

Chapter II

LESSONS FROM THE FIRST TWO SONS

The Bible does not tell us when Eve conceived her first son, but it was probably within the first year after they were expelled from the garden. The Bible simply says, *Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD* (Genesis 4:1). According to the Hebrew lexicons, this means she had received her firstborn son with *God's help*. This probably means she recognized the power of God in her distinctive creation from the side of Adam and was not claiming Cain to be *the seed of the woman*, as might be supposed.

At this juncture the Biblical narrative moves along rapidly. The purpose of the narrative, as we have seen, is God's unfolding plan of redemption and not a detailed history of the origin of man. To this end it is important to the theme of redemption that the second-born son of Adam and Eve be introduced immediately, and he was: *And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground* (Genesis 4:2).

In my study of the Scriptures over the years, I had noted a contrast between the first and

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second-born sons in the book of Genesis. As I viewed these individuals, it seemed as if the firstborn was likened to all of us in this world, who by right of birth, are simply *of the earth, earthy*; and the second-born seemed to occupy the position of gaining the inheritance, which the firstborn believed was his by right of birth. Further the second-born seemed to be likened to those of us who have been regenerated and are reckoned spiritual, with a heavenly inheritance which is undeserved.

When I first discovered this contrast, the principle seemed to stand in every case but in the case of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His case the typology seemed to break down because, at that time, I considered Him to be the firstborn Son of God. Then I remembered: in the genealogy of our Lord in the book of Luke, Adam is called *the son of God*. With this, the typology (of the natural first and the spiritual second) proved to be true in every case. Adam was the first son of God by right of creation, and the Lord Jesus Christ (with respect to His earthly ministry) was the second Son of God by right of His incarnation. Further I was reminded of Paul's instructions to the Corinthians, where he wrote:

Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. (I Corinthians 15:46-49)

In the progressive revelation of the redemption of man, the relationship between these first two sons portrays two ways of thinking: one from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the other in the promise of the *seed of the woman*. The first way had its origin in *the spirit of the error* and is the lie of the Devil. It is represented in and expressed by Cain. The other way is of

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the Spirit of the Truth and is a manifestation of the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. It is represented in and expressed by Abel. Returning to the narrative, we find: ... *in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell* (Genesis 4:3-5).

The common view of the offerings of Cain and Abel is that they both brought of that which they had produced. While this is true, it was not the reason for their offerings. The reason was hidden in their respective responses to the truth preached by their father, which is implied, but not recorded in Scripture. Their respective offerings reflected the basis of their respective views: one was according to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, *a way which seemeth right unto a man*, and the other was according to the revelation of God in the promise of the *Seed of the woman*. One rejected the concept of federal headship, and the other recognized this truth. Cain sought the approbation of God by the works of his own hands, and Abel placed his faith in the promise of the *Seed of the woman* (Jesus Christ), who would come in the fullness of time and offer Himself a ransom for sin. Consequently Cain's offering was bloodless, rejecting the idea that *without the shedding of blood is no remission*, and Abel's offering was a declaration of this truth.

When Abel offered of the *firstlings of his flock*, he did so because he acknowledged himself a sinner. He did this because he acknowledged he was related to a federal head who had plunged himself and his posterity into sin. Abel's offering was in keeping with this and with God's promise of a Redeemer.

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We know this because the Bible tells us, *for where no law is, there is no transgression* (Romans 4:15). So for the first twenty-five hundred years of human history, the only sin anyone was charged with was the sin of Adam. This does not mean they were otherwise sinless. It means they were not charged with anything that had not been expressly prohibited by God and, at that time, eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the only prohibition God had made.

Cain refused to acknowledge Adam's sin to be his sin. Instead he rationalized he could have a viable relationship with God on the basis of the works of his own hands. He produced what must have been a beautiful display of all of the things which he had grown. These he presented to God instead of a sacrificial lamb, which had been revealed in the promise of *the Seed of the woman* to be a type of the Kinsman Redeemer. He blatantly rejected the truth of the promised Redeemer for that which was right in his own eyes. Despite his denial of the truth, God was gracious and said: *Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him* (Genesis 4:6-7).

Make no mistake, *doing well* was not something Cain, or anyone else in Adam's race, could do. The whole human family has been born *dead in trespasses and in sin*. God was not suggesting to Cain that he could have a viable relationship with Him based upon doing well: He was using Cain's inability to do well as *a schoolmaster* to bring him unto Christ that he might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). Even so Cain refused to see any fault in himself, or to acknowledge his condemnation as a member of the human race. He believed he could stand before God on the basis of his own merit. This is *the way of Cain*, who is described as a false prophet

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in the book of Jude. *Cain's way* was the way of the Pharisees, so our Lord said to them: *They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Luke 5:31-32).

The problem with Cain, and with all of those who follow *the way of Cain*, is that Cain failed to recognize that his human nature was in rebellion against God. Cain's nature, as well as the nature of the entire human family, is not fit for the presence of God. Cain ignored his fallen nature because he believed he could have a viable relationship with God on the basis of his personal goodness.

Cain's way is the way of the world. It is universal because it is intrinsic to human nature. It is subtle and persistent. On the surface *Cain's way* may not appear to be too harmful, but a close examination of Cain's offering, which was an expression of his way, reveals *Cain's way* was of extreme harm. It was born in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It had its roots in the lie of the Devil. Thus it was in opposition to the truth of the Word of God and was in no way an expression of faith in the promises of God. Cain was a false prophet who espoused *another gospel* which was based upon *a way which seemeth right unto a man*, as all false religions are.

The Scriptures tell us, *Cain was wroth and his countenance was fallen*. Apparently this condition continued despite God's gracious handling of Cain. Cain carried his anger with him, from the rejection of his offering forward, awaiting the opportunity to vent his displeasure with Abel. In Cain's mind, Abel was responsible for God's refusal of his offering; otherwise, according to his way of thinking, God would have accepted it. Shortly thereafter: *Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel*

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his brother, and slew him (Genesis 4:8).

The New Testament account of these events helps us to understand Cain's motive for killing Abel and the circumstances and manner by which Cain slew him. Jealousy, anger and self-righteousness were at the root of it. This is revealed by the apostle John in the third chapter of his first epistle, where, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, he said: *Cain, who was of that wicked one ... slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous* (I John 3:12).

John used the Greek word *spahdzo* (in this text) to describe the murder of Abel. *Sphadzo* means to slaughter victims for sacrifice. In the usual meaning of the word, this is done by slitting the throat of the victim. Thus through the verbal inspiration of Scripture we learn Cain slit Abel's throat, as in a sacrifice. This gives us a mental picture of their meeting in the field: Cain, most likely, accused Abel of spoiling his offering; and Abel, most likely, explained the truth of the promise of the *seed of the woman* to Cain: to provide the reason for the acceptance of his offering and the rejection of Cain's. This explanation would have been the last thing Cain wanted to hear. In a self-righteous rage, he grabbed Abel and with one quick move slit his throat. It is very possible Cain may have thought, *If God wants a bloody sacrifice, here is one!* as he allowed his brother's body to slump to the ground.

Make no mistake, Cain was not the product of his environment. Cain was the product of his fallen nature, and his nature was intrinsically self-righteous; so much so, that he felt justified in murdering his brother because his religious ideas were rejected of God and his brother's were accepted. Even so Cain could have been accepted of God. God certainly gave him the

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opportunity to express his faith in the promise of the seed of the woman by offering a lamb as a type of Christ, but he would not. These events agree with the meaning of the word *sphadzo*; these events agree with the character of Cain as described in Scripture; and these events agree with Cain's characterization as a representative of the flesh, which is at enmity with the Spirit of God. Cain was a murderer in the same capacity that the Devil is a murderer. Our Lord told the religious leaders of the Jews, who, like Cain, rejected him:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer [Greek: *anthropoktonos*, a slayer of men, contextually: a slayer of souls] from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh [the] lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

After the death of Abel, Cain was made a vagabond. He wandered east of Eden, where he took a wife and *builded a city* and named it for his son Enoch (Genesis 4:17). Cain was the spiritual leader of his posterity, but he could not lead them in the truth. He had rejected the truth for his own *way*. Consequently he slew the souls of those who followed him as certainly as he had physically slain his brother. In this respect, Cain was very much like the nation of Israel. They both turned their backs on the truth of the Word of God and provided a religious tradition for their posterities which revealed they were *ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, [so they would not submit] themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth* (Romans 10:3-4).

Cain and Israel both tried to establish their own righteousness before God. They both had a zeal for God but it was not based on a full knowledge of the Word of God. They both failed before God in the matter of *doing well*. In addition to failing before the law, Cain and Israel both failed in the object of their faith. They both placed their trust in their own self efforts, rather than

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in the promises of God. Therefore Cain and Israel both had a vain faith.

Their faith was vain because they interpreted their relationship with God on the basis of their knowledge of good and evil, rather than on the basis of the Word of God. Therefore God would not and could not accept them on the basis of their vain faith. Finally, in jealousy, Cain and Israel both slew their *brothers*. Cain slew Abel and Israel slew the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore, Cain and Israel both offered their brothers in sacrifice unto God in rebellion against the truth. They both did this not realizing that while they meant it for evil, God meant it for good: to set forth the truth in Abel and to provide redemption in Christ.

Despite Cain's and Israel's rebellion against the truth, God set a mark on both of them. God dealt with both Cain and Israel in grace. All either Cain or Israel had to do was to trust in the promises of God rather than in their own good works, and God would have accepted them. However they both chose to stand upon the basis of their own self-righteousness rather than on the basis of God's grace. Returning to the narrative, God said unto Cain:

Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

. And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod [wandering], on the east of Eden. (Genesis 4:9-16, emphasis mine)

A faith which is based upon the self-determination of good and evil sets a man wandering

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outside of the Paradise of God with no certain dwelling place in the things of God. This kind of faith has a faulty foundation. Man's knowledge of good and evil came about because of his disobedience to the Word of God. Therefore anything born of that knowledge sets a man at variance with God. In the Bible this relationship is called *the flesh*, or the *old man*. The *old man* always functions in *a way which seemeth right unto a man* (Proverbs 14:12), which came from *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*.

There is another relationship in the Bible which was portrayed in Abel. This relationship sets a man at rest with God. It is a spiritual relationship, which the Bible refers to as *the new man*, or *walking in the Spirit*. It is a relationship in which the believer functions on the basis of faith in the Word of God by the leading of the Spirit of God. Walking in the flesh is walking according to *a way which seemeth right unto a man*, and walking in the Spirit is walking according to the truth of the Word of God. These two ways are diametrically opposed to one another. One is of God, the other is of the Devil.

On the one hand, Cain could have enjoyed fellowship with God if he would have submitted to the grace of God and offered the lamb lying outside the door, but he would not. On the other hand, Abel was accepted of God because his offering was based upon the truth of the Word of God. This causes us to ask, what was the basic difference between Cain and Abel? They had the same parents and they had the same brothers, sisters, nephews, and nieces. The human family had grown to a considerable size in the nearly one hundred and thirty years that elapsed before Cain slew Abel. They lived in the same environment and undoubtedly they were taught the same things. The influences that were brought to bear upon one were brought to bear upon the other.

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Yet they were diametrically opposed to one another. This opposition came about because Abel believed God and Cain did not. This was the primary difference between them. This is also the difference between the flesh and the Spirit. Faith, or unbelief, in the promises of God is the difference between whether a man is accepted or rejected of God. And finally, faith, or unbelief, in the Word of God is the primary difference we shall view in the first and second-born sons portrayed in the Bible and reviewed in this book.