

**Introduction:** As I end my fourth week I am happy to report we seem to have left our scheduling problems behind. Although the attendance was still down, it was not due to a lack of information about the meeting, or the time needed to make plans to attend.

We were in the mountains of Ntchisi this week, climbing steep dirt roads that were very bumpy and dusty, but the views were spectacular. We were able to see the fringes of Ntchisi forest and also the Nkota-kota game reserve. Since we were in a different place each day, we spent the nights sleeping in different villages. This is often challenging as we never know what type of house we will sleep in. So far this year we have been allowed to sleep in the nicer homes of the teachers, built by the government as part of their salary. With concrete floors to spread out a bamboo mat and iron sheets for a roof, we live in "luxury." We had lunch in a home made of mud, with a grass roof, a mud floor, and no windows. It was dark, and smelled strongly of earth. I haven't slept in one yet this year. We just take each day as it comes to us and thank God for it. I have learned a lot about the difficult life of preachers here in Malawi, so I try to never complain since they do this every time they preach in the villages for their entire life.

For some reason most of the churches this year want to hear the same basic lessons on Christian growth, the family, and life after death. But occasionally I get an opportunity to speak on something different. In one congregation I spoke about the importance of the examples God has left for us in the lives He recorded in the Old Testament.

I began with Romans 15:4 where Paul stated that "*whatever was written before*" (OT Scriptures) were left for our learning so we could, through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures, have hope. I then contrast what we are to learn from the evil examples of some and the good examples of others. The Spirit used the example of the children of Israel after they left Egypt to force us to see that after God used His power and mercy to save them, He was forced to curse and destroy them in the wilderness (1Cor. 10:1-13). Paul plainly stated we face the same dangers and the same fate unless we remove the sins that destroyed them from our own lives. The Holy Spirit also used the good examples of many as "*a great cloud of witnesses*" to testify of the power of faith to make us great (Heb. 11:1 - 12:3).

Thus the standard of using the lives of those who lived before us is clearly revealed. The events in their lives are often similar to ones we face today, since there is "*nothing new under the sun.*" With life "*under the sun*" being an ever-repeating cycle, we often face the same challenges and temptations they did. By studying their examples we can avoid the fate of those who fell and also be encouraged by those who remained faithful.

Both Peter and Jude warned Christians that the false prophets seeking to deceive those who lived before Christ are so similar to the false teachers of today, we should use them as guideposts and signs to point them out (2Pet. 2:1-3). What Noah faced before the flood and Lot faced before the destruction of Sodom were used to help us deal with any wickedness we may face in our own lives. Jude took it a step further, warning that false teachers would enter the church unnoticed and soon make their influence felt. "*For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation.*"

Although they may not be noticed immediately, Jude said they were "*long ago marked out*" and that we could use those *marks* to identify them. He later revealed that those "*marks*" could be seen by looking at the example of three men: "*Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah*" (Jude 11). It is evident God expects us to use the "*way of Cain,*" the "*error of Balaam*" and the "*rebellion of Korah,*" to identify and avoid or remove them.

### **The way of Cain**

While most associate the name of Cain with the murder of his brother Abel, Jude's words force us to take a closer look. The apostle John also revealed that the murder came later and was actually the result of an earlier sin:

*“not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.” (1Jn. 3:12)*

It was the “evil works” Cain had already done that led him to kill Abel. John added that the murder occurred after Cain compared his own works to those of Abel and saw his were evil and Abel's righteous. Jesus added that Abel was the first prophet murdered as a result of persecution: *“the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah” (Lk. 11:50-51).*

So the way of Cain had already been created before the murder. Since the only recorded thing both Cain and Abel did was their worship, this must be the heart of the way of Cain. We are forced to this conclusion with the explanation given in Hebrews: *“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”*

Abel's righteous works occurred when he *“by faith offered a more excellent sacrifice.”* This “faith” led God to *“witness that he was righteous,”* by *“testifying of his gifts.”* When God accepted Abel, though he is dead he still speaks and is part of our great cloud of witnesses. When God rejected Cain He testified those works were evil. This is *“the way of Cain.”*

Anyone who comes among us must listen to Abel and flee the way of Cain. But if someone seeks to offer worship to God without faith, he is following Cain. Jesus also spoke of this problem quoting Isaiah: *“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 7 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men” (Mk. 7:6-8).*

Cain was the first one to substitute the doctrine of men (his own thinking) for God's commands (by faith). His worship was also vain as God clearly rejected it. He created and forged the way that those Isaiah was speaking about were following and Jude told us such people are still following it today.

Anyone who replaces faith in God's commands with his own ideas is walking in the way of Cain. If we reject what God says about singing and making melody *“in”* the heart, or having *men* praying in every place we are following the way of Cain (man's doctrine) and our worship is vain! While those who take the Lord's supper (breaking bread) every first day of the week, and preach only the word of God are walking by faith and heeding the words that Abel is still speaking.

Jesus said it best. True worshipers (like Abel) worship in spirit (inner man in submission to God) and truth (guided by God's word). Since God is Spirit, we can't worship Him without His guidance. Thus those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth (and flee the way of Cain).

*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23-24*