

## Master or Be Mastered 10-8-06

Genesis 4:1-16 (NIV)

This week is the Feast of Sukkoth or the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. It is the time when Israelites live in a temporary shelter for 8 days to remind them of their temporary shelters as they journeyed through the wilderness. (See the DVD *Ushpizin*) After the Feast of Booths, they celebrate Simchat Torah or Celebrating with the Torah. The Torah is brought out of its tabernacle and rewound to Genesis 1:1. "This is an occasion of much rejoicing, and the object of their joy is the fact that God gave them his word, the Torah. They literally dance around the synagogue with the Torah scrolls praising God for the scriptures." Dr. Lois Tverberg How much more should we rejoice as we open the Word knowing that it culminates in a personal Savior and Messiah who has given Himself for our sins so that we might have eternal life?

<sup>1</sup> Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."<sup>2</sup> Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?<sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

<sup>8</sup> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" <sup>10</sup> The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. <sup>11</sup> Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."<sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. <sup>14</sup> Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."<sup>15</sup> But the LORD said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. <sup>16</sup> So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Adam and Eve had been driven from the Garden. Their lives have been affected to the core by the judgment of God on their sin. The world began to experience death and decay. (1 Corinthians 15:26) Cherubim stood guard over the way back into the Garden to keep them from the Tree of Life. Yet, God has given them gracious promises of Someone who would come and crush the head of the serpent. They were given clothing of skins made by God to cover their shame. And then, grace upon grace, they have their first child. (1 Samuel 2:21)

**Commented [notes1]:** 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.  
1 Cor 15:26 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** 21 And the LORD was gracious to Hannah; she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.  
1 Sam 2:21 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> *Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."* She experienced that pain in childbirth. If you have ever seen a birth, you know what an incredible thing it is. It is an emotional roller coaster. You cheer them on and then, as they tire from the incredibly difficult ordeal, you begin to be concerned if they are going to make it. It really is an amazing thing. Never in their life has their body done what it is doing. Muscles contract and hormones surge all involuntarily and in perfect order to force this little body out into the world. Even if you've seen it before, every time is awe-inspiring. Suddenly there is this new little life that begins to breathe and scream and nurse. It is so miraculous.

Imagine Adam and Eve experiencing this first birth. They didn't know what to expect. They didn't know that when the contractions got closer and more intense that the baby was about to be born. No one knew to say "push" or "wait". It was all a first. And what do you do with the cord? Did she know it would take a day or two for her milk to come in? It must have all been very frightening yet filled with wonder. Every mother can say with Eve, "With the help of the Lord I gave birth." You know after an experience like that that you couldn't have done it without God's help. And all the mothers in the congregation said, "Amen!"

<sup>2</sup> *Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.* Every child is unique. My two are as different as night and day. Abel and Cain were very different too. Abel was a keeper of domestic animals, a herdsman. Cain was an agriculturalist. Both are honorable professions.

<sup>3</sup> *In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.* In the course of time may mean that there were designated times for offerings as there would later be in the Law. (Numbers 18:12) The Law may have been patterned after already existing worship rituals established by God long before. Apparently the time for the offering came around the time of harvest as it would later in the Law.

Some have pointed to the offering of Cain and said that the reason that God was displeased was because it was not a blood offering. If the Law is patterned after ancient God given rituals, then a grain offering is an acceptable offering. (Leviticus 2:1-2) We have no record of God demanding a blood offering so far, but we do see that God shed the first innocent blood of animals to provide a covering for the shame of Adam and Eve's nakedness. (Genesis 2:21)

<sup>4</sup> *But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,* This passage has been translated several ways. The Hebrew may mean he offered the fat portions of some of the firstborn lambs, or he offered the lambs and their fat, or he offered the lambs of the fattest or best Ewes. In any case, it was a blood offering of the best of the flock. Notice though that the LORD (YHWH, the covenant keeping eternal God) looked with favor on Abel and his offering. The order here is important. God looks on the heart of the one that brings the offering first. (1Samuel 16:7)

**Commented [notes3]:** 12 "I give you all the finest olive oil and all the finest new wine and grain they give the LORD as the firstfruits of their harvest. Num 18:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** 1 ""When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it 2 and take it to Aaron's sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. Lev 2:1-2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** 21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. Gen 3:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 1 Sam 16:7 (NIV)

<sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Remember when King Saul brought back the best of the Amalakites livestock for sacrifice and Samuel's rebuke to him? <sup>22</sup> But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. <sup>23</sup> For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. 1 Samuel 15:22-23 (NIV) Saul's heart was full of rebellion and arrogance. That is the problem with all unaccepted offerings. If the one that offers them is in rebellion and filled with arrogance it doesn't matter how costly the offering is. It is an insult to God to give an offering when your heart is arrogant.

Cain may have thought that his labor in the fields was of greater worth than his brother's work of watching the flock and guiding it to pasture. He probably thought that God should be grateful that he offered a gift that he labored so hard to give. "I put my hundred dollars in the offering plate that I earned by hoeing the field all day. God should really appreciate it!" Who gave Cain his strength? Who gave him the earth and seed? Who caused the springs of the earth to water the ground? Do you or I have anything that is not given to us from God? (1 Corinthians 4:7) God owes no man anything but every man is indebted up to his eyeballs to God. When we give any offering, we are just giving back a portion of what He has so graciously and generously given us. To do so while in rebellion or with arrogance is detestable to God. (Malachi 1:8)

God looked with favor on Abel and his offering. Abel's heart must have been a humbly grateful heart. (Psalm 51:17) Abel demonstrated to all future generations how to give an offering in the right spirit. Some believe that the acceptance of the offering was that it was consumed by fire from heaven. In the future, Samson's parents would see it happen to their offering of food to the Angel of the LORD. (Judges 13:20) Israel would see this happen when the Temple was completed. (2Chronicles 7:1) Elijah would see it happen in his contest with the prophets of Baal. (1Kings 18:38) And today children of God around the world are offering themselves as a living sacrifice and being consumed by the fire of the Holy Spirit. I hope that each of you desires to be that kind of acceptable sacrifice to the LORD. (Romans 12:1-2)

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? Apparently, Cain's offering lay on the altar untouched while Abel's went up in flame. That really ticked Cain off. After all, he worked harder for it didn't he? I can hear the argument in his mind. "Abel just lies under a tree in the heat of the day while I'm breaking my back in the fields. He just walks around from pasture to pasture while I'm sweating away pulling weeds. What an ungrateful God I am trying to serve!"

So God came to him with a reality check, "Why are you angry?" Think about it more clearly. Consider what is in your heart. (Acts 8:21) Every time we get angry we should ask ourselves what is at the root of it. Why do we have such an attitude? If we get still before the Lord, He will show us. It shows on our face. It infects our speech. Everyone that comes in contact with us knows it is a good idea to keep a little distance. We are a pressure cooker that is ready to blow. Our little talk with our self has only been to fan the flames, not to come to reason. (Ecclesiastes 7:9)

**Commented [notes7]:** 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? 1 Cor 4:7 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** 8 When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty. Mal 1:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Psalms 51:17 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** 20 As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. Judges 13:20 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. 2 Chron 7:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. 1 Kings 18:38 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** 1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Acts 8:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** 9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. Eccl 7:9 (NIV)

Then God gave Cain an eternal truth. <sup>7</sup> *If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.* Just do the right thing. Have the right attitude and you will be accepted. It's that simple. Don't get mad because you have an ungrateful or arrogant attitude. Don't expect God to answer your prayers when your heart is so perverse. Do what is right and you will be accepted. Humble yourself!

But if you refuse to do what is right, if you insist on clinging to your arrogant attitude, your ridiculous notion that you have given God something of great merit, then know that sin, like a lion, is crouching at your door. It is ready to pounce on you and consume you. (1Peter 5:8) That nasty attitude will turn into full-blown rebellion and it will make you its slave. Nurse the grudge and soon the grudge will be nursing you. The kitten you have fed becomes a lion that will feed on you. Sin wants to own you.

*"But you must master it."* You must! The alternative is too ugly to consider. You must take control of your attitude and emotions and be honest with your heart. You must face the truth that the reason you are angry with God is that He has refused to let you be King of your universe. And when you face the fact that you are prideful, you must master that attitude. Put your foot on its throat. Be honest with yourself as to how ugly and ridiculous that attitude is. Master it! Ask God for the strength and wisdom from above to tell that attitude that you will not entertain it! Your sin will master you or you will master it! (Romans 6:12)

Cain didn't listen. He let the sin in his heart master him. The very next thing he did was invite Abel out into his field. Now, on his own turf, he snuffed out his own brother's life. Jealousy became hatred, hatred turned to rage, and rage vented all the ugliness of Cain's heart until Abel lay lifeless on the ground.

<sup>9</sup> *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"* His arrogance continued. He dared to lie to God just as his parents had. He has taken the first life, committed the first murder, and he brazenly lied to God about it. He spouted that famous rebuff to the LORD, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* Do I look after my brother like he looks after sheep? The first humans had not figured out that the LORD is all-knowing. There is an irony in Cain's answer. Are we our brother's keeper? Are we supposed to look out for one another? We are not only supposed to look out for one another, but we are supposed to love one another. (John 15:12) Where is your brother or sister in Christ fellow Christian? Don't tell me you are not their keeper!

<sup>10</sup> *The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."* <sup>11</sup> *Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.* The book of Hebrews reminds us that Abel was a person of faith. He offered his sacrifice in faith, not looking to his own righteousness, but to the graciousness of God. (Hebrews 11:4) It goes on to say that even though he died, his faith still speaks to us. Just as his blood cried out from the ground to God because of the injustice of that murder, his

**Commented [notes16]:** 8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.  
1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.  
Romans 6:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.  
John 15:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** 4 By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.  
Heb 11:4 (NIV)

faith cries out to us as believers. It teaches us to humble ourselves before the LORD and the offering of our lives will be accepted.

Cain was already in a cursed world and dealing with the curse on Adam, the curse of thorns and weeds. Now he would have an additional curse. The ground would not as readily yield its fruit to him. You see, we live in a fallen world and inherit some of the curses of those who have gone before us, but we can add to those even more by our own deliberate arrogant rebellion against God. There is an interesting connection here between the sins of man and the fruitfulness of the earth. (2Chronicles 7:13-14) Moses warned that if Israel would not obey God that the land would suffer. (Deuteronomy 11:17) Sin affects our environment. It is my conviction that our climate is affected not only by natural cycles but also by our lifestyles, for good or bad. We've seen how revival can heal the physical land as well.

<sup>16</sup> So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain was destined to be a wanderer. He was worried about others taking vengeance on him and asked God for mercy. God marked him so that no one would execute him and warned that their sentence would be seven times as tough if they did.

Cain went out from the LORD's presence. Apparently, Adam and Eve had returned to a right relationship with God. The first family again enjoyed the presence of God. But now, Cain would go by himself from that community. He would depend on his natural strength and wisdom. You can do a lot with natural ability, but it won't amount to anything eternal. The physical will never fill the void in our hearts. Success and fame can't fill us either.

As we will see in next Sunday, Cain made the most of his banishment. His sentence was light by worldly standards, but by God's standards it was severe. He went out from the presence of the Lord. Those of you who live in the presence of the Lord shudder at the thought. You know you cannot make it on your own and how often you have depended on His presence to see you through. Cain's arrogance had mastered him, and he let it continue to reign over his life. He was a slave of his own desires. (John 8:34) We will see his arrogance again in the lives of his descendants.

This passage has shown us the first birth, the first offering, and the first murder. The first birth shows us the wonder and grace of God tinged with the judgment on sin. The first offering tells us that God looks on the heart of the giver more than the gift itself. The first murder shows us that sin can master us if we will not master it. Our news of late has given us examples of men that have been mastered by sin. In Cain's case, envy went to hatred, hatred to rage, and rage to the taking of life made in the image of God. Jesus said that is the work of the thief, referring to Satan. (John 10:10)

Let me close with the word of the LORD to Cain and to all of us. <sup>7</sup> *If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.* "We can choose between only two. The LORD Jesus will master us and we will master sin, or sin will master us.

**Commented [notes20]:** 13 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 2 Chron 7:13-14 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** 17 Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you. Deut 11:17 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. John 8:34 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 (NIV)

Which will it be for you? Are you living in the presence of the Lord? Those who are mastered by Jesus love to be in His presence. Those who are mastered by sin live like Cain, away from the presence of the Lord.