This sin led in turn to even more alienation, this time between the man and the woman themselves. Firstly, they were embarrassed to see each other's 'nakedness', but their disunity was subsequently displayed in their different reactions to God when he asked them what had happened (3:10f.), and we can easily see the sense of blame and shame within all they said. After this, alienation quickly followed between Adam and the ground he worked which was 'cursed' because of the man (Gen 3:17) and became hard for him to work. Then, in our reading today, social and family relationships were torn apart with the murder of Abel by Cain because of his jealousy at God's rejection of his offering and the blessing of his brother's gift (4:3-7). This breakdown of his family was like the last straw for Cain, and although he was the one responsible for it, he was not able to comprehend that his actions had consequences, and he blamed God, saying 'my punishment is more than I can bear'. Yet again, as he has been called to do throughout the story, God acted with love and care to provide the murderous Cain with personal protection because of his damaged soul (4:15,16)

**The crime** The murder of Abel was also the first great injustice recorded by the Bible. It was a terrible act of self-centredness, and in so doing, Cain showed complete disregard for God as well as his brother. His casual remark when challenged; 'am I my brother's keeper?' has gone down in history as the epitome of ignorance and irresponsibility. In saying this to God, Cain refused to accept personal responsibility for his own actions, and compounded his sin by the arrogance of one who thought he could 'get away with murder'. By means of these phrases, this story has certainly contributed to language over the centuries!

**The 'mark of Cain'** God always responds to injustice with His justice, and this is what happens here. He told Cain the consequences of his crime, and he was faced with the unpalatable truth (4:10-12); but Cain was incapable of showing anything more than a sad and sorry concern for his own fate having just killed his brother (4:13). The story tells us that God placed a mark on Cain (4:15) to protect him in response to his sense of vulnerability, a mysterious sign that no-one has ever managed to describe or explain. We are simply not given any information about it apart from what we can read here.

There have been many theories about the sign; for example if it was to ward off others, how could it do this when as far as scripture tells us there were no other people around in the world (as yet)? There are no easy answers here, though when we face this question again in the coming chapters, I will give a considered answer to this 'problem' within Genesis. Others have suggested that the 'mark of Cain' was the mark of God's image, a promise, if you like, of the work of saving grace God planned to do some day in the future for the people He has made. This makes sense to us who approach this story with an understanding of Christian faith, but there is no real evidence in the text to say one thing or another. We simply know that God cares, and perhaps that is enough.

As with the text of the first part of the story of Cain and Abel which we read yesterday, the Hebrew of these verses is at times very obscure. It is nevertheless important to try and uncover what 'the original' text may have said. The mysteries of these early stories of Genesis are considerable, and yet they teach us so much about humanity in general. They are too important for us to leave and fail to use all means to search out the truths that God would teach us in His Word.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What alienation exists between God and people today, and how and where do we observe this?
2. Does Cain deserve the punishment God gives him? Why does God not show Cain some degree of mercy and protection? Does he deserve this?
3. To what extent do you find people around in the world today like Cain? Does this scripture give us enough for us to picture him?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The murder of Abel by Cain was a terrible blow to the whole process of Creation and the story of God's dealings with people. It is a representative story, whatever you believe lies behind scripture here, as is all of the story of Adam and Eve. Perhaps scripture illustrates the way in which evil, once given a foothold, and given the permission to enter and remain within our own 'world', will hang around until its temptations are accepted and it becomes fully fledged. We either submit to sin, or we must bring it out and let God deal with it through our confession. Cain could not do this, but through Jesus Christ, we can!*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *We may not have committed the sin of murder, but many of us have felt very angry at times and we need to be reminded that Jesus taught that anger lies at the root of murder. What feelings and situations bring out the worst in you? Pray and ask the Lord to help you find a consistent way of dealing with this.*
- *In what ways does God 'touch' our lives, or 'mark' us, so that we are protected? Are you conscious of God's protection in any ways, and does this help you? Discuss this with others if you can to try and tease out what this means to you.*

## Final Prayer

There are so many people, heavenly Father, who live in this world and do not know You. Help us not to be judgemental, but anxious to show to all who we meet, the glories of our salvation and the happiness, love and hope of a life in Jesus Christ. Heavenly Father, please help us in this task. AMEN