

# It Didn't Start with the Stone

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**Springboard Scripture:** Genesis 4:3–8

**Thesis:** Sin is never an isolated event; it is a progression that begins with a heart problem (unbelief), festers in pride, and ends in spiritual death if unchecked.

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## BLOOM'S TAXONOMY OBJECTIVES

LEVEL	OBJECTIVE
<b>Knowledge</b>	Identify the three stages of Cain's fall as revealed in Genesis, Hebrews, and 1 John.
<b>Analysis</b>	Examine the relationship between "doing well" (obedience) and "countenance falling" (guilt/anger).
<b>Application</b>	Detect the "crouching" of sin in our own lives before it strikes.

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## HOOK

We all know how the story ends. It ends with a body in a field and a brother with blood on his hands. It is the first murder in human history. But if you think the sin happened when Cain picked up the rock, you are missing the point. That wasn't the beginning of the sin; that was the graduation ceremony.

We tend to look at the explosion. God looks at the fuse.

## INTRODUCTION

We love to play the role of the judge, don't we? We have our mental clipboards where we rank sins. Murder? That's a felony; that's a "Class A" sin. Gossip? That's just a hobby. Skipping

worship? That's just a busy schedule. Resenting your brother? That's just "venting."

But here is the hard truth: God doesn't own a color-coded chart. To Him, sin isn't about the size of the wreckage; it's about the direction of the heart.

In Genesis 4, we don't see a monster appearing out of nowhere. Cain didn't drop out of the sky with a pitchfork. He was a farmer. He was a brother. He was a *worshiper*. If you met him the week before, you would have seen a religious man bringing an offering to God. But underneath that religious exterior, a cancer was growing.

He didn't wake up one morning and decide, "I think I'll invent murder today." He woke up a man who thought his opinion mattered more than God's command. He woke up a man who let a little bit of jealousy sit in the living room of his heart until it took over the whole house.

James 1:14–15 gives us the terrifying formula: Desire conceives sin, sin grows up, and it brings forth death. Cain is Case Study #1. We tend to focus on the rock in his hand, but God focuses on the rebellion in his heart.

If we want to understand how a brother becomes a killer, we have to stop looking at the crime scene and start looking at the altar.

Let's dissect this.

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## **I. THE ROOT: UNBELIEF IN WORSHIP (GENESIS 4:3–5; HEBREWS 11:4)**

The text says "in the course of time," or literally "at the end of days," they brought offerings. This wasn't a surprise inspection. This was a designated time for worship.

Abel brought the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. Cain brought the fruit of the ground.

God accepted Abel. He rejected Cain.

### **Why?**

People have argued about this for centuries. Was it because it wasn't blood? Was it because Cain's fruit was rotten? Stop guessing and let the Scripture speak. The Holy Spirit interprets the Old Testament for us in Hebrews 11:4:

*"By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain..." (Hebrews 11:4, NASB 1995)*

That phrase "by faith" is the key that unlocks the whole mystery. We know from Romans 10:17 that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

You cannot act "by faith" unless God has spoken.

- If God says "Go," and you go—that is faith.
- If God says nothing, and you go—that is presumption.
- If God says "Do A," and you "Do B"—that is rebellion.

For Abel to offer "by faith," God must have given them specific instructions on what He required. Abel heard the instruction, believed the instruction, and obeyed the instruction.

Cain heard the same instruction, but he had a better idea. He decided to freelance. He engaged in what Paul calls "will-worship" or "self-made religion" in Colossians 2:23. It looked like worship. It felt like worship. It involved a sacrifice and an altar. But because it didn't come from God's command, it came from Cain's will.

Jesus warned about this exact attitude in Matthew 15:8–9:

*"This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." (NASB 1995)*

Did you catch that? Worship can be **vain**. It can be empty. You can sing the songs, bow your head, and bring your checkbook, and God can look at it and say, "I never asked for this."

We see this same principle with Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10:1–2. They were priests. They had censers. They had fire. But the text says they offered "strange fire... which He had not commanded them." And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them.

It wasn't about whether the fire was hot; it was about whether the fire was **authorized**.

**Illustration:**

*Imagine you hire a contractor to build a deck on your house. You give him the blueprints. He ignores them, builds a gazebo instead, and says, "Look how hard I worked on this! Look how beautiful the wood is!"*

*You aren't going to pay him. You might even fire him. Why? Not because he didn't work hard. Not because the gazebo isn't pretty. But because he didn't do what you asked. He did what he wanted.*

Cain's problem wasn't just his produce; it was his presumption. He didn't approach God on God's terms. He approached God on Cain's terms. He wanted to worship God without submitting to God.

### **Application:**

We live in a religious world that is obsessed with style, preference, and entertainment. People ask, "Did you like the worship today?" or "Did that speak to you?"

Those are the wrong questions. The audience of worship is not you. The audience is God. The question isn't "Did I like it?" The question is "Did He accept it?"

When we start introducing things into the worship of the church that God did not command—whether it's mechanical instruments because we like the sound, or changing the Lord's Supper to a quarterly event because it's "more convenient"—we are standing in Cain's shoes.

We are saying, "God, I know what your Book says, but I think this is better." That is the root of the fall. It is unbelief masquerading as devotion.

## **II. THE REACTION: PRIDE OVER REPENTANCE (GENESIS 4:5–7; 1 PETER 5:8)**

Look at Cain's reaction when his "freelance worship" gets rejected. Does he say, "I'm sorry, Lord, let me go get the right sacrifice"? Does he say, "Thank you for showing me the pattern"?

No.

*"So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell." (Genesis 4:5, NASB 1995)*

The Hebrew text here paints a picture of a man burning up with heat (anger) and his face dropping (depression/pouting). He is humiliated, and instead of letting that humiliation lead to repentance, he lets it turn into resentment.

This is the pivot point. This is where the man turns into the monster.

Notice God's grace here. God didn't strike him dead on the spot. He didn't have to speak to Cain at all. But He does. He comes to him as a Father and asks two diagnostic questions:

*"Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?" (Genesis 4:6)*

God is trying to get Cain to look in the mirror. He is forcing Cain to admit that the problem isn't God—the problem is Cain. And then, God gives him the remedy. It is simple, it is doctrinal, and it is conditional:

*"If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted?" (Genesis 4:7)*

Do not miss that word **"IF."**

We live in a world that wants to tell you that God accepts you "just as you are," no matter what you do. That is a lie. God tells Cain, "You will be accepted **IF** you do well." Acceptance follows obedience. If you want to feel better, you have to *do* better. You have to submit to the authority of Scripture.

But then comes the warning. And it is one of the most chilling verses in the Old Testament:

*"And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:7)*

### **The Exegesis:**

The word for "crouching" here is *robets*. It refers to a predator lying in wait. It's the same language Peter uses in the New Testament:

*"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8, NASB 1995)*

God is telling Cain: "You are standing on the front porch of your life, pouting about a worship service, and you don't realize there is a tiger in the bushes ready to rip your throat out."

The text says sin's "desire" is for you. It wants to dominate you. It wants to own you. But God says: "You must master it."

That command destroys the false doctrine of "I couldn't help myself." God told Cain he had a choice. He had the power to say "No." He had the power to rule over his emotions.

### **Anecdote:**

*Think of a wild animal, a lion, hiding in the tall grass. It doesn't roar when it's stalking. It waits. It's silent. It waits for you to step off the path. That is what God told Cain. "Your anger is opening the door, and the beast is waiting."*

*You can't play with a lion. You can't keep a rattlesnake as a pet and be surprised when it bites you. Cain was toying with his anger, nursing his grudge, feeding it scraps from the table, and God warned him: "It's going to eat you alive."*

Cain had a choice right there: Humble himself, repent, and go get a sheep from his brother to offer the right sacrifice... or let his pride drive.

He chose pride. He was more concerned with his bruised ego than his standing with God.

### **Application:**

Let's bring this into the pew. When you are corrected by the Word of God—maybe in a sermon like this one, maybe in a Bible class, or maybe an elder pulls you aside—what is your reaction?

Do you get mad at the preacher? Do you say, "Who does he think he is?" Do you stop coming on Sunday nights?

Galatians 4:16 asks, *"So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?"*

If you get angry at the truth, you are feeding the beast. When you leave the church building mad because the sermon stepped on your toes, you are walking right out the door where sin

is crouching. You are doing exactly what Cain did.

Stop pouting. Stop making excuses. "Do well," and you will be accepted.

### III. THE RESULT: HATRED OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (GENESIS 4:8; 1 JOHN 3:12; JOHN 3:19–20)

We know the act. "Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him."

Notice the setting. Genesis 4:8 says, "Cain told Abel his brother." Some translations supply the conversation: *"Let us go out to the field."*

This wasn't an accident. This wasn't a crime of passion in the heat of the moment. This was premeditated. Cain took him away from the parents, away from the altar, out into the field where no one could see. He planned it.

But why? Why kill the only brother you have? Why kill a man who has done you no wrong?

1 John 3:12 gives us the motive that Genesis only hints at:

*"...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." (NASB 1995)*

Read that carefully. It doesn't say Cain killed him because they had a property dispute. It doesn't say he killed him over an inheritance.

He killed him because Abel was **righteous**.

This is a hard truth about the nature of sin: **Darkness hates the light.**

Jesus explained this in John 3:20:

*"For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."*

Abel's obedience made Cain's disobedience look bad. Abel didn't have to say a word. His faithfulness was a silent sermon that screamed at Cain's conscience. Cain looked at Abel and

saw his own failure.

Cain had two choices to stop the pain of that conviction:

- I. Change his own heart (Repentance).
- II. Eliminate the source of the conviction (Persecution).

Cain didn't want to raise his standard to meet God's; he wanted to destroy the standard. So he eliminated the man who was keeping it.

### **Illustration:**

*It is like the student in a math class who fails a test because he refused to study. He looks across the aisle and sees a student who got an 'A'.*

*That 'A' student didn't do anything to the 'F' student. He didn't mock him. He just passed. But the 'F' student hates him. Why? Because the 'A' student proves that passing was possible. He is a living reminder of the lazy student's failure.*

*You can't kill the grade, so you want to beat up the student.*

### **Application:**

Jude 11 warns about those who have "gone the way of Cain."

What is the way of Cain? It is attacking the person who is trying to do right.

We see this in the church. When a brother stands up and says, "We need to follow the Scripture on this," or "We can't fellowship this error," how is he treated? Is he thanked? Or is he labeled a legalist? Is he gossiped about? Is he pushed out?

If you resent a brother because his strict obedience makes your loose living look bad, you have murder in your heart. You are trying to kill the messenger because you hate the message.

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### **CONCLUSION**

Cain's story is a tragedy, but it's also a mirror.

It shows us that sin is a progression. It didn't start with a murder in a field.

- I. It started with **Unbelief** at the altar ("I'll do it my way").
- II. It grew into **Pride** when corrected ("I'm not wrong, God is unfair").
- III. It ended in **Persecution** of the righteous ("I have to silence the conviction").

You might be sitting there thinking, "Well, Preacher, I've never killed anyone."

I'm sure you haven't. But let's check your heart:

- Have you worshiped God based on your preferences rather than His authority?
- Have you gotten angry when the Scripture corrected a sin in your life?
- Have you lashed out at a faithful Christian because their example made you feel guilty?

If so, the spirit of Cain is alive and well. And God says to you today exactly what He said to Cain: *"Sin is crouching at the door... but you must master it."*

How do you master it? You can't do it alone. You certainly can't do it by pouting. You master it by submitting to the Master. You need to come back to the Father's way.

The Bible gives us the plan to crush that rebellion and be restored to God:

- I. **Hear** the warning. Faith comes by hearing the Word, not your feelings (Romans 10:17).
- II. **Believe** that God is who He says He is, and that Jesus is the Christ (John 8:24).
- III. **Repent** of the pride, the anger, and the self-will. Turn around (Acts 17:30).
- IV. **Confess** Jesus as Lord. If He is Lord, He calls the shots, not you (Romans 10:10).
- V. **Be Baptized** for the remission of your sins. Wash away the hatred, wash away the guilt, and rise to walk in newness of life (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16).

Don't let sin master you. Don't be like Cain who walked away from the presence of the Lord. Master it today through obedience to the Gospel.