

## **GOD'S DISCIPLINE UPON HIS DISOBEDIENT CHILDREN**

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From the very beginning and throughout all the ages, God has been revealing Himself as a gracious and holy God. He is love, yet He cannot stand sin. When Satan rebelled God sentenced him along with all those who were with him. When Adam and Eve were disobedient, He judged them accordingly. In this period His judgments were even more detailed, whether in His outstanding judgment upon the whole world or in individual cases.

When Cain appeared with a long face, an indication of his evil heart, God unfolded His preventive grace by telling him that He was not a partial God. He told him that if he would listen to Him and do his best, he would have the same respect as Abel had. For a while this preventive grace did affect him, because the Scriptures say Cain did speak to Abel, which might mean he related to Abel about what God had reasoned with him. Before long however Cain rejected God's grace and committed fratricide. Again, God came to him but with two questions similar to those He had previously asked Adam, saying, "Where is Abel your brother?" and "What have you done?" God certainly knew both answers. He did not ask Cain in order to secure information but to give him a hint of his spiritual condition, in hope that his conscience might be awakened and he might repent from what he had done. Cain again hardened his heart and denied his sins. As a result God had to discipline him, by causing the ground to withhold its yield and by banishing him from His presence as a displaced person wandering here and there (Gen. 4:1-14).

God's discipline always comes, but only after He has used all the mercy at His disposal. Before the coming of the flood, God gave the people 120 years for repentance. Before the exile of the children of Israel, God endured them until they would give their ear to Him no more (See Neh. 9:30). Before the destruction of Jerusalem, the Lord had tried again and again to gather the Jews under His protection, but they would not; then the Lord said, "Behold, your house [temple] is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:38). Even now "the Lord is not slack concerning His promise . . . but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). When His children are in misery, He is grieved (Judg. 10:16); in all their afflictions, He is afflicted (Is. 63:9). In other words, each time His own are suffering, the Lord suffers also, and He suffers even more than they do! When He heard the sound of the trumpet and the alarm of war approaching Judah, His heart was broken. He said, "My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart . . ." (Jer. 4:19). And in response to Cain's appeal, "that every one that finds me shall slay me," He set a mark upon him for his protection.

In summary, Cain was disobedient to God's institution by bringing an improper sacrifice to Him; he envied and resented his brother; he rejected God's offer of reconciliation; he committed premeditated murder; he lied to God; and he affronted God's justice. As a result he was both banished from the presence of Yahweh and rejected by the earth. Yet God would grant him a protecting mark to guard him. No

wonder one of the distant revelations says, “But You are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsook them not” (Neh. 9:17).

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