

CAIN AND ABEL

Genesis 4:2b–16

BACKGROUND

- Cain was the firstborn of Adam and Eve (4:1)
- the first person born in the human race was an unbeliever and a murderer—a good reason for pause and reflection

INVERTED PARALLELISM

A Cain and Abel Come to the LORD with Gift Offerings to be Blessed (4:2b–4)

□ B The LORD Confronts Cain about his Attitude ("anger") and Behavior ("if you do not do well") (4:5–6)

□ □ C Cain Murders Abel (4:8)

□ B' The LORD Confronts Cain about his Sin of Murder (4:9–10)

A' Cain is Cursed and Leaves the Presence of the LORD (4:11–16)

SACRIFICES OF CAIN AND ABEL

- these are the first recorded sacrifices in the Bible (no account of the origin of sacrifice is given in the Bible)
 - each brought an offering appropriate to his vocation: fruit or grain for Cain, kids or lambs for Abel
- they were brought after the first agricultural year (lit. "at the end of days"—an indefinite period Gen 24:55, or a year Lev 25:29)
- Abel offered the firstborn of the flock and their fat—giving the best of what he had to God (Gen 4:4; cf. Lev 3:16; Exod 34:19)
 - Cain's offering lacks a parallel to firstborn and fat: he offered fruit but not the firstfruits to God—he did not give the best of what he had to God (Gen 4:3–4; cf. "Abel offered...a better *quality* sacrifice than Cain" Heb 11:4)
 - both brothers brought gift offerings (*minchah* in Gen 4:3, 4, 5), not expiatory (sin or guilt) offerings: gift offerings were usually grain—flour, cakes, loaves (Lev 2; 6:14–23), but animals could also be offered (1 Sam 2:17)
- gift offerings were brought to show thanksgiving and submission to God (cf. Gen 43:11–15, 25–26; 1 Sam 10:27; 1 Kings 4:21)
 - the idea of atonement is not present in gift offerings, nor is typology pointing to the sacrifice of the Lamb, Jesus Christ
 - God did not reject Cain's offering because it was bloodless: it was not an expiatory sacrifice
- we don't know how they recognized God's approval: perhaps God torched the offering (cf. Lev 9:24; Judg 6:21; 1 Kings 18:38)
- God first inspected the man and then his offering (Gen 4:4–5): God values the heart condition of the offerer more than the gift
 - Abel had faith (Heb 11:4) and was righteous (Matt 23:35); Cain was evil and belonged to Satan (1 John 3:12; Jude 11)
 - Cain's offering was rejected because of his unbelief ("who was of the evil one" 1 John 3:12), bad attitude (not offering the best of his produce to God, cf. Mal 1:6–14), evil behavior ("if you do not do well" Gen 4:7; "his deeds were evil" 1 John 3:12), and lack of faith (Heb 11:4)—it was rejected because Cain was rejected as a priest to God
 - elsewhere God rejected the gift offerings of Korah (Num 16:15), Saul's men (1 Sam 26:19), and apostate Israel (Isa 1:13)
 - God promised to accept Cain if he did right: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Gen 4:7 NIV)
 - Abel's sacrifice was acceptable, genuine worship; Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable, hypocritical religiosity
- Abel may have brought more than one sacrifice (plural "gifts" in Heb 11:4), perhaps also a sin offering (argument from silence), but "gifts" more likely refer to the number of animals sacrificed—"the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions" (Gen 4:4)

CAIN MURDERS ABEL

- sin (or a door demon) is like a crouching animal ready to pounce and must be ruled over (Gen 4:7; cf. "rule over you" in 3:16)
 - Cain progressed from deficient worship to anger (Gen 4:5), hatred and murder (4:8), and callous sarcasm (4:9)