

Relationships & Rivalries in the Bible

1. Cain and Abel – Genesis 4:1-12

Cain and Abel's story is of sibling rivalry and murder. There is only one generation between creation and the first homicide. Mankind's fall into sinfulness was fast and severe.

The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, saying, "I have produced a male child with the help of the LORD." Next, she gave birth to his brother Abel. Abel became a herder of flocks, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the ground, while Abel, for his part, brought the fatty portion of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but not on Cain and his offering. So, Cain was angry and disappointed. Then the LORD said to Cain: Why are you angry? If you act rightly, you will be accepted; but if not, sin lies in wait at the door: its urge is for you, yet you can rule over it. Cain took his brother Abel to the field, where he attacked and killed his brother Abel. The LORD asked Cain, Where is your brother Abel? He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" God then said: What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! Now you are banned from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the ground, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a constant wanderer on the earth.

Cain and Abel each bring God a sacrifice. When God shows disappointment in Cain's sacrifice and pleasure in Abel's, Cain kills Abel with a stone. Why was God disappointed with Cain's sacrifice? Cain's sacrifice as "some of the fruits of the soil." Abel's sacrifice comes from "fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock." Basically, Cain offered the ordinary and Abel the best, and the quality of their offering reflects the condition of their hearts. Abel is enthusiastic in his worship, while Cain is basically uninterested. God was not troubled that Cain brought vegetables rather than meat. If Cain had brought the first fruits, the very best of his produce, then God would have accepted that offering.

Notice how Cain responds to God's disapproval. Instead of wanting to do the right thing, he gets angry. Yet, God encourages him to change his attitude and warns Cain what will happen if he does not change. Sin will dominate him. God also warns Cain that sin is waiting to take control of him, but Cain needs to take control of his life and keep sin out.

❖ What did we learn from this story?

Cain kills Abel because he can't kill God, so he kills the one that pleased God. Another lesson from Cain and Abel is to overcome sinful feelings (jealousy, envy), otherwise, these sinful feelings can lead to angry or harmful feelings and actions (murder).

2. Jacob and Esau – Genesis 25:22-23

“But the children jostled each other in the womb so much that she exclaimed, “If it is like this, why go on living!” She went to consult the LORD, and the LORD answered her: Two nations are in your womb, two peoples are separating while still within you; But one will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

Jacob and Esau were at odds before birth, which was not helped when their parents picked favorites—Isaac favored Esau, Rebekah preferred Jacob. One day, Esau came home hungry from hunting and asked Jacob for some red stew he was cooking. Knowing the character of his brother, Jacob said for him to “Sell me this day thy birthright (25:31). Jacob showed that he was willing to take advantage of his brother. Esau had no interest in spiritual things so he agreed, saying: I am at the point (about) to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? (25:32-34). There was no way Esau would have died by missing one meal; but instead, Esau reveals how worthless he considered the birthright. However, trouble came when Isaac lost his eyesight in old age, asked Esau to make him a wild game meal, so he could give him his blessing. This blessing was separate from Esau’s birthright and had more long-lasting consequences. It was about which of the two sons would inherit the covenant that God promised Abraham, that many descendants would come forth as well as other blessings. Rebekah helped Jacob disguise himself as Esau and bring Isaac a meal while Jacob was still hunting. Isaac was tricked into giving the blessing to Jacob. Esau was enraged and Jacob had to run away to save his life.

What did we learn from this story?

Esau’s decision to sell his birthright is seen as someone preferring material, or pleasurable things over spiritual blessings. God chose the younger Jacob to carry on the Covenant of Abraham, while Esau was left out of the Messianic lineage. This meant that Jesus would come from the line of Jacob, and not Esau. Jacob & Esau’s parents weren’t helpful in making sure the brothers got along. They remind us that parents have a role to play in controlling sibling rivalry. While Esau said and did some terrible things, and Jacob went along with his mother in fooling Isaac, we also learn that we can overcome sibling rivalry. Even though it took over 20 years for the two brothers to reconcile, but the brothers show it’s possible to forgive and reconcile.

3. Joseph and his brothers – Genesis:3-11

Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child from the wife he loved more, Rachel. When his brothers saw that their father loved him best, they hated him even more. Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had. There we were, binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf rose to an upright position, and your sheaves formed a ring around my sheaf and bowed down to it.” His brothers said to him, “Are you really going to make yourself king over us? Will you rule over us?” So they hated him more because of his dreams. Then he had another dream. “Look, I had another dream,” he said; “this time, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” When he told it to his father and his brothers, his father asked, “What is the meaning of this dream of yours? Can it be that I and your mother and your brothers are to come and bow to the ground before you?” So his brothers were furious at him but his father kept the matter in mind.

Jacob's overt love for Joseph drove his brothers' jealousy to the point of hatred. Then Joseph had two dreams where in both his brothers bowed down to him. Joseph, immature and naive told his brothers these dreams, without realizing he was only fueling their hatred. So, it should be no surprise that Joseph's older brothers plotted to get rid of Joseph. They went from killing him to merely selling him as a slave to some traveling Midianites. Applying animal blood to his "ornate robe," they returned home and made Jacob believe his son had been killed by wild animals. Later, Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to the captain of the guard, Potiphar, as a household slave. Joseph was later falsely accused of attempting to rape Potiphar's wife and thrown into prison. "**But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him kindness** by making the chief jailer favoring him. The chief jailer put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. Everything that had to be done there, he was the one to do it." (Genesis 39:21-22).

While in prison, Joseph interprets dreams of two of Pharaoh's servants, then a dream for Pharaoh, when no one else could. Pharaoh was so pleased by the interpretation that he appointed Joseph as second-in-command over Egypt. Pharaoh's dream predicted seven years of famine. During the famine, Joseph's older brothers came to Egypt to buy food. They did not recognize Joseph, now twenty years older, and he treated them harshly, pretending that he thought they were spies. Joseph kept one brother in prison until the others brought their youngest brother, Benjamin, back to Egypt to prove they were not spies. They brought Benjamin with them on a return trip, and, eventually, his brothers bowed before him—in fulfillment of Joseph's dream—then Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and reunited with his father.

Later, when Jacob, died, Joseph's brothers feared that Joseph would take revenge against them for how they earlier treated him. They came to Joseph, begged for his forgiveness, but revenge was not on Joseph's mind. "But Joseph replied to them: 'Do not fear. Can I take the place of God? Even though you meant harm to me, God meant it for good, to achieve this present end, the survival of many people. So now, do not fear. I will provide for you and for your children.'" By thus speaking kindly to them, he reassured them." (Genesis 50:19-21).

What did we learn from this story?

You would think that because of Jacob's rivalry with his brother Esau and being subjected to parents showing and each having their "favorite", that Jacob would have learned and not commit the same mistake. So again, a parent played a part in fueling the fire of sibling rivalry. Still, this story is an example of how it takes two to have a rivalry. The other brothers weren't very nice to Joseph and blamed him for his father's mistake. Yet Joseph wasn't exactly understanding, and he was a bit of a showoff. Both sides were wrong and didn't take the time to understand one another. Ultimately, in the story of Joseph and his brothers, we see the themes of forgiveness, the father-son bond, both good and bad, sibling rivalry, brotherly love, God's power and presence in times of suffering. Just like Joseph, we are called to forgive those who have offended us and see life's experiences as part of God's plan to help us serve others. In the end, and after much trial and tribulation, the brothers reconciled.

4. The Prodigal Son – The Parable of the Lost Son. Luke 15:11-32

What does "prodigal" mean? It's basic meaning is "wasteful"--particularly with regard to money. Actually, Jesus tells three parables:

1. The parable of the lost sheep
2. The parable of the lost coin
3. The parable of the lost son (or, as we know it, the parable of the prodigal son).

All three parables are on the subject of recovering the lost. The parables of the prodigal son (and the lost coin) occur only in Luke.

- ✓ In Jewish society, there were laws regarding how inheritances were divided. The oldest brother got a double share (Deuteronomy 21:17), while the other brothers got a single share; or the older brother would get 2/3rds of the estate, and the younger brother would get 1/3rd.
- ✓ That means he is asking for the 1/3rd of the father's possessions that he would ordinarily get when the father dies. He's asking his father to give him 1/3rd of everything that he owns *right now*, before the father is dead.

Despite the younger son's request, the father grants it! This shows the unconditional love that God shows toward us, even when we are acting as selfishly as the prodigal son. After getting his 1/3rd of his father's estate, he squanders his money, ended up starving and had to return home to his father. He plans to return to his father and say three things:

1. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:18),
2. "I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:19a),
3. "Treat me as one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:19b).

Lessons from the father –

He only gets to say the first *two*. He says:

1. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:21a), and
2. "I am no longer worthy to be called your son" Luke 15:21b).

Before he can say the *third* part, the father interrupts. The first lesson is that the father will not treat a son as a hired servant. The younger son is still a son.

Lessons from the older brother

We find out that he's angry with his brother AND his father.

He stresses that he has never disobeyed his father's commands but that his father has never given him a young goat so that he could slaughter it and have a party with his friends.

The older brother sees this difference in how the father treated both he and his brother, as an injustice which is why he's angry with his father. However, it seems that he's also worrying about his own financial security in the family since the father is showing "favoritism" to his younger brother.

What does the father do? The father tells the older son three things.

1. First, he tells him: "**Son, you are always with me.**" This seems to reassure the older son that he has not lost his place in the family, his place is secure.
2. Second, he tells him: "**and all that is mine is yours.**" This is because the younger son already took his third, so the two-thirds that remain will go to the older son. This also means that the celebratory dinner does not represent a threat to the older brother or his inheritance, merely a celebration for the return of the younger son.
3. Third, he tells him: "It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

5 The Disciples' Relationship

Mark 9:33-35 – The Greatest in the Kingdom

"They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. **They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.** Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."

Matthew 20:20-24 – The Request of James and John.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached him with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, "What do you wish?" She answered him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom." Jesus said in reply, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can." He replied, "My cup you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left, [this] is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers.

Luke 22: 24-26 – The Role of the Disciples.

Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest. He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as 'Benefactors'; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant.

Matthew 18:1 – The Greatest in the Kingdom.

At that time the disciples* approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Luke 9: 46 – The Greatest in the Kingdom.

An argument arose among the disciples about which of them was the greatest.

❖ **James 2:1 – Sin of Partiality.**

My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

❖ **Other Examples:**

Jacob's Favoritism between His Wives

Examples of favoritism in the Bible also include sisters. Jacob had two wives: Leah and Rachel, but Jacob really loved Rachel, and Leah knew it. Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah first, and was blessed with giving Jacob many sons, while Rachel struggled. Sadly, Leah tried to prove her worth through the sons she bore, at the expense of Rachel's feelings.

Samson and Delilah

Samson was a man of great physical strength, but when he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, he met his match. He abandoned his mission to please the woman who stole his affections. This led to blindness, imprisonment, and powerlessness as he allowed his lust to overtake him. The Holy Spirit left him. Delilah persistently wore down Samson until he finally told her the information the Philistines wanted her to obtain. Having taken the Nazirite vow at birth, Samson had been set apart to God. As part of that vow, his hair was never to be cut.

Judges 16:21-22 – But the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. Then they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze fetters, and he was put to grinding grain in the prison. **But the hair of his head began to grow as soon as it was shaved.**

King Saul & David

❖ **Not all Biblical Relationships were Rivalries:**

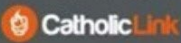
David and Jonathan





Moses and Aaron

Elijah and Elisha

Naomi and Ruth

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LITURGICAL COLORS



GREEN	RED	GOLD OR WHITE	ROSE	PURPLE
				
WHEN IS IT USED? Ordinary Time in the liturgical calendar.	WHEN IS IT USED? Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, Feasts of the Apostles and martyrs.	WHEN IS IT USED? Feasts of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary, and saints who were not martyred.	WHEN IS IT USED? Third Sunday of Advent and the Fourth Sunday of Lent.	WHEN IS IT USED? Advent and Lent, also in Requiem Masses.
SYMBOLISM Signifies hope.	SYMBOLISM Signifies the fire of charity and blood shed for Christ.	SYMBOLISM Symbolizes glory, joy, innocence, and purity of soul.	SYMBOLISM Symbolizes joy and love.	SYMBOLISM Signifies humility and penitence.

LITURGICAL COLORS

AND WHAT THEY MEAN

PURPLE	RED	ROSE/PINK	GREEN	WHITE/GOLD
				
Penance Preparation Used during Advent and Lent	Sacrifice Used during Passion Sunday, Good Friday, Pentecost, and the feast of the Apostles and martyrs	Anticipation Used on the third Sunday in Advent and the fourth Sunday during Lent	Hope, Life & Growth Used throughout Ordinary Time	Joy & Purity Used during Easter and Christmas seasons and feasts of the Blessed Mother, angels and saints who weren't martyred

CATHOLIC  EXTENSION