

# Genesis 4:1-8 • When Anger Takes Hold

## Introduction

Why is it we're "surprised" whenever we try to take a spiritual "shortcut" believing we don't "really" have to follow the rules because we believe the ends will justify the means, only to find out that the ends are nullified by God Who **IS** concerned about the means? From the very beginning, God establishes that the process is just as important—sometimes even **more** so—than the goal. Obtaining a goal does not negate the unfaithful, disobedient life that engaged it. In fact, we repeatedly find that because of the way we sought it, the goal becomes worthless as well.

<sup>1</sup>Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord."

<sup>2</sup>Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

<sup>3</sup>So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. <sup>4</sup>Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; <sup>5</sup>but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

### [Read v.1-5]

**Q: To whom does Eve give credit regarding her pregnancy and the birth of Cain? How does the use of the name change from previous verses? (Compare in the table below.)**

A: Eve refers to "the LORD." In some Bibles (NASB), upper case letters are used to designate the formal and proper name of God designated by the name *Yahweh*, or YHWH. This is the holy name of God written but not spoken aloud by the Israelites. (When reading this word aloud, Jews substitute the word *Adonai*, meaning "Lord", as opposed to *Yahweh* which in the NASB is written "LORD".) It is the name God gives when asked by Moses, and becomes the personal name of God for the Israelites. Up to this point in Genesis, the term "LORD God" has been used. Satan omits the YHWH part and refers only to God, recognizing Him as creator but not as Lord. Eve refers to God personally...Yahweh...or, as some older translations put it, *Jehovah*.

#### Normal Use of God's Name

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the **LORD God** had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'"—Genesis 3:1

Then the **LORD God** called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"—Genesis 3:9

Then the **LORD God** said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."—Genesis 3:13

I have gotten a manchild with the help of the **LORD**.—Genesis 4:1

#### Satan's Use of God's Name

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has **God** said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'"—Genesis 3:1

but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, **God** has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"—Genesis 3:3

"For **God** knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."—Genesis 3:5

**Q: Adam and Eve have a second child, Abel. Who is the firstborn and who would therefore be the "traditional" heir of Adam, the one who would inherit the rights of the father? What roles do each son assume?**

A: Cain is the firstborn and would be the more responsible son to carry on the line of the father. Cain tills the land and Abel keeps the flocks. As meat was probably not eaten until after the flood, Cain's responsibility was probably greater, for he was responsible for providing food, whereas Abel was responsible for providing wool for clothing.

**Q: In verse three, both sons bring an offering to the Lord. (This was probably learned from Adam, but the story focuses on the sons.) Why did they bring offerings and what was the primary difference and significance between Cain's offering and Abel's?**

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A: Most probably, God instructed Adam how to bring offerings and Adam taught his sons. The purpose of the offerings was to recognize that God is God over their lives and perhaps also for the recognition of their sin; thus, sin offerings.

Although offerings were formalized in the Levitical laws, in general meat (blood) offerings applied to the issue of sin, whereas grain offerings applied to the issue of dedication and devotion.

The primary difference in Cain's and Abel's offering is twofold: Abel's offering was of the "firstlings" of the flock (not stated that Cain's was of the first fruit of his harvest), and, more importantly, Abel's offering involved the "fat portions" of the sacrifice. That could only mean that an animal had been sacrificed and blood was shed. ("*The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.*"—Genesis 3:21 Adam and Eve witnessed the requirement of blood to cover sin.). The significance is that for the forgiveness of sin, the shedding of blood is required. This foreshadows the death of Christ, as does the Atonement sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

*"And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."*

—Hebrews 9:22

**Q: In 5b, how does the Lord respond to the sacrifices? What does it mean to have "regard"?**

A: God, being God, has the right to determine what constitutes an acceptable sacrifice. **He** is the offended party as the result of mankind's sin, and **He** is the one to whom reconciliation is due.

**Application:**

- *Through these verses, how is God speaking to you right now regarding your "offerings"?*
- *Do you tend to be an Abel or a Cain in your offerings?*
- *In what other ways is God speaking to your heart right now from His Word?*

**[Read v.5b-7]**

**Q: What was Cain's reaction to the fact that God did not regard his offering as an acceptable one? What does it mean that "his countenance fell"? Why do you think Cain felt that particular emotion? (For interesting information, look back in chapter 3 and find other emotions. List them.)**

A: Cain became...not angry...but **very** angry. This is the first mention of anger in the Bible. [Other emotions in chapter 3 include shame (3:7) and fear (3:8). The result of shame was hiding from each other. The result of fear was hiding from God.] Who was Cain angry at? Probably God, probably Abel, and probably also himself for not having figured it out. Anger always needs an object for expression, and that anger toward the object is usually accompanied by some form of hatred. God is out of reach making Abel the more viable target. That his countenance fell probably points to pouting or becoming depressed.

**Q: Besides anger and depression, what other emotion is Cain feeling?**

A: Rejection.

So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup>Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup>If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

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**Q: In verse 6, God asks Cain “Why are you angry?” Question: Can’t God, being omniscient, figure this out? Why, then, does God ask Cain this question?**

A: God wants **Cain** to face his anger and realize the feelings he is having. We call this, “Getting in touch with your feelings.”

**Q: In verse 7, God presents to Cain a set of options. Are these options conditional or unconditional? If conditional, whose responsibility is it to make the choices?**

A: This is what is called a “conditional statement,” or an “if...then” statement. That means that **if** thus-and-thus occurs, **then** thus-and-thus will happen; therefore, cause and effect. (An unconditional statement would be more like a promise, such as God’s promises to Abraham.) What this means is that the choice of the outcome is up to Cain. It’s his responsibility to determine the outcome. If he faces and deals with his anger, then his depression and feelings of rejection will be overcome. But if he fails to deal appropriately with his anger, there are other consequences.

**Q: What are the consequences if Cain chooses not to face and deal appropriately with his anger? What do you find odd about the way this consequence is worded?**

A: God says that “*sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.*” What is odd about this consequence is that what appears to be figurative language is used. That is, sin is pictured as a crouching animal ready to spring and overtake Cain. Note, however, that the “animal” has not yet “sprung.” It all depends on Cain’s choices.

**FYI:** The Hebrew language comes from a more ancient language, call Akkadian. In that language, the word “crouching” also means “demon.” According to Dr. Merrill F. Unger, author and former professor at Dallas Seminary, the sentence could be translated, “There is a demon crouching at the door (of your heart), and this demon’s desire is for you (to inhabit you); you must master this demon.” This raises the possibility that the emotion of anger, which is always accompanied by hatred of an object of that anger, opens the door for demonic influence.

**Q: Most important question: Is it God’s responsibility to (1) change what kind of a sacrifice is acceptable to Him so as not to hurt Cain’s feelings, (2) take away Cain’s anger with divine intervention, or (3) to deal with the “crouching” sin?**

A: It is Cain’s responsibility to deal with the issue.

**Application:**

- Are you dealing with anger at someone now?
- What is God teaching you right now about carrying anger toward anyone?
- Is it possible to carry anger toward yourself?
- If you’re feeling depressed, do you think anger toward someone (God, yourself, another) may be the source?

<sup>8</sup>Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

### **[Read v. 8]**

#### **Q: How well did Cain deal with his anger?**

A: Not as one would hope. Turn to John 8:44. To what incident was Jesus referring when He said, "...he was a murderer from the beginning...?"

#### **Q: From where do you think Cain got the idea of killing (murder)?**

A: The idea for killing his brother was probably placed in his mind by "the crouching one"; that is, Satan. In other words, the "sin" what was "crouching at the door" was Satan, waiting for an opportunity to destroy the only one who brought the correct sacrifice and knew the significance of man's sin.

#### **Q: In verse 11, Cain comes under God's curse. How does this affect the descendants of Adam?**

A: Cain, the firstborn, is cursed; Abel the man of faith, is dead.

*"By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks."*

—Hebrews 11:4

*"For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous."*

—1 John 3:11-12

#### **Application:**

- *How has God spoken to you through this lesson?*
- *Be careful not to just utter general principles, but share personally the message that God is speaking to your heart through His Word.*