

is probably the text that the writer of Hebrews had in mind when he wrote, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and by it many be defiled..."

In other cases, the poison is animosity. A resentment which usually grows out of a breakdown in interpersonal relations. Another term which is used to describe this kind of bitterness is the word "grudge." The poison works in the host to distort reality and create a picture of the person disliked which has little or no basis in fact. It stirs up passions and plans directed toward the hurt of the other. It eats away incessantly until it dominates the thoughts and actions of the embittered person. Such bitterness is serious business and is a common factor in interpersonal conflict.

Genesis chapter four records the conflict involving Cain and Abel. This account of the first murder in human history is terse, but reveals the ugliness of bitter hatred and its results. It is also a clear example of interpersonal breakdown which cannot be blamed on environmental conditioning or genetically related instability. Though Cain and Abel lived in a sinful world, they were only a generation away from a sinless utopia. Also, even though Adam and Eve had sinned against God, they had not forgotten God. It is probable that they instructed their children in the principles and practices necessary to a right relationship with the God who made them.

It is impossible to understand how such a heinous crime could occur in the first household apart from understanding the nature of