

PREFACE

Chapter One of Genesis records the basic sequences, in bullet-point form, of the Creation: the universe as a whole, earth, vegetation, the earth's sun and moon, living creatures in the water and in the air, living creatures on the land, then the first man and woman—all in that order.

Chapter Two adds more detail to the Creation process, especially regarding humankind, laying the foundation for the tragic third chapter.

Chapter Three records the terrible downfall of man and the introduction of sin into the world, initiated by Satan through his servant the serpent, resulting in Yahweh God's stern judgment upon all three parties, and even the earth itself. The chapter closes with the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, summarily ejected from Paradise, consigned to work the more challenging, less-fertile and weed-infested land outside the Garden.

We now come to Chapter Four, which serves—with the introduction of the supposed first children—as a portal into the subsequent generations, itemized in Chapter Five.

Read Genesis 4:1-8.

As we have experienced before in this study, a cursory reading of this passage seemingly leaves us with more questions than answers.

- Does v1 document the *first* time Adam and Eve had sexual relations, just the first time their relations bore fruit, or were their other children before Cain?
- What was happening between these two births and when the two (young?) men were old enough to tend the flocks and the fields?
- What knowledge or commands about offerings to Yahweh were understood by them, and how did they receive them?

- Why is there no mention in the account—even going all the way back to Genesis 1:1—of Yahweh explaining His preference for blood sacrifice? Or *is* that what is going on here? What *was* it about Cain’s offering that made it unacceptable to Yahweh?
- Did Cain knowingly make an inferior offering? Did Abel knowingly make a proper offering? Or were they just offering from their respective materials at hand? That is, did Cain know better?

We look forward to discovering answers to at least some of these questions as we proceed.

And as we move forward we are reminded once again of the standard confusing, even *frustrating* dichotomy: On the one hand, these events—an illicit offering, deceit, murder, another banishment—do not represent Yahweh God’s ideal for the earth and its people; it is not how He would have it. On the other hand, however, we believe the eternal Godhead had mapped all this out—including the need for a Savior, a Redeemer to atone for these sins—from well before Creation was even initiated.

v1

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a man with the help of Yahweh.”

Let us not pass too quickly over the familiar, and perhaps archaic euphemism “knew,” a reference to the man having conjugal relations with his wife. If one burrows down into that word one finds that it is utterly appropriate, as well as more polite. It speaks of that supernatural union, the *oneness*, “one flesh” of God’s ideal for man and woman in marriage (Genesis 2:24). In that oneness man and woman “know” their mate with a depth and intimate understanding that can be attained no other way. But, of course, here it speaks as well of the physical act necessary to produce offspring, in this case the first male child.

As with the possible eating of the fruit from the tree of life, one can only conclude from the way this is phrased that either this was the first time the couple had had relations—or prior to this there had been no issue from the act.

...and she said, "I have gotten a man with the help of Yahweh."

There is a loose connection between the name "Cain,"—Hebrew *qayin* (kine)—and the verb translated "I have gotten"—Hebrew *qanah*. We won't dwell on that etymology, ☞ as it can be rather confusing and, ultimately, less important than what Eve says about it and what she means.

The interpretation of the Hebrew phrase, rendered in the LSB, "with the help of Yahweh" or in the KJVs "from the Lord," is accepted by all our common versions. That is, Eve is declaring openly that Yahweh has graciously been a part of this first birth—not an inconsequential credit, since it wasn't that long ago that Yahweh had kicked them out of Paradise to fend for themselves in the wild. Apparently she is not holding a grudge. She even puts it in the terminology of a gift, of having acquired something from someone else—i.e., the Lord.

The Hebrew text in this portion of the verse is challenging, leading a few scholars to translate it something like, "I have the man, the Lord," as did Luther, or "I have created a man equally with the Lord"—i.e., "a boast that just as the Lord had created a man, so now she had created a man" (Sailhamer)—which could mean either *she* is equal to the Lord as a creator, or that the child himself is divine.

To be fair to Eve, one can imagine that she might in ignorance draw a similarity between God's fashioning of man and her body doing the same, especially if there had been only nominal communication on this from Yahweh God to the man and woman. And remember what we know Yahweh *did* say to to the serpent, presumably in the hearing of Eve:

Read Genesis 3:15.

Well, here is her "seed," her first seed; it would seem a natural conclusion drawn by her that this firstborn was the prophesied "seed" that would have victory over the serpent, and perhaps even divine.

That being said, one can readily see how the vast majority of translators went with the more pious and reverential translation common to our versions.

Albert Barnes: Cain occurs only once as a common noun, and is rendered by the Septuagint *doru*, "spear-shaft." The primitive meaning of the root is to set up, or to erect, as a cane, a word which comes from the root; then it means to create, make one's own. Hence, the word here seems to denote a thing gained or achieved, a figurative expression for a child born.

v2

And again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a cultivator of the ground.

In this verse we see a dramatic compression of time. How long was it between the two births? We are not told. And Moses deems it unnecessary to offer even a glimpse of the upbringing of the two lads; they are born and immediately they are out conducting their respective work-a-day occupations—either as adults or, at least, older youth. Both are farmers, like their dad: Cain tends the crops, while his younger brother tends the beasts.

Guzik: We see agriculture and the domestication of animals were practiced among the earliest humans. Adam and his descendants did not spend tens of thousands of years living as hunter-gatherer cave dwellers.

A number of different conclusions have been drawn over the meaning of Abel's name (Hebrew *hebel*), which means vapor, breath, vanity, emptiness, futility. All these conclusions focus on what may have been in the mind of Eve—a resource which, frankly, remains closed to us. Neither can we conclude, as some do, that Eve herself named the child; we are told nothing about the source of the names of either child.

vv3-5

So it happened in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to Yahweh of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part, also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And Yahweh had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell.

Moses makes one more leap in time in v3.

So it happened in the course of time...

The KJVs have it “in the process of time.” The phrase means (as YLT has it) “at the end of days.” The implication from this is that this represents a considerable span of time—and there is no reason to think this was the *first* such offering. Neither need we assume this was performed after a dictate laid down by Yahweh. Leupold, for one, makes a solid case (as does history itself) for such sacrifices rising out of an inherent impulse in human nature. ➡

Many years ago, having written a musical that had enjoyed a successful run, one day it occurred to me, in a fit of joy and thanksgiving to God, to take a copy of the script out onto the patio and offer it as a burnt sacrifice of devotion to God.

Cain brought an offering to Yahweh of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part, also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.

Read Hebrews 11:4.

If you are like me you have grown up with the idea that Abel's sacrifice was more acceptable to Yahweh because it was a blood, a fleshly sacrifice, whereas Cain's was not accepted because it was *not* a blood sacrifice. But that is not correct.

First, if we compare these to the Mosaic Law, both of these would have a resemblance closest to the Feast of Weeks or the Feast of Ingathering or Booths, when the harvest was celebrated and the very first and best of the harvest was offered to God in thanksgiving and praise for another bountiful harvest.

Read Exodus 34:21-22, 26.

In the text these are called "offerings," not sacrifices, although in a broad, general sense the word "sacrifice" used in the Hebrews passage (Greek *thysia*) can include non-bloody offerings.

But, of course, these covenantal feasts were only in the mind of the chronicler—not the characters in Genesis. Both brothers were simply conducting a simple, traditional ceremony giving thanks to Yahweh for their food, each offering from the fruits of their respective areas of labor. As the Mosaic Law reveals, there is nothing substandard about offering produce when the practice has nothing to do with atonement (to expiate sin) or salvation, such as Passover or the Day of Atonement, where the shedding of blood is explicitly called for. The Hebrew word here translated "offering" is *minhah*, which covers "any type of gift man may bring" (Leupold).

Leupold: Neither of the two sacrifices is made specifically for sin. Nothing in the account points in this direction. Consequently, the merit of the one over against the other does not lie in the fact that it was a bloody offering. The nature of the sacrifice as to its material is determined entirely by the occupation of him who brings it.

In fact, throughout the narrative one should carefully guard against imputing to these sacrifices things that we cannot prove to have been part of them. We are not even sure that an altar was built for the purpose. The first altar is mentioned after the Flood. We cannot prove that fire was employed to consume the sacrifice. That the animal sacrifice was killed is made apparent by the use of the term "fat pieces."

That reference to "fat portions" may offer us one clue as to why Yahweh had regard for Abel's offering; Leviticus 3:16-17 reads,

And the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar as food, an offering by fire for a soothing aroma; all fat is Yahweh's. It is a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your places of habitation: you shall not eat any fat or any blood.

Moses tells us specifically that Abel included the beast's fat portions, and we take that to be an expression, on Abel's part, of obedience and devotion to Yahweh. But Hebrews 11:4 gives us probably the finest clue for why God favored Abel's offering:

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he was approved as being righteous—

It was the condition of Abel's *heart* that made the difference—*not* the composition of his offering. It was his faith in Yahweh that warranted not just Yahweh's acceptance of his offering, but a declaration that he was declared by God to be righteous.

Note one more comparison:

v4: "Abel...brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions." That is, Abel made a righteous offering by giving to God the first and the best of what he had to offer. We are not to give to our God from that which is left over, but right off the top.

As for Cain,

v3: "Cain brought an offering to Yahweh of the fruit of the ground." Absent any descriptive terms, such as the text includes for Abel's offering, we are left to conclude that Cain's offering was simply *pro forma*, just going through the motions because it was the time of the year when one did such things. And as such, because of the apparent coldness of Cain's heart, Yahweh "had no regard" for his offering. Was he contrite, repentant? No, Cain burned with anger (*yiharah*) toward God, and the desire for vengeance against his brother (v8).

SESSION 33

Two Brothers, Two Offerings

Genesis 4:1-5

“knew”

This familiar and archaic euphemism is a reference to the man having conjugal relations with his wife. If one burrows down into that word, however, one finds that it is utterly appropriate, as well as more polite. It speaks of that supernatural union, the *oneness*, “one flesh” of God’s ideal for man and woman in marriage (Genesis 2:24). In that oneness man and woman “know” their mate with a depth and intimate understanding that can be attained no other way. But, of course, here it speaks as well of the physical act necessary to produce offspring, in this case the first male child.

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