

# A Good Shepherd Sacred Story

## **Cain and Abel**

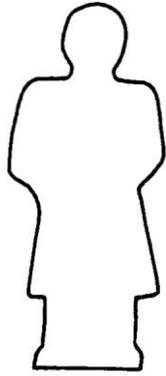
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## **CAIN AND ABEL. ... MATERIALS**

- small wicker basket to hold:
  - wooden Cain figure
  - wooden Abel figure
  - wooden grain bag
  - wooden sheep



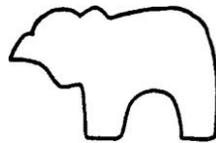
Cain



Abel  
Sheep



Grain Bag



## CAIN AND ABEL. ... GENESIS 4:1-16

### ACTIONS

After speaking, stand and get the story from it's shelf. Return to the circle and sit down, placing the basket next to you.

Gently stroke one or more of the wooden figures as you center yourself and the children in silence.

Place first the Cain figure and then the Abel figure in the center front.

Touch first the Cain figure, then the Abel figure.

Move the Cain figure to the left.

Touch the Abel figure and move it slightly to the right.

Move both figures back to center.

Place the grain bag to the left of Cain and the sheep to the right of Abel.

Move Abel to stand almost in front of Cain and smile slightly.

Move the Cain figure back a bit and emphasize the word "very".

Turn the figures to face each other.

### WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

All of the words to this story are inside of me. If you will make silence with me, I will be able to find all the words to this story of God's people.

After Adam and Eve left the beautiful garden they had two sons.

The first son was named Cain. The second was named Abel.

Cain was a farmer. He grew crops in the ground.

Abel was a shepherd. He took care of animals.

After some time both Cain and Abel brought God their offerings.

Cain brought God the first grain that he harvested. And Abel brought God the first animal that was born.

For some reason God liked Abel's offering better than Cain's.

Cain became very angry.

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out into the field. "

Speak very softly and sadly. Knock the Abel figure down. Move the Cain figure a little to the right, away from Abel.

Touch Cain gently.

Shrug your shoulders and turn both palms up.

Use a very quiet voice or a loud stage whisper and touch the "ground" as you speak.

Touch the "ground" again and shake your head very slowly.

Touch Cain as you speak.

Clench one hand into a fist as you speak.

Touch Cain's forehead, very gently, with one finger.

Touch Cain again and nod your head slowly.

Move Cain even farther to the right away from Abel.

Then Cain did a terrible thing. Because he was so angry he killed his brother.

Later God came to Cain and said, "Where is your brother, Abel?"

Cain answered, "I don't know. Am I supposed to always take care of him?"

God said to Cain, "What have you done? I can almost hear your brother's blood calling to me from the ground. "

Then God told Cain that his punishment for killing his brother was that the ground would no longer grow good things for him.

Cain cried that it was too terrible a punishment. He said he would have to leave the place he lived.

Then he was afraid, because he knew other people might kill him when they found out he'd killed his brother.

But God still loved Cain. So God put a mark on Cain. It would protect him.

Anyone who saw the mark would know that if they hurt Cain, God would punish them, too.

And so Cain moved away from the place where God was and lived in the land called Nod, to the east of Eden.

## WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder why God liked Abel's offering best?

I wonder how Abel felt when God liked his offering more than his brother's?

I wonder what mark God put on Cain?

I wonder how God can love someone who has murdered a person?

Carefully place the wooden pieces back into the basket.

Watch carefully how I put these materials away so that you will know how to handle them if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

After speaking, stand and carry the basket back to the shelf. Return to the circle and sit down.

Watch carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

Be certain every child has had the opportunity to choose their work before dismissing the entire circle.

I wonder what you will make your work today? Let's go around and choose what we would each like to do.

## CAIN AND ABEL. •• TEACHER HELPS

This is an incredibly difficult story to teach because it brings to us a God who acts without reason. It gives us our first contact with the unusual Yahweh of the J source. The Old Testament is made of several different sources. They have marked differences, while also containing some similarities. The J source (standing for Jahwhist as in Y[J]ahweh) brings us a God who seems very human. This God talks with others; comes down from heaven to check things out; has worries and concerns about power; intervenes with personality, though not always logic; and remains always bound to God's people. The J source never explains away this everyday God, but rather accepts that it's God's choice to be however God chooses to be. (The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible; edited by Charles Laymon, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987) (The Book of J; translated by David Rosenberg and interpreted by Harold Bloom, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990) The Cain and Abel story talks basically of an unfair God. The majority of us have always presented God as good and fair, both to

ourselves and especially as we've talked with children. It was fair, in The Garden story for Adam and Eve to have to leave the garden-- they had broken relationship with God. But both Cain and Abel brought their best from the skills and gifts that God gave them. God found one gift better or more acceptable than the other.

Some scholars attempt to explain this as being written to show a preference for shepherds and nomads over those who settled as farmers. Still others believe that the whole saga has Cain killing Abel to complete a human sacrifice to bring fertility to the soil. (The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible; edited by Charles Laymon, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987, p.6) It's important to see the story of Cain and Abel in the context of the whole. After creation comes the beginning of the alienation of God and humankind. The Cain and Abel story is another piece or link in the telling of this alienation. It is placed immediately after the expulsion from the garden and before the story of the flood.

So what IS the best way to tell this story to children? Simply and sadly. There is very little joy in this story, but there is an element of grace that is noted at the end. Don't try to diminish Cain's terrible deed or the sadness of Abel's death. Violent death is to be abhorred and it is never this author's intent to whitewash that thought. But violence is a sad part of reality and young children know that much earlier than we would like to believe. By treating this as a terrible event, and yet not using it to frighten children, we can reinforce into their faith the sanctity of human life and the need to treat each other with kindness and love.

At the end of the story we have the ever loving, ever protecting God. Even this man who has murdered his brother is not beyond the bounds of God's love. Though God was saddened by Abel's death, God does not require or desire another death in payment. Rather the punishment for Cain is that the ground that he once worked in and watched produce grains and fruits is now foreign to him and will no longer be his source of livelihood. God marks Cain, not as a murderer, but as one who is protected by God. The message is clear to all who see the mark: This man is one of God's own and is protected by God. When you choose to deal with him violently you will be answerable to God. Finally, Cain leaves his land and moves to Nod, which in Hebrew means "wanderings".

The wondering questions in this story are designed to begin with the questions we ALL have about the text. Why did God prefer Abel's gift? No answer is given and the children and teachers both will simply need to wonder about that. The second question addresses the relationship between Cain and Abel by wondering what Abel's feelings were. Sometimes young children bring a great deal of sensitivity to this issue when they talk about feeling badly because a sibling didn't get "as much" as they did. The third question wonders about the mark on Cain. What was it? A tattoo, a birthmark, a handicap? No one knows. But it is a wonderful question to free the children's imaginations. The final question is, of course, the grace question. It is almost impossible to accept that God can still love someone who has murdered his brother. That's because we cannot do as God would do. But it is the promise, the golden thread that runs through both the Old and the New Testaments and gives us hope that God will never stop loving us, even when we do our worst.

## **SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN**

How does this story make you feel about God?

Have you ever been so angry with someone that you wished for them to be dead, even for a moment? How did you feel afterward?

In this story God Protects Cain from the other people after Cain has murdered his brother. Do you believe God was right to do that? Why or why not?