

Chapter Six ***CAIN AND ABEL***

Hebrews 11:4 *By FAITH Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*

The original story is found in Genesis 4: 1-8.

A question often asked in Sunday School quizzes: “Who was the first man to shed blood?” There is no convincing reason to believe that Adam had not slain an animal for food, but the first recorded shedding of blood is that of Abel shedding the blood of a lamb. Students, in their eagerness to answer, often say that the first was Cain who shed the blood of his brother in an act of murder.

Cain was the first-born son to Adam and Eve. His mother was so excited. Surely he was the ‘seed’ promised by God in His declaration of war against the serpent who had deceived her.(Gen.3:15) She names him “SPEAR”(the meaning of ‘Cain’), saying “I have a man from the Lord.” Soon she realises her mistake as he grows up with all the characteristics of other babies yet to be born! He was probably just as naughty!

Another son is born whom she names “VANITY” (the meaning of ‘Abel’) realising that the battle is not to be over as soon as she had thought. Such hoping had been in vain. Evidently, there were to be other ‘seeds’ so which of them would be the one to wound the serpent’s head ?

Years pass during which time there is no communion with God, no worship, only a deep sense of guilt in the parents and a growing questioning and desire in the two sons. I can imagine their lives in those early days , just outside the walls, and see them asking their parents about the garden and the cherubim who stood guard over its gate. I wonder if Adam or Eve were ever able to tell their sons of what had happened within those walls - it was hardly a story that they would want to remember! However, there has always been in man a desire to worship, whether it is the Living God or any of the multitude of gods represented in the variety of religions of the world. Cain and Abel would have been no different.

As the boys grew up, they developed different interests. Cain worked the land and became a tiller of the ground, producing beautiful flowers, vegetables, fruit and herbs. He followed his father who toiled in the fields all the days of his life. The younger son, Abel, became a shepherd, wandering with the animals as they sought good pasture.

It was Cain who first thought of bringing a gift to God. We do not know his purpose but there is no reason to believe this to be anything less than a genuine, thankful offering, (the Hebrew language would certainly imply that). Maybe there was a hope that God might show him favour

and allow him back inside the garden. Where should he take the basket of produce he had washed, polished and put together so carefully? Possibly to the gate guarded by the cherubim? The basket looked so beautiful with all its varied colours and aromas. He placed the basket before the angel as his brother looks on.

Brother Abel wonders what he can bring as an offering to God. He doesn't want to be left out if there is any chance to appease God, but he has no beautiful produce to bring. Indeed, he has nothing he has obtained by the sweat of his brow. All he has is some cattle, goats and sheep.

By FAITH he offered a better sacrifice. What does that mean?

We read that "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Evidently God spoke to Abel. I am reminded of Jesus' words to Peter on Mount Hermon, recorded for us in Matt.16:17. "Blessed are you flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father..."

God's voice was not the voice of thunder, nor the voice recognised by the senses, but the inner voice heard only by the soul and often not recognised as being His.

"I will bring a lamb" thought Abel (in response to the inner voice). "A young lamb, a firstling. I will kill it, dress it and bring it with its fat." So he presents his offering before the angel at the gate. His faith was evidenced in obedience to the inner voice.

The next action belongs to God. It is He who has led both men here as He wants to teach them and us, some vital principles of the righteous life. "*He had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering He had no regard.*"

The destructive power of Offense

The men are important as well as their offerings.

God knows the heart of man and knows the man to whom He can trust His revelation and prompting. He said to Moses that He knew his name (ie; character) and would therefore reveal His name (ie; character) and glory to Moses (Ex 33:12 - 34:8). When Simon declared that Jesus was the Messiah, his master realised that such knowledge had come by revelation from God. Though he often spoke out of turn and was little educated, his heart was right, so God gave revelation. Knowing that this was a testimony to his character, Jesus renamed him Peter, a rock. How does God see my heart, your heart ? Does He see the character that will please Him ? What name would He give you ? Does He see one to whom He can reveal His glory, knowing that you will not usurp some of that glory for yourself ? Does he see one whose heart is pure, one to whom He can reveal Himself ? (Matt 5:8) A pure heart is single-focused; unalloyed by love for things of the world.

Cain did no wrong in bringing his offering to God - in fact he should be commended for his actions. However, God knew that there was potential in Cain for offense that leads to sin.

Offense in itself is not sin. Jesus caused offense to the Pharisees, the scribes and even some of His friends, yet without sin. However, it is a weapon greatly used by Satan the enemy, to rob believers of their victory, and has been the source of more church splits than anything else in his arsenal. Sadly, more people leave the spiritual battlefield because of being offended than for any other reason. The number one reason that missionaries leave the field and pastors leave their pulpits is not finances, ill health, visa or language difficulties, but because they, or someone they work with, have been offended.

Here is a brief outline of five scriptural examples of people being offended and what it cost them.

Matt.13:20, 21 one is offended by the Word. eg; he doesn't like its call to commitment.
Result: *no fruit.*
no love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal.5)

Matt.13:53-58 familiarity breeds contempt - they are offended (v57).
Result: *no supernatural ministry*
no answers to prayer, no revelation.

Matt 26:6-10 disciples (especially Judas - Jn 12:4) are offended (v8)
Result: *no confidence*
Judas goes out to betray his Lord. (v14)

Matt 26:31-35 disciples offended because they do not understand.
Result: *no testimony*
Peter (the Rock) crumbles before a little girl.

John 6:51-61 disciples offended at Jesus' call to commitment
Result: *no communion or fellowship*
they walked with Him no more (v66)

God would challenge Cain just as Jesus challenged those He loved. John the Baptist was offended by Jesus when the latter did not visit him in prison. (Matt 11:2-6) and Mary was offended by Him because He did not rush to prevent the death of Lazarus (John 11:1-35, note vv9,10). Indeed, I would suggest that the reason Jesus wept was because of the way she spoke to Him when finally she came to see Him outside Bethany. She used the same words as her sister Martha, ("*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*") but the response of Jesus was very different. Surely He did not weep for Lazarus, nor the professional mourners, for He had known of their situation since He had decided not to come at their first call. He also knew that in a few minutes they would all be rejoicing at the resurrection.

The Lord allows offenses to come into our lives to teach us something about ourselves, about the condition of our hearts. When we allow that offense to become sin, (causing the Saviour to weep and Satan to gloat!) we reveal a character to whom God will not give revelation, nor the prompting of faith.

The atoning power of the Blood

Secondly, God had regard for the offering of Abel but not that of Cain. Some have said that this is because Cain should have known that to approach God, he ought to have shed a lamb's blood. But how would he have known that? Further, he had no sheep; they belonged to Abel. I believe that kind of reasoning is putting the cart before the horse. God chose the offering of Abel in order to teach them, and us, what was previously unknown. **The only way man can approach God is through the shed blood of a lamb.** There was nothing wrong with Cain's offering but God chose Abel's. Indeed, later, when God would institute various kinds of offering for the feast days of His people, the produce of the field was a very acceptable offering. (eg; Lev.6: 14-23)

Throughout the Old Testament we read of God reaching out to His creation seeking to win them back into fellowship with Himself. He finds few whose hearts are pure before Him until, at the flood, He wipes all but one family of eight persons off the face of the earth. Later He calls out a special people for Himself and reveals to them His will in the Ten Commandments. They prove themselves incapable of the righteousness demanded by that Law so He reveals how He will deal with their sinfulness.

For all forms of uncleanness, blood had to be shed.

Especially was this true of that annual great Day of Atonement when the sins of the people and the nation were to be covered over for another year. Amidst great ceremony and ritual, a lamb was taken. It was to be 'spotless', a one-year-old male. Its blood was poured into a basin and taken by the High Priest into the most holy place in the tabernacle or temple, where it would be offered before God. All the nation would wait with bated breath hoping that God would accept this sacrifice for another year. Great was the rejoicing when the High Priest returned to them unharmed. God had been pleased again to accept them as His people!

These Old Testament rituals were but a shadow of that which was fulfilled in the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, at the cross of Calvary. However, He did not shed His blood that our sins might be covered for another year. The death of the perfect lamb was to remove our sins completely, as far as the east is from the west, - into the depths of the sea. To those who have placed their trust in the finished work of Calvary, there is no more condemnation but an access into the presence and fellowship of God. Paradise has been regained!

Cain's response

The heart of Cain was revealed. He was very angry and his countenance fell. The Lord asked him why he was angry and asked him an interesting question. *"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you but you must master it."*

Evidently, Cain had not yet sinned! There was no sin in his approach to God nor in his offering. Cain's attitude was wrong, his taking offense was wrong, but the fruit of sin had not yet come.

He must master sin's temptation and do well. However, he fails, Abel is slain and Cain is cast out, nevertheless with God's mark of protection upon him.

In considering this story, Jewish commentators have an interesting understanding of the question posed by God. They see it as an early reference to tithing! Cain's offering was not acceptable because he had not '*rightly divided*' his produce. They translate, "If you had rightly divided, would not your offering have been accepted?"

Summary

As I read the story of Cain and Abel in the context of faith, I see the Lord teaching us the following principles:

- 1. Approach to a Holy God is only through the shed blood of a lamb, the perfect type of the coming Lamb of God, Jesus.**
- 2. God knows the heart of man and will only reveal Himself to those who are pure in heart.**
- 3. God permits offenses to come to teach us about our heart's potential to sin.**