

## "WHAT HAST THOU DONE?"

"And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." Genesis 4:10.

The preceding chapters of Genesis contain the account of the creation of Adam and Eve, the first human beings on this earth, and the details of their disobedience resulting in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Their home, which was of divine appointment, was designed for the increase of the human family and for the training of their children. The fourth chapter of Genesis takes us into their home in its new location and introduces us to their first two children.

### I. The Story.

The birth of a child is always an exciting event, and one can easily imagine what it must have meant when the first boy ever to be born made his appearance. What joy! What concern for his welfare! And what plans for his future! What an event it was when the first son was born to this couple! To them his coming was a greater miracle than that of their own existence.

When Eve had given birth to her first child, she readily concluded that the promise of Genesis 3:15 was in the process of fulfillment, and rightly acknowledged the hand of God in the birth of her son in these words: "I have gotten a man from the Lord," or, as another version has it, "I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah." Thus, Eve, the first mother, gave the credit for her great joy to the proper Person. Every parent should recognize, as Eve did, that each child born into the world comes from God, and that this divine gift is to be cherished as a sacred and precious trust.

This first boy was named "Cain," which is derived from the Hebrew word "kanah." It signifies an "acquisition" or a "possession" of great value. This baby was indeed a treasure that was potent with possibility.

When a second son was born to Adam and Eve, there was no indication that she rejoiced over his birth as she had over that of Cain. It was quite obvious that she did not expect very much from him. Perhaps this second son meant little more to Eve than a lot of trouble in caring for him. This second son was named "Abel," which is derived from the Hebrew word "habel." It signifies "breath," "vapor" or "vanity." Although Adam and Eve were not conscious of it at the time they named their son "Abel," his very name was prophetic of the brevity of his earthly life.

These parents were faithful in their God-given responsibility to the extent that they taught their sons to work. They did not allow their boys to spend their time in idleness, but required them to develop their youthful energies in useful and helpful employment. Thus, the first family has reminded us of the necessity and the dignity of work as one of the very essentials of human life and progress.

As is so often the case in families, these brothers were quite different. They differed in their personalities, their interests and their occupations. Abel chose the peaceful work of a shepherd or keeper of sheep, which was a very honorable vocation during the early history of mankind. It was the occupation of such men as Moses, the Hebrew emancipator, and David, the psalmist of Israel. Cain chose a more active occupation and became a tiller of the soil or an agriculturist, which has come to be an even more important vocation with the passage of the years. Seemingly Abel's occupation caused him to realize that the results which he obtained did not depend as much upon his own skill and efforts as they did upon the blessing of God. On the other hand,

thinking that he produced the results which he obtained with the labor of his own hands, Cain was more inclined to depend upon himself rather than to rely so much upon a higher power for help.

These brothers were taught to worship as well as to work. Born of the same parents, reared in the same home, taught the same things and living in the same environment, these brothers became worshippers of the same God, in the same place, at the same altar and in the same way, namely, by the presentation of offerings. They knew what many church members today have never learned, namely, that worship is giving rather than getting, or ascribing rather than appropriating.

Doubtless God had revealed to Adam and Eve where, when and how He was to be approached and worshipped. Evidently they have given their sons definite instruction along these lines. There was a particular place in which they were to worship God. There was also an appointed time for worship. According to the Hebrew language of verse three that time was "at the end of days." That implies the end of the days of the week. In other words, this expression points to the Sabbath as the time when God was to be worshipped formally and publicly. A prescribed means of worship was implied also. God could be approached and worshipped by means of a sacrifice.

This incident intimated that Cain and Abel had been instructed by their parents that there was a definite place where God could be found, that there was a time at which they should come into His presence, and that an appointed means of approach to Him had been established and designated.

## II. The Sacrifices.

Instead of centering our attention on the two men themselves, we shall now focus it upon the difference between their offerings. Their offerings were not even the same in matter.

Cain brought an offering from "the fruit of the ground," in recognition of the fact that God was his Creator and was therefore worthy of his homage. Abel brought an offering from "the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof," in recognition of his need of a covering for sin. Cain's thank offering was an act of homage and was bloodless. Abel's sin offering was a plea for forgiveness and was one of blood and life.

Cain thought that God would accept the best that a man could produce with his own labors. He believed that if a man did something which was classified as a good work God would accept him for it. So, he brought to God the fruit of the cursed earth, which had been produced by the labors of a sinful man, believing that God would accept his offering, inasmuch as he thought he had done the best he could in producing it. Believing that God could be pleased with the results of a man's own works, Cain presented his offering to Him with much personal satisfaction. He reminds us of many self-centered and self-righteous people today to whom the blood of Christ is repulsive and who, therefore, trust in their own character and works for salvation.

In making his offering, Abel "brought of the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof," which was the best that he had. To do so, sacrifice had to be made, blood had to be shed and life had to be taken. Abel simply took a lamb, slew it and took it to the Lord. In doing so Abel acknowledged the fact that he was a sinner, admitted that he was under the penalty of sin which is death and owned the fact that he deserved to die, and presented a substitutionary victim, whose blood had been shed and whose life had been taken, to God.

By his action Abel seemed to say, "Death is what I deserve and I confess it, but I come to Thee depending entirely on the merits of another." His sacrifice, in which atoning blood was shed, was therefore at once his confession of sin and of his faith in the interposition of a substitute. It was the recognition by a man of faith in the twilight of the world's history that without the shedding of blood there is no remission. Abel's lamb prefigured the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. When we approach our God, relying on the merits of that Sacrifice, we do so in the spirit of the well-known words:

"Not the labors of my hands  
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

Cain was the type of man who believed in doing the best he could and letting it go at that. As might have been expected, he desired God's favor, but he wanted it upon his own terms. Having prepared the soil, planted the seed, cultivated the crop and gathered the harvest, Cain was quite proud of his achievement. Neither his method of approach to God nor the offering which he presented gave any indication that he had any consciousness of sin or of the need of atonement. Depending upon the works of his own hands, he approached God in his own way and thereby deprived himself of blessings which he would have received had he come in God's way. Because Cain rejected God's way of access to Himself, his offering was not accepted.

Abel believed what God had said about Himself and the way in which to approach Him. Depending on God's grace and acting upon faith, Abel approached God in the divinely appointed way. Because he recognized his personal need as a sinner and by faith brought the sacrifice which represented the substitutionary offering of another in his stead, Abel's offering was received by the Lord. It was not accepted because of Abel's goodness, but because of his faith. "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" (Hebrews 11:4).

### III. The Sequel.

When God rejected the offering of Cain and accepted the offering of Abel, Cain was highly displeased at the difference which God made between them. Cain's pride was offended sorely because Abel had pleased God while he had failed to do so. He was enraged and he showed it. Why was Cain so angry? Disappointment, an inferiority complex and jealousy led to his anger, as they so often do.

Knowing full well the heinousness of the sin of prolonging and nurturing jealous anger and permitting it to bear fruit in rash behavior, God intervened and called upon Cain to examine himself and to discover and reveal the reason for his attitude of jealousy and envy.

Quite frequently anger, like many other sins, results from a lack of consideration. People would not cherish anger if they would stop to think seriously and honestly why they were angry. The real reason would be so trivial that it would put them to shame. Everybody would do well to heed the admonition of God's Word, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26).

The Bible says, "And Cain was very wroth," or, as we would express it today, "It burned him up." God's question, "Why art thou wroth?", was asked for the specific

purpose of arousing Cain to the realization of a grievous disorder in his spirit and conduct. In mercy God made an extra appeal to him. It is even possible that God placed a lamb near the door of the tent of Cain and then urged him to change his mind and bring the lamb as a sin-offering as Abel had done. Had Cain only confessed his sin, repented thereof, and offered a slain lamb, God would have pardoned and restored him, but, due to his stubbornness, he refused to do so. Just as God extended His mercy to insolent Cain, so will He forgive all who will renounce self-will and approach Him through the Lamb which was slain on Calvary's cross. God has provided in Christ all that we need, but some of us, like Cain, have been too proud and too stubborn to receive it.

Cain was so furious that he closed his ears to the appeal of God. The attitude which he assumed toward his brother was very unseemly in its character, unjustifiable in its cause and wrathful in its manifestation. Of course, Abel had noticed the anger of Cain, when God made a difference between their offerings, but his subsequent attitude toward him had left Abel under the impression that Cain had forgotten it all. At least Cain talked with his brother as if he did not have anything against him.

In his hypocrisy Cain deliberately led Abel out into a field where others would not see what he was about to do. With the consciousness of inferiority in his mind, and with jealousy, malice and hatred smouldering in his heart, at the earliest opportunity that afforded itself, Cain arose and killed his brother. That which was in his heart was revealed in what came out of it, namely, murder. In killing his own brother in order to get him out of the way, Cain evidenced the fact that he was under the control of Satan.

Why did Cain slay Abel? I John 3:12 answers, "Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." So, God immediately brought Cain task for slaying his brother. God asked Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" Cain replied, "I know not." Cain had killed Abel, but He denied any knowledge of the murder and tried his best to conceal his crime. Cain said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and God informed him that he was.

To Cain God said, "What hast thou done?" Even though Cain may have thought that when he murdered his brother that was the end of it, but God meant to convince him that as a free moral agent he was responsible for his actions. When God asked Cain, "What hast thou done?", He did not lack the knowledge of what he had done, but He wanted to let Cain know that He was fully aware of what he had done, and that He wanted him to repent of it. He told him emphatically that Abel's blood cried unto Him from the ground for vengeance. He wanted him to know that murder could not be concealed from Him or from man. Sin cannot be hidden successfully by any man.

God's judgment upon Cain for his sin, which was unforgiven and unconfessed, thrust him out of his home and made him a wanderer and a vagabond, but he was never able to get away from the cry of his brother's blood. He simply refused to repent of his sin and to receive the divine forgiveness which had been so graciously and mercifully offered to him. Instead of receiving forgiveness, Cain complained that his punishment was so great, but that did not help him or anyone else.