

Discussion Prompts for Genesis 8:4-18

Context

- Some scholars suggest Abel was born from God and Cain was born from the spirit of evil? Do you think this is a story about good and evil? Right and wrong? Or do you see some nuance?
- Do you agree that this could be a story about an early human conflict between two distinct lifestyles and cultures (agricultural life in organized settlements vs. nomadic, rural life of herders)?
- What are some of the cultural conflicts of our day? What guidance does this story give us for resolving those conflicts? What does God desire from us?

Conflict

- Do you think God was unfair in favoring Abel's offering? Do you think Cain failed to offer his best? What causes Cain's murderous anger?
- How have you experienced jealousy and anger in your relationships? What have been the consequences?

- How does it affect our lives if we intentionally fail to give our best to God and one another? What are the consequences of competition and how do you see those effects in our society?

Resolution

- Do you think Cain received the right punishment for his actions? Was God too harsh or too lenient? What would happen today if Cain did the same thing? How can this story inform our Christian conversation around capital punishment?
- If God wants us to allow criminals to face consequences but also offer a pathway to a new life—what would that look like in our society today? What would consequence/new life look like for a thief, a drug dealer, a white collar economic con artist, a murderer?
- Some make a distinction between retributive justice (the perpetrator receives vengeful punishment) vs restorative justice (the perpetrator is restored to a new place in society through reform). Which form of punishment do you feel is more effective? Which feels more aligned with God's action in this story?