



"[T]he line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"  
—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

03-Jun-11

## *Cain's Assumption (Part Two)*

As we saw last time, Abel brought an offering that was acceptable to [God](#), while Cain—who must have been given the same instructions—did not. One possible explanation for Cain's inappropriate offering can be inferred from [Genesis 3:13-15](#):

And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

We recognize verse 15 as a prophecy regarding the Messiah to come, who would be bruised by [Satan](#) yet ultimately conquer him. But did Cain understand this? Could he have thought the "Seed"—the offspring—of the woman referred to *him*? After all, he was the seed of Eve. Along these same lines, when Seth was born, Eve gave him that name because "God has appointed *another seed* for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed" ([Genesis 4:25](#); emphasis ours). Her focus was still on *her* seed and undoubtedly, the prophecy of One who would "bruise the head" of Satan was still in her mind after her first two sons were precluded from fulfilling it.

Is it possible that Cain saw himself as the great protagonist, the conqueror of

Satan—even the Savior of [the world](#)? Did Cain literally have a "Messiah complex," inserting himself into this prophecy? Did he assume that this prophecy *must* come to pass in his day, and thus *he* must be the object of it? This is only a theory, but if it is true, it answers a great deal.

If Cain believed that he was the promised Seed, it may explain the offering he gave. It was of the "fruit of the ground," meaning some sort of grain, which would point to him making a [meal offering](#). The meal offering symbolizes a man's wholehearted commitment to his fellow man, and it is associated with the last six of the [Ten Commandments](#). It is appallingly ironic, then, that following his offering, Cain coveted Abel's acceptance, *killed* his fellow man, dishonored his parents, and then lied to God by rhetorically asking, "Am I my brother's keeper?" ([Genesis 4:9](#)). He may have brought an offering that symbolized devotion to his fellow man, but his heart was far from being devoted to much of anything except himself.

Additionally, in God's instructions, the meal offering could only be offered after the whole burnt offering was given, symbolizing a person's wholehearted devotion to God (parallel to the first four commandments). The lesson behind these two offerings is that a man cannot be truly devoted to his brother without *first* being fully devoted to God. To offer the meal offering without the burnt offering is saying, in effect, that one could have a good relationship with one's neighbor without the proper worship of God. The offerings teach that this is impossible, and the story of Cain demonstrates the result of trying.

Moreover, before a person could offer either the burnt or the meal offering, he first had to offer a [sin offering](#) to acknowledge his sins and to make propitiation (in type). In the symbolism, just as trying to be devoted to one's neighbor without properly worshipping God first is futile, so is trying to be devoted to either God or man without first acknowledging sin and seeking atonement and [forgiveness](#). Yet it appears that this is exactly what Cain was signifying with his offering.

God's intent behind blood sacrifices was to remind people of sin and point to the need for a Savior. Abel fulfilled this by offering "of the firstborn of his flock." By not offering a blood sacrifice, Cain was essentially saying that he did not need to be reminded of sin or to consider a Savior. Did he act this way because he believed that he *was* the Savior? The Savior would have no need to atone for his own sin. Clearly, Cain's mistake was in not getting the whole story regarding himself before acting so presumptuously.

If he believed that he was the Messiah, it would also explain his extreme reaction when God corrected him. If Cain had been [poor in spirit](#), [meek](#), or [pure in heart](#), he would have taken the correction, repented, changed, and moved on. However, his angry reaction

does not indicate a willingness to learn, but only a desire to be "right." God's rebuke, then, would have come as quite a shock—after all, why should the promised Seed be rebuked? His reaction may indicate one whose dream had just been shattered, who has suddenly come face to face with the sinful reality about himself. Even then, it was a reality he was unwilling to accept, seen in the fact that he destroyed the other human witness and then lied to the Judge. These are the actions of a self-centered man who felt deeply threatened. Who he thought he was—his position, his image, his role—was threatened, causing him to respond so defensively.

In his warning against false Christians, Jude refers to the "way of Cain" ([Jude 11](#)), and the rest of the epistle provides details about the men he is warning against ([Jude 3-4](#), 8, 10-18). To summarize, the "way of Cain" is religion or worship on one's own terms, even though the person may claim loyalty to God and use the Bible to some degree to back up his practices. If Cain thought that he was a messianic figure, he certainly would have been following a religion on his own terms! As Jude shows, the way of Cain manifests itself in unbelief, rebellion against authority, perversion, ungodliness, turning God's [grace](#) into license, and denying the Father and the Son—not denying their existence but denying God's authority and the need for Christ's sacrifice and redemptive work. Jude shows that those linked with the way of Cain are grumblers and complainers, living according to their own desires, using flattery to gain advantage, seeking material wealth, and causing division, yet having a veneer of righteousness and spirituality.

The story of Cain reveals a man who was not nearly interested enough in the whole story, particularly the [truth](#) about himself. He made assumptions regarding his standing with God, what God required and desired, God's grace, and how prophecy must be fulfilled. He was not interested in details that would contradict who he was—or who he thought he was.

Sometimes, as in this speculation regarding Cain, we cannot know the whole story. But it is definitely in our best interest to find out the whole story when it comes to where we stand with God and how we should be responding to Him. Cain lost interest in these things because he decided he already knew "the rest of the story." We need not share in Cain's wretched ending if we will make the effort to get all the facts straight and all the details worked out regarding our understanding of God, our standing with Him, and our following His will for our lives.

- David C. Grabbe

---

*From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

**[Parables of Matthew 13 \(Part 2\): Leaven](#)**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh reiterates that the Kingdom of God or of Heaven has past (Hebrews 11:13), present (Hebrews 12:22), and future (Hebrews 12:28) aspects. The Kingdom parables primarily provide instruction for the present aspect, a time when struggle and suffering are part of the mix (Matthew 11:12). The first parables of Matthew 13 reveal Satan's battle plan to: (1) attack in the early stages of development, (2) infiltrate with secret agents, (3) cause the church to grow large and worldly, exceeding God's prescribed limits, and (4) corrupt by false doctrine, destroying the relationships between the brethren. These parables describe the last quarter century in the church of God.

---

*From the Archives: Featured Article*

**[The Offerings of Leviticus \(Part Two\): The Burnt Offering](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The first of the offerings of Leviticus is the burnt offering, a sacrifice that is completely consumed on the altar. John Ritenbaugh shows how this type teaches us about Christ's total dedication to God—and how we should emulate it.

---

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

---