

Genesis Chapter 4

Then the human knew Havva his wife, and she became pregnant and bore Creator (*Kayin*). She said: “I have created a man, as has Y_{HWH}!” And she bore again, his brother, Vapor (*Hevel*).

Now Hevel became a shepherd of flocks, and Kayin became a worker of the soil.

It was after the passing of days that Kayin brought, from the fruit of the soil, a gift to Y_{HWH}, and as for Hevel, he too brought—from the firstborn of his flock, from their fat-parts. Y_{HWH} had regard for Hevel and his gift, yet for Kayin and his gift he had no regard. Kayin became exceedingly angry and his face fell.

Y_{HWH} said to Kayin:

“Why are you so incensed,
and why has your face fallen?
Is it not thus: If you intend good,
bear-it-aloft,
but if you do not intend good,
at the entrance is sin, a crouching-demon,
toward you his lust—
but you can rule over him.”

Kayin spoke to Hevel his brother... But then it was, when they were out in the field that Kayin rose up against Hevel his brother and he killed him.

Y_{HWH} said to Kayin: “Where is Hevel your brother?”

He said: “I do not know. Am I the watcher of my brother?”

Now he said: “What have you done! Hark—your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil! And now, *damned* be you from the soil, which gaped open its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you wish to work the soil it will not henceforth give its strength to you; wavering and wandering must you be on earth!”

Kayin said to Y_{HWH}: “My punishment is too great to be borne! Here, you drive me away today from the face of the soil, and from your face must I conceal myself! I must be wavering and wandering on earth—now it will be that whoever comes upon me will kill me!”

Y_{HWH} said to him: “No, therefore, whoever kills Kayin, sevenfold will it be avenged!”

So Y_{HWH} set a sign for Kayin, so that whoever came upon him would not strike him down. Kayin went out from the face of Y_{HWH} and settled in the Land of the Restless Life, alienated from Pleasure. Kayin knew his wife; she became pregnant and bore Hanokh. Now he became the builder of a city and called the city’s name according to his son’s name, Hanokh.

To Hanokh was born Irad, Irad begot Mehuyael, Mehuyael begot Metushael, Metushael begot Lemekh.

Lemekh took himself two wives, the name of the one was Ada, the name of the second was Tzilla. Ada bore Yaval, he was the father of those who sit amidst tent and herd. His brother’s name was Yuval, he was the father of all those who play the lyre and the pipe. And Tzilla bore as well—Tuval-Kayin, burnisher of every blade of bronze and iron. Tuval-Kayin’s sister was Naama.

Lemekh said to his wives:

“Ada and Tzilla, hearken to my voice,
wives of Lemekh, give ear to my saying:
Aye—a man I kill for wounding me,
a lad for only bruising me!
Aye—if sevenfold vengeance be for Kayin,
then for Lemekh, seventy-sevenfold!”

Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son. She called his name: “Granted-One (*Shet*)!” meaning: God has granted me another seed in place of Hevel, for Kayin killed him. To Shet as well a son was born, he called his name: Mortal (*Enosh*). At that time they first called out the name of Y_{HWH}.

Thoughts and Questions for Interpretation

- New Testament writers commented on this story from a particular set of rabbinic teachings in their context. Setting that aside, what do we see directly in this story?
- God told the Human in chapter 3 to get his living from the cursed ground; where did Havel's vocation come from?
- Kayin offers an offering to Y_{HWH}, and Havel copies him; why?
- What is Y_{HWH}'s role in this story? Friend, enemy, advocate, provocateur, avenger, protector?
- There are three ancient patterns of livelihood: hunting, herding, and farming. What are the broader implications in contrast of the latter two? What does this passage say about them, especially in reflection on the broader Hebrew Bible context?
- This is the first mention of *sin* in the Hebrew Bible (does not appear in the "Fall" narrative). What is the context and commentary surrounding it? How do humans relate to sin?
- What does this passage say about evil and choice and consequence—and also the limits of consequence?

Themes and Archetypes Introduced

- Two brothers, the younger favored.
- Conflict between the Farmer and the Shepherd.
- Sin leading to exile. ("It is a question whether ancient man saw any distinction at all between banishment and death.")
- The social aspect to sin, expanded from the individual (ch 3).
- The establishment of the city and civilization (arts and crafts).

Translation Notes

Primary translation by Everett Fox (Shoken Bible)

As edited by John Lein

- **formed a man as has** Y_{HWH}: Havva ("life-giver") understands herself acting as God does in giving life: creating.
- **Kayin**: "Cain," to get, to create. See his descendent Tuval-Kayin: "burnisher of every blade of bronze and iron."
- **Hevel**: "Abel," from the Hebrew meaning "mist," "vapor," or "mere breath," translated in Ecclesiastes as "vanity."
- **sin**: this is the first mention of "sin" in the Hebrew Bible
- **spoke to his brother...** The Hebrew text is cut off.
- **blood/soil**: These Hebrew words play together in form: blood/*dam*, soil/*adamah*, human/*adam*, red/*adom*.
- **damned**: or "cursed;" alienation and disconnection.
- **wavering and wandering**: the nomadic life is celebrated in Hebrew stories; this is a state of being haunted and driven.
- **punishment...borne**: The complaint is clearly not of the sin (as Luther taught), but of the sentence itself: banishment.
- **land of the Restless Life**: "Land of Nod" has the connotation of restlessness or misery, a state of being—not geography. To be "East of Eden" is to be alienated from pure creation.

Resources used

- *The Philosophy of the Hebrew Bible* by Yoram Hazony
- *The Five Books of Moses* translation/notes by Everett Fox
- *The Five Books of Moses* translation/notes by Robert Alter
- *The Jewish Study Bible* translation/notes
- *Genesis (Interpretation Commentary)* by Walter Brueggemann
- *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* by Claus Westermann

Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture:

- The theme in Genesis is not blind obedience, since many of the things punished have not yet been declared by God. There is an assumption that the humans should know better, that there is a morality naturally existing: *natural law*.
- God is impressed with initiative/innovation in life (Abel's shepherding), not in piety (Cain's sacrifices).
- "...it's evident that shepherding is not what God had in mind when he sent man forth from Eden. But as it turns out, it's something that God wants anyway: an improvement in man's station, a greater goodness which comes out of man's own unsolicited efforts."
- The life of the farmer, here, leads to murder, exile, and cities with their accumulation of wealth and power.
- Cain symbolizes submission to the decrees of the gods, pious sacrifice and self-sacrifice, honoring the customs of past generations.
- Abel symbolizes dissent from the supposedly unalterable decrees of the gods, hesitation to accept that which is customary as authoritative, and keen interest in innovation in order to improve things. (These are seen as abominations by those who rule the cities and empires!)

Westermann:

- "Cain in his anger breaks off community relationships." Fallen face means alienation.
- The shock for J is not that Cain is especially bad, but that even such an obedient and pious man can murder his brother.
- God conducts the trial and punishment directly; only in Gen 1-11 does God do this. A parallel with Gen 3.

- Cain gives a full-throated lament: God-lament, I-lament, enemy-lament: "Thou has driven me this day..."
- In Genesis 3 neither human are cursed; here Cain is cursed and cut off from from his community; he is haunted and driven by the curse.
- Cain will live under the weight of God's anger, but other men are limited from applying their own separate punishment now that God has completed the trial.
- Themes: 1) Consideration of fraternal relationships, not just married ones; 2) division of labor: farmer and shepherd; 3) NT interpretation takes over the early rabbinic interpretation; 4) too often we read "sin" as individual, missing the social aspect in ch 4 (unlike prophets!)

Brueggemann:

- Both brothers do right; Y^{HWH} causes the trouble through apparent arbitrary choosing!
- No implication of "fallenness" here in the text. Cain is offered full choice and promised that he can choose good.
- Parallel with chapter 3: investigation, sentence, banishment.
- Was Cain's life really so bad? Seven generations of descendants. Jabal, Jubal, Tubal-cain: related to "productivity." Na'amah: "pleasant, lovely." Arts and crafts.
- Development of the city: mixed? Brueggemann talks of the relation between desire and culture. Mastery of desire leads to culture? Freud.
- Does Jesus deliberately oppose Lamech, reorienting the development of the world?
- The tribe of the Kenites may be the first worshippers of Y^{HWH}.
- Juxtaposition of themes: appearance of a) radical sin, b) high culture, c) confessional religion.