

Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition

Jewish and Christian Interpretations
of the First Sibling Rivalry

John Byron



Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition

Themes in Biblical Narrative Jewish and Christian Traditions

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Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition

Jewish and Christian Interpretations
of the First Sibling Rivalry

By

John Byron



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INTRODUCTION

A story of firsts

The story of Cain and Abel is a story of firsts. Readers of the Bible are accustomed to hearing that the first ever recorded murder happened in Genesis 4. But that notorious act was only one among a number of “firsts” in biblical history that are located in Genesis 4. The declaration in 4:1 that “Adam knew Eve” is the first act of sexual intercourse in the Bible. Eve’s subsequent pregnancy and bearing of two sons represents the first time that human beings appear on the earth devoid of a creative act by God. In Gen 3:17 Adam’s role as farmer is thrust upon him by God as part of the cursing of the earth, whereas the mention of Cain and Abel’s activities as farmer and shepherd is the first time that human beings chose their occupation (4:2). The account of the brothers’ sacrifice is the earliest presentation of deity worship in the Bible. It is also the first ever account of God rejecting a worshipper’s offering. While Adam and Eve both clearly disobeyed God by partaking of the forbidden fruit, their act is never labeled as “sin.” The first appearance of the word “sin” is in Gen 4:7 when God imparts a warning to Cain. Genesis 4 is also the first time a human being dies. In spite of the fact that God forbid Adam to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and warned him that “in that day you eat of it you shall die,” he lives to the ripe age of 930 (Gen 2:17; 5:5). The first person to die is Abel at the hands of his brother, which is also the first time that blood is mentioned in the Bible (4:10–11). Strangely, the first murder is accompanied by the first promise of divine protection that allows the murderer to go off, raise a family and build the first recorded city (4:15–17). Among other notable firsts that appear in this chapter are: a genealogy, bigamy, vendettas, exile, and the appearance of music and metallurgy. The Cain and Abel story provides the genesis for a number of biblical topics.

On the other hand, the story generates more questions than answers. The initial, perhaps most puzzling question is: Why did God reject Cain’s sacrifice? What was it about Abel’s offering that pleased God more than that of Cain? Following upon that question would be the mystery of why Cain killed Abel. While commentators ancient and

modern suggest that it was because Cain was jealous of Abel, the Bible provides no more a specific reason for the murder than it does for what makes Abel's sacrifice better than Cain's. The Bible simply is silent on both of those topics. Even when details are provided, they often raise questions rather than provide answers. For instance, why should the first murderer receive divine protection and be allowed to marry, raise a family and initiate a monumental building project? How, in light of the crime, is this justice for murdered Abel? Even more significantly, what does this say about God and the way that the affairs of the world are handled by the divine?

The more one digs into these questions the more theological dilemmas appear to bedevil the interpreter. Moreover, these are questions that are formulated by a mere cursory reading of the text. A critical analysis of the story, with the aid of the original languages, reveals a host of problems. Gaps in details, unusual terminology, and tortured syntax add to the confusing mix one encounters when trying to read, let alone interpret and understand, this story. One would think that such an important story detailing the origins of so many things from sex to city planning would have been put together rather more carefully.

How ancient exegetes interpreted the Bible

We would be presumptuous, of course, to assume that modern interpreters are the first to notice the difficulties latent in the story. In fact, the questions raised above have been with translators and interpreters from the beginning. If anything, they were more familiar with the interpretive challenges presented by Genesis 4 than most modern students of the Bible usually appreciate. Generally speaking, modern readers of the Bible are not aware of the numerous attempts to answer these and other questions. Sometimes the answers that are so readily accepted in the modern age are not appreciated for their antiquity. For instance, the oft-repeated explanation that Cain's wife was his sister has been part of the interpretive history of Genesis 4 for at least 1800 years. The result of these types of encounters between the story and interpreters is a set of well-documented traditions that attempt to answer questions generated by the story and not answered by the author. The very nature of the story, indeed of the whole Bible, requires that every encounter be an act of reading that includes, at the same time, the process of interpretation.

One curious aspect of ancient interpretation that might strike modern students as peculiar, if not suspect, is the practice of expanding and/or reworking the story in order to smooth out wrinkles in the text. On the micro-level this might include the addition of a word or phrase to clarify an ambiguous detail in the story. On the macro-level it can include the insertion of large amounts of previously unknown material like a conversation or an additional scene that helps to bring the story to a more satisfactory conclusion. This tendency in biblical interpretation played an integral part in the exegesis of the Bible and has sometime been referred to as “rewritten Bible.”¹ Unlike modern interpreters, Jewish and Christian exegetes were not inhibited about altering, expanding or even contracting the biblical text. This process occurs within the Bible itself. The author of 1 Chronicles 21, uncomfortable with the 2 Samuel 24 portrayal of God inciting David to number the people of Israel, and thus causing a devastating plague, adjusts the story subtly, yet significantly, by saying that it was Satan, not God, who caused David to commit this foolish act.² Similarly, in 2 Tim 3:8 we are told the names of the magicians who challenged Moses in Pharaoh’s court, a detail that cannot be found anywhere in Exodus.

Those who were heirs of the biblical traditions felt the same if not greater freedom. A modern student of the Bible would be quite surprised by some of the expansion and editing of a well-known biblical story. For instance, in Exodus we read that Moses was adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh and that he lived with her in the palace. Josephus expands this part of the story in several ways including a large section detailing how Moses, at the head of the Egyptian army, defeated the Ethiopians (*Ant.* 2.238–253). Similarly, the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus has been reworked in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* so that when Moses sees the crowd dancing before the cow he also sees Satan in the middle.³ In Genesis we read that Jacob produced children through

¹ The term seems to have been coined by Geza Vermes (*Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* [SJLA 8; Leiden: Brill, 1975]). I am using the term as a matter of convenience rather than as a technical designation for the process of interpretation in antiquity or for a particular genre of literature. I am not attempting to add or subtract from the debate around the appropriateness of the term and its ramifications for the study of “Bible” and “canon.”

² The Chronicler also edits out the story of David’s affair with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah. The result is that the reader of 1 and 2 Chronicles thinks that Solomon’s parents came together under “normal” circumstances.

³ *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* 45 says that Sammael (or Satan) entered the cow and caused it to dance.

Bilhah and Zilpah, slave women belonging to his wives. But a number of ancient commentators insert the detail that these women were released from slavery before conceiving by Jacob. This minor adjustment removes the possible accusation that four of the twelve tribes of Israel were descended from slaves and therefore illegitimate.⁴

While a modern reader would be hard pressed to find these expansions in most copies of the Bible, it would be incorrect to conclude that these are nothing more than aberrations of the canonical story and therefore only curious artifacts. The fact is, while Judaism and Christianity were careful to pass on the actual text of Scripture, they also passed on how to read Scripture. Elaborations of words and stories accompanied the text in its transmission journey. The history of ancient biblical interpretation was as important as the Bible itself. One only need peruse through the volumes of midrashim, commentaries and homilies to discover that interpretation was central to the continual process of reading Scripture. The foundation for interpretation was Scripture. But the elaborations were not merely thrust upon Scripture. They were anchored in some type of detail, or lack thereof, in the Bible. Sometimes they were driven by ideology. Other times it was a desire to make sense of the text and that meant *all* of the text. This means adding conversations, details, etc, was allowed since the text was seen as giving consent to the interpreter by virtue of what it did or did not say. The retelling of biblical texts in their own words allowed the interpreter to not only say what Scripture said, but what it meant. Through this process interpretive traditions were added to the text resulting in exegetical motifs being circulated and becoming authoritative. This means that what an interpreter presents is not necessarily their interpretation, but includes interpretations that were picked up on the way and the author/interpreter may not even be aware of it (e.g. 2 Tim 3:8).

More than anyone else in recent scholarship, James L. Kugel has taught us the ways in which ancient exegetes interpreted the Bible and the assumptions that guided them in their work.⁵ Because the principles he identified guide this monograph's account of the tradi-

⁴ See my "Noble Lineage as a Response to Enslavement in the Testament of Naphtali 1.9–12," *JJS* 55 (2004): 45–57.

⁵ Kugel has outlined these four assumptions in several publications but see especially his "Ancient Biblical Interpretation and the Sage in Studies in Ancient Midrash," in *Studies in Ancient Midrash* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 2001).

tions about Cain and Abel, I offer a brief summary of them by way of introduction.

The first assumption is that the Bible is a cryptic document. It was assumed that beyond the apparent meaning of the text there was also a hidden meaning.⁶ This means that while everything seemed obvious, nothing was apparent. Every detail in a story could legitimately be interpreted as having a secondary or implied meaning.

The second assumption is that the Bible constitutes a book of instruction and is, therefore, relevant as a text. The Bible is not essentially a record of things that happened or were said in the past. They were recorded with a purpose, that the readers might learn vital lessons.⁷ This means that reading the Bible in antiquity was not for the purpose of gaining facts and knowledge about the past.

The third assumption is that Scripture is perfect and harmonious in itself. Any apparent contradictions were viewed not as mistakes but as an allusion to something hidden that needed to be clarified through proper interpretation.⁸ Interpreters sought to discover the basic harmony that underlies apparently incongruous facts and statements. This meant that one text might explain another even if they were written by different authors, at different times, in different cultures. Every detail is important and represents a lesson to be taught and learned.

The final assumption is that all Scripture is divinely sanctioned or inspired. This means that everything in the Bible is seen as coming from God. While this assumption underlies the authority of the Bible for its interpreters, it did not necessarily spawn the first three assumptions.⁹ However, the conviction that everything in the Bible was somehow the words of God meant that interpreters were ultimately concerned about theology. Meaning in ancient interpretation was relevant to the situation of the interpreter and the listener and not necessarily to the historical situation about which the text was written.

Many of the questions and theological dilemmas raised by Scripture were common to Jews and Christians. Both religious groups were equally perplexed, for instance, by God's apparently capricious acceptance of Abel's sacrifice and the seeming impunity with which Cain commits murder. The attempts to respond to these questions and

⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁹ Ibid., 19.

dilemmas developed into a set of well-established interpretive traditions that find residence in both Jewish and Christian literature. At times both groups share very similar if not identical traditions. Other times there is a divergent trajectory which might be related to a particular theological point or concern. Christian interpretation is certainly indebted to Judaism for *how* it reads Scripture, but there is evidence that Judaism was sometimes influenced by Christianity. Therefore, rather than examine the history of interpretation from either a Jewish or Christian perspective, a more helpful approach is to consider these developments as deeply embedded in both Jewish and Christian traditions.¹⁰

The contribution of the present volume

The purpose of the present volume is to trace the interpretive history of the Cain and Abel story in the first millennium CE. Rather than focus on critical questions like historicity, cultural background and manuscript evidence, I examine how the story was understood by Jewish and Christian interpreters. Because the Hebrew version of Genesis 4 contains a number of linguistic ambiguities and narrative gaps, it raises more questions than answers. Ancient exegetes expanded the story in ways that helped to fill in the gaps as well as to answer some of the more important questions. The focus of the book is not so much on analysis of Genesis 4 as it is making the Cain and Abel traditions available to a wider audience. With this in mind I avoid rehearsing scholarly arguments, only include ancient language when it is vital to explaining the development of a tradition, and include a full English translation of the primary sources being discussed. The focus is on how the interpretive traditions derived from Genesis 4 exerted significant influence on Jewish and Christian authors who knew rewritten versions of the Cain and Abel story. It is a wide-ranging study that analyzes how the Cain and Abel story was expanded and reinterpreted; and particular attention is devoted to considering themes developed in extra-biblical literature which made the story attractive to these authors. The goal is to help the reader to appreciate these traditions

¹⁰ Added to this can be those traditions that are shared with Islam. The present volume only highlights one instance of how the Cain and Abel traditions overlap with the Quran, but there are a number of interpretive traditions commonly shared between the three monotheistic religions.

within the broader interpretive context rather than within the narrow confines of the canon.

Until recently, the most comprehensive treatment of the Cain and Abel traditions has been Victor Aptowitzer's *Kain und Abel in der Agada*.¹¹ This is an important monograph that presents many of the Cain and Abel traditions and is still used by scholars working in either Hebrew Bible or Midrash studies. But much has happened since the publication of this work including the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi library, not to mention almost ninety years of biblical scholarship. In addition to its age, it is only accessible to readers of German. While I do not presume to replace this well respected volume, I do hope to augment it. Aptowitzer catalogs many of the important Cain and Abel traditions, but he provides little in the way of formal analysis and commentary. My contribution seeks to not only catalog the traditions but also to explain how these traditions may have surfaced.

A useful compendium of interpretive traditions is J. L. Kugel's *Traditions of the Bible*.¹² This is an excellent resource that provides a survey of Jewish and Christian interpretative traditions of the Hebrew Bible. Kugel presents some of the traditions associated with Cain and Abel as part of his overall program. The book is also useful as a sourcebook due to his inclusion of important texts. However, since Kugel is covering much of the Pentateuch, the Cain and Abel story is only allotted 23 out of almost 900 pages. While Kugel's volume is very helpful, there are many more traditions that can be included. If anything, the size of Kugel's volume demonstrates how much more could be said about many of the stories in the Hebrew Bible.

The published Ph.D. thesis of J. B. Glenthøj demonstrates just how staggering a task it is to catalog the Cain and Abel traditions.¹³ In 296 pages he compiles the traditions found in Syriac and Greek writers from the 4th–6th centuries. The result is a comprehensive sourcebook whose value cannot be overstated. However, the scale of the project and the narrow focus means that it is limited in analysis and

¹¹ *Kain und Abel in der Agada: den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen christlichen und muhammedanischen Literatur*. (Vienna: R. Verlag Löewitt, 1922).

¹² *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹³ Johannes Bartholdy Glenthøj, *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4th–6th Centuries)* (CSCO; Lovanii: Peeters), 1997.

consideration of Jewish and Christian literature prior to time period he is examining.

In addition to the above there is the volume *Eve's Children* edited by G. P. Luttikhuizen.¹⁴ This is a helpful, scholarly volume that brings together the work of fourteen different scholars. In addition to Cain and Abel it includes chapters on Adam and Eve's other son Seth as well as exploring how Cain and Abel were viewed by more modern, non-biblical literary figures such as Lord Byron and John Steinbeck.

It is not my intention to be critical of the above contributions in any way. On the contrary, I am heavily indebted to them all for what I have learned. What follows in the chapters below is only possible by my standing on their shoulders. I do not consider my work better or more superior, only different in focus and presentation. If it was not for the scholars represented above and elsewhere in this volume, my work would be woefully inadequate.

The time span and variety of literature I have elected to cover is, admittedly, vast. Many times the presentation and analysis of a particular interpretive theme begins with how the LXX translated the Hebrew version of Genesis 4 and then extends through the New Testament, Targums, patristic literature and late rabbinic works. Roughly speaking, the material covered is found in literature dating from about 300 BCE to 800 CE. I have tried to be comprehensive rather than exhaustive. The amount of material collected by Glenthøj representing only three centuries demonstrates the herculean task it would be to collect all of the Cain and Abel traditions into one volume, if such a goal was possible. Moreover, many of the traditions are repeated numerous times by a variety of interpreters over the centuries. It simply becomes impossible to register them all. My focus has been on identifying the more important, if not more interesting, traditions and tracing them out through the history of interpretation. I do not designate the traditions according to Christian or Jewish categories unless it appears to have been owned by one group rather than the other. Many of these interpretations were shared.

One goal of the book is to make these traditions available to students and scholars who are unfamiliar with them. With that in mind I often provide full English translations of the source being cited. Since these traditions are scattered over a large number of disparate sources,

¹⁴ G. P. Luttikhuizen, *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and interpreted in Jewish Christian Traditions* (TBN, 5; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

it was my hope that people interested in this material not need to go searching for the primary source to read it. Part of the enjoyment of working on this book has been reading what the ancients have said. Consequently, I included many of the primary sources so that a reader could experience the development of the traditions rather than just read about them. With a few exceptions, the English translations are adopted from standard scholarly translations. I do not claim to be making any contributions in the area of linguistics or translation strategy.

The presentation of the material follows the story as it appears in Genesis 4. I begin with 4:1 and systematically work through the chapter pointing out what interpreters identified as real or potential exegetical snares and then outline how they attempted to rectify the problems. I tend towards presenting the traditions in a chronological order, but do not intend to suggest that one tradition is necessarily dependent upon or predates the other. Many of the traditions contained here are those for which we have the earliest, extant evidence and probably are representative of a broader collection of interpretative traditions. This format is maintained for five chapters. Chapters six and seven are more thematically based focusing on the character and theological developments surrounding the two brothers in Jewish and Christian interpretation.

Finally, at the beginning of each chapter I provide a quote taken from the works of poets, playwrights, theologians and novelists each of which somehow alludes to or references Cain and Abel. The purpose of the quotes is to demonstrate the significant influence that the Cain and Abel story has had throughout its long history. While the present volume focuses specifically on ancient exegesis of the story, one can find elements of and allusions to the story in art, music, film and, as I discovered recently during a trip to our local grocery store, beer. As a story of firsts, Cain and Abel is still being discussed and reinterpreted in a variety of venues. The echoes of the first sibling rivalry have reached down through history to our own modern day. Abel's blood, it seems, is still crying out.

CHAPTER ONE

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON GENESIS 4:1-2

You two are book-men: can you tell me by your wit;
What was a month old at Cain's birth, that's not five
weeks old as yet?

(Shakespeare—*Love's Labor's Lost* 4.2.40)

Why did Cain kill his brother Abel? It is usually assumed by modern commentators that God's rejection of Cain's offering led him to kill his brother in a fit of jealousy.¹ Such a conclusion is logical in light of the way the action in the story is arranged. But the fact is we are never told the specific reason for the murder. Ancient exegetes, as we will see later, also speculated over Cain's motive and sometimes provided the same conclusion as modern interpreters. But some suggested that there was something more sinister behind the killing, that there was something inborn about Cain that led him to earn the title of first murderer. These interpreters pushed back past the actual murder to look, as would a good biographer, at what it was about Cain's birth and childhood that led him to his moment of infamy. Correspondingly, they asked similar questions about Abel. The result was a development of traditions that became associated with the brothers' births, names and occupations.

Who was Cain's father?

As we noted in the introduction, Cain and Abel is a story of firsts. In Gen 4:1 we find the first ever account of sexual relations between humans with the end result being the first pregnancy.

And Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and gave birth to Cain and she said, "I have gained a man with the help of the Lord."

¹ Anglea Y. Kim, "Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A study in the History of Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4:1-16," *JSP* (2001): 65-84.

The language describing Adam's relations with Eve is the usual biblical form of "knowing her" which is somewhat prosaic in comparison to the more graphic "entering into her" found elsewhere in Genesis (e.g. Abraham with Hagar 16:4; Jacob with Leah, Rachel, and Bilhah 29:23, 30; 30:4; Judah with Tamar 38:18).² The description of Eve's conceiving and giving birth also follows standard formulas, but what is unusual is the declaration made by Eve after giving birth to Cain, her first child. It is this statement that attracted the attention of later translators and interpreters and led them to speculate on the meaning of Eve's words.

In the Hebrew version of the story Eve declares that she has "gained a man with the Lord." Most English translations will insert the phrase "with the help of" (NRSV) to clarify how Eve received a man from the Lord. But the Hebrew is more ambiguous and difficult to translate than is sometimes appreciated. The problem centers on how one is to understand the phrase אֶת־יְהוָה. While the majority of modern commentators suggest that the phrase be translated as "with the help of the Lord," such a translation is without parallel. For instance, if the אֶת is understood as a direct object marker rather than as a preposition, it is then possible to understand Cain as the fulfillment of the promise made to Eve in Gen 3:15 where God says the woman will have a child who crushes the head of the serpent.³ Such ambiguities in the Hebrew represented both a challenge and an opportunity to early translators and exegetes.

A survey of extant translations from antiquity reveals that attempts were made to clear up the ambiguity, but were not always successful. The LXX, for instance, translates the phrase as διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ "through God," which would suggest some type of divine intervention.⁴ Symmachus, on the other hand, simply translated it as σὺν κυρίῳ ("with the Lord") which would lend more support to modern translations. While either of these translations may seem innocuous at first glance, both contain potential theological statements about the interaction

² Susan Brayford, *Genesis* (Septuagint Commentary Series; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 248.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 102; Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1–5* (Luther's Works, Vol. 1; Saint Louis, Mo: Concordia, 1958), 242.

⁴ Note also that the translator used θεοῦ rather than κυριοῦ which is the usual Greek equivalent for יְהוָה in the LXX; see John William Wevers, *LXX: Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies 35; Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1993), 51.

of God with human beings. For instance, if one were to follow the LXX it is possible to understand God as being the instrument through which Eve became pregnant, a reading that could potentially be understood to imply that Eve had sexual relations with God. The translation offered by Symmachus, however, would correct any misunderstanding by clarifying that it was with God's help (i.e. divine intervention) that Eve became pregnant and not through a sexual encounter with the divine. Evidence that a clarification of this translation and its theological import was needed can be found in Philo of Alexandria. Apparently Philo recognized the potential for misunderstanding the LXX's διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ as Eve somehow becoming impregnated by God. In response to such a theological error, real or otherwise, Philo points out that the correct way to interpret the phrase is to designate God as the *cause* of the pregnancy rather than the *instrument* or *tool* through which it came about.

And therefore we must make our protest against the Mind, which thought the offspring engendered by union with sense his own possession, called it Cain and said "I have gotten a man through God." Even in these last two words he erred. You ask how? Because God is the cause not the instrument, and that which comes into being is brought not into being *through* an instrument, but *by* a cause. (Philo, *Cherubim* 124–125 [Colson, LCL])

Was it correctly said about Cain, "I have acquired a man through God"? A distinction is made between "by someone" or "from someone" and "through something" or "from something," that is from matter. "Through someone" means through a cause and "through something" means through an instrument. But the father and creator of the universe is not an instrument but a cause. Accordingly, he errs against correct thinking who says that things come into being not by the agency of God but through God. (Philo, *QG* 1.58)

Combining Philo's statements with Symmachus' decision to translate the אֶת־יְהוָה phrase as σὺν κυρίῳ ("with the Lord") suggests that there was, at the very least, confusion surrounding the Greek translation of Gen 4:1 and the identification of Eve's sexual partner.

Further evidence for reading Gen 4:1 this way can be found among the Gnostic interpretations. In the *Apocryphon of John*, Eve is said to have been seduced by the supreme archon Yaldaboth who then fathered two sons named Eloim and Yave.⁵

⁵ Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, "Gnostic Ideas about Eve's Children and the Salvation of Humanity," in *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish*

And the chief archon seduced her and he begot in her two sons; the first and the second (are) Eloim and Yave. Eloim has a bear-face and Yave has a cat-face. The one is righteous, but the other is unrighteous. (Yave is righteous, but Eloim is unrighteous.) Yave he set over the fire and the wind, and Eloim he set over the water and the earth. And these he called with the names Cain and Abel with a view to deceive. (*Ap. John* II, 24, 16–25 [Wisse])

In the *Apocryphon of John* Yaldaboth is the evil creator-god who creates angels to rule the world and aid in the creation of human beings. In a passage preceding this one both Cain and Abel are listed among the twelve authorities birthed by Sophia.⁶ The identification of Cain and Abel with Eloim and Yave with the Hebrew “Yahweh” and “Elohim” is easily deduced and, coupled with the seduction of Eve, demonstrates the author’s intention of describing Eve’s sons as being the result of a sexual encounter with a divine being.⁷ Thus in the *Apocryphon of John* both of the brothers are descended from a divine being rather than just Cain and both became authorities who ruled over the elemental elements of creation. The important difference, however, lies in their essential character traits; Cain is unrighteous while Abel is righteous. While Genesis provides no such explicit description of the brothers, these epithets became part of Jewish and Christian tradition that will be explored in more detail in subsequent chapters.⁸

While there were probably relatively few exegetes who understood Gen 4:1 as suggesting that God had impregnated Eve, there were some who concluded that the ambiguity of the Hebrew did point to someone other than Adam as the father of Cain.⁹ One reason for this conclusion was that Cain’s birth in 4:1 is not described in the same way as that of Seth.¹⁰ In Gen 5:3 we read that “Adam begot a son in his own likeness, his own image, and called him Seth.” But no similar

and *Christian Traditions* (ed. G. P. Luttikhuisen; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 209; Johannes Bartholdy Glenthøj, *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4th–6th Centuries)* (CSCO; Lovanii: Peeters, 1997), 13–14.

⁶ Gen 4:1.

⁷ Birger Albert Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 1990), 99–100.

⁸ For a discussion of Abel as “righteous” see chapter six. For a discussion of Cain as “unrighteous” see chapter seven.

⁹ In an unexplainable error, Augustine attributes Eve’s statement in Gen 4:6 to Adam (*City of God* 15.15). Later, he will indicate that it is unclear who made the declaration about Cain (*City of God* 15.17).

¹⁰ Florentino García Martínez, “Eve’s Children in the Targumim,” in *Eve’s Children*, 34.

statement is attached to the description of Cain and his birth (or to Abel). The difference in the descriptions led interpreters to conclude that there must have been something qualitatively different about the circumstances surrounding Cain's birth. This observation led the Aramaic translator of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon* to add the following to the biblical text of Gen 5:3.

When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he begot *Seth*, who resembled his image and likeness. For before that, Eve had borne Cain, who was not from him and who did not resemble him. Abel was killed by Cain, and Cain was banished, and his descendants are not recorded in the book of the genealogy of Adam. But afterwards he begot one who resembled him and he called his name Seth.¹¹ (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 5:3 [Maher])

The question some ancient interpreters asked, then: who was the father of Cain? Somewhat surprisingly, it is the devil that was often identified as the father of the man who would become the world's first murderer even though the devil does not appear in the Cain and Abel narrative. Such an interpretation seems to stem from yet another ambiguity contained in Eve's cryptic statement.

One would expect Eve to designate Cain as בן ("son") or another Hebrew word for a male child. But the use of אִישׁ ("man") to describe the birth of a child is once again unusual and without parallel. Eve's statement seems to describe the child in a way that one would a full-grown male. Modern commentators sometimes suggest that one possible way to understand her declaration is in light of Gen 2:23 where it says "from man (אִישׁ) she was taken." Her shout may be one of triumph in which she puts herself on par with the Lord as creator: "I have created a man equally with the Lord."¹² But ancient interpreters moved in other directions.

One interpretive tradition seems to have understood this description as meaning that Cain possessed an intellect and skill advanced for his age. *The Life of Adam and Eve* understands the identification of the child as "a man" to mean that he was born with abilities far beyond his

¹¹ Texts displayed in italics, unless otherwise noted, are transferred directly from the edition in use and reflect the editors' practice of either setting off quotations from the Bible or additions/changes made to the Bible by ancient translators/exegetes.

¹² Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah: Genesis 1–VI 8* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1961), 202; Wenham, 101.

years. In the story, the child runs and fetches his mother a reed (*qaneh* in Hebrew) which is how he receives the name Cain.

And she bore a son and he was lustrous. And at once the infant rose, ran, and brought in his hands a reed and gave it to his mother. And his name was called Cain. (*L.A.E. [Vita]* 21:3 [Johnson])

The interpretation of Eve's deceleration of bearing an אִישׁ ("man") suggests that Cain was born with the mind (and body?) of an adult. The description of him being "lustrous" may reflect the Gnostic association of Cain with the sun. Cain's action of bringing Eve a reed is curious. In light of his occupation as a farmer it may be a symbolic nod in that direction as well as a commentary on his destructive nature. While his father, Adam, planted to care for his family, Cain responds by plucking up. In the Armenian/Georgian versions of the document, Eve relegates herself to eating only grass until she dies. Cain's plucking of the grass (reed) portrays him as robbing his mother of her only sustenance. In response to Cain's action of plucking the Armenian version claims that "infertilities became numerous in that place" and an angel/midwife declares "God is just...for you are Cain, the perverse one, killer of the good, for you are the one who plucks up the fruit-bearing tree, and not he who plants it" (Gerog. 21:3c).¹³ With this commentary, the birth of Cain is painted in such a way to proclaim his propensity for evil immediately upon leaving the womb. He is representative of the destructive forces in humanity.¹⁴

For other interpreters, however, the combination of this strange description of the child as an אִישׁ ("man") along with the equally strange description of his birth אֶת־יְהוָה ("with the Lord") led some to conclude that Cain was the resulting offspring of an encounter between Eve and some type of angel of the Lord, more than likely a fallen angel in light of Cain's later actions. This is related to a reevaluation of what Genesis means when it says that "Adam knew his wife." Rather than interpret it in the euphemistic sense of sexual intercourse, some exegetes interpreted the phrase to mean that "Adam knew something about Eve," that is, she had intercourse with someone other than

¹³ Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, eds., *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* (2nd rev. ed.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 24E, 25E.

¹⁴ Johannes Tromp, "Cain and Abel in the Greek and Armenian/Georgian Recensions of the *Life of Adam and Eve*," in *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays* (ed. G. Anderson, M. Stone, and J. Tromp; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 289.

Adam.¹⁵ The result is a well attested tradition among Jewish and Christian interpreters that depicted Cain as the son of either the devil or some other fallen being.

This is the message which you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another and not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. (1 John 3:10–12)

Having been made pregnant by the seed of the devil... she brought forth a son. (Tertullian, *Patience* 5:15)

First adultery came into being, afterward murder. And he [Cain] was begotten in adultery, for he was the child of the serpent. So he became a murderer, just like his father, and he killed his brother. Indeed every act of sexual intercourse which has occurred between those unlike one another is adultery. (*Gos. Phil.* 61:5–10 [Isenberg])

And Adam knew about his wife Eve that she had conceived from Sammael, the angel of the Lord, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. And she said, "I have acquired a man, indeed an angel of the Lord." (*Tg. Ps.-J. Gen* 4:1)¹⁶

(Sammael) riding on the serpent came to her and she conceived [Cain]; afterwards Adam came to her, and she conceived Abel, as it is said, "And the Adam knew his wife Eve." What is the meaning of "knew"? He knew that she had (already) conceived [from someone else]. (*Pirque R. El.* 21 [Friedlander])

The traditions preserved in *Pseudo-Jonathon* and *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* illustrate that aspect of the tradition that claimed Adam was not the father of Cain.¹⁷ If Adam was not Cain's father, how should the claim

¹⁵ N. A. Dahl, "Der Erstgeborene Satans und der Vater des Teufels (Polk. 7 1 und Joh 8 44)," in *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), 70–84; A. M. Goldberg, "Kai: Sohn des Menschen oder Sohn der Schlange?" *Judaica* 25 (1969): 203–21; C. T. R. Hayward, "Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer and Targum Pseudo-Jonathon," *JJS* 42 (1991): 223–24; James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 147.

¹⁶ Translation mine.

¹⁷ Per A Bengtsson points out that the connection between Eve and Sammael is an ancient one and reinforced by the fact that he is only mentioned twice in *Pseudo-Jonathon*, here in 4:1 and as her deceiver in 3:6 (*Passover in Targum Pseudo-Jonathon Genesis: The Connection of Early Biblical Events with Passover in Targum Pseudo-Jonathon in a Synagogue Setting* [Scripta Minora; Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001], 33); C. T. R. Hayward suggests that the name of Sammael may be a scribal addition to identify the name of the angel of the Lord in *Pseudo-Jonathon*. But he also notes that the name of Sammael was widely known by the second century CE so the addition should be probably understood as adding clarity to *Pseudo-Jonathon* rather than borrowing from *Pirque deR. Eliezer* ("Pirque de Rabbi

in Gen 4:1 that Adam “knew his wife Eve” (i.e. had sexual relations with her) be understood? The solution was *not* to interpret Adam’s knowledge of his wife as referring to sexual intercourse, but rather that he knew something about her; she had experienced sexual relations with Sammael.¹⁸ Moreover, if the child was partly divine, this would explain Eve’s description of Cain as an אִישׁ (“man”) since angels are sometimes referred to as a “man” in the Bible (cf. Gen 18:2; 19:1, 10, 12, 15–16; 32:24; Josh 5:13; Judg 13:3, 6).¹⁹ Thus, according to some interpreters, Cain was half-human and half-angelic having been fathered by the devil or some other fallen angel.

A similar tradition is found in some Gnostic literature. In the *Apocryphon of John* we noted the story of Eve being seduced by the supreme archon Yaldabaoth who fathered both Cain and Abel. Yet another tradition surrounding the birth of Cain exists in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. This time, however, Eve is not seduced by Yaldabaoth, but is instead raped by a pair of Archons.

Then the authorities came up to their Adam. And when they saw his female counterpart speaking with him, they became agitated with great agitation; and they became enamored with her. They said to one another, “Come, let us sow our seed in her,” and they pursued her. And she laughed at them for their witlessness and their blindness; and in their clutches, she became a tree, and left before them her shadowy reflection resembling herself; and they defiled [it] foully.—And they defiled the stamp of her voice, so that by the form they had modeled, together with [their] (own) image, they made themselves liable to condemnation. (*Hyp. Arch.* II, 89, 19–31[Layton])

Eliezer,” 223; David L. Everson, “A Brief Comparison of Targumic and Midrashic Angelological Traditions,” *Journal of Aramaic Studies* 5 (2007): 75–91.

¹⁸ Florentino García Martínez, “Samma’el in Pseudo-Jonathon and the Origin of Evil,” *JNSL* 30 (2004): 19–41. Other possible references to the tradition of Cain as the son of the devil, the serpent and the angel Sammael and Eve’s intercourse with these beings may be found in *IQH* XI 6–18; *Wisdom* 2:24, 10:3–4 (So John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch* (JSPSup 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 52–53; 4 *Macc* 18:7–8; *John* 8:39–44; *Irenaeus Adv. Hers.* 1.30:9; *b. Shabb.* 146a (738); *Yebam* 103b (711); and *Abod Zar.* 22b (114).

¹⁹ A good example is found in *Genesis* 19 where the two individuals sent to rescue Lot are referred to as both מַלְאָכִים, “angels,” (19:1, 15) and אֲנָשִׁים, “men,” (19:12, 16) which would have suggested to interpreters that angels are sometimes called “men.” The story of Samson’s birth in *Judges* 13:2–23 also uses both terms to refer to the angel of the Lord who appears to Manoah’s wife, but the terms’ presence is result of the couple’s confusion over the identity of the being appearing to them rather than them being used as synonyms as is the case in *Genesis* 19.

Now afterward, she bore Cain, their son; and Cain cultivated the land. Thereupon he knew his wife; again becoming pregnant, she bore Abel; and Abel was a herdsman of sheep. (*Hyp. Arch.* II, 91, 12–16)

In between these two sections detailing Eve's encounter with the Archons and the birth of Cain and Abel is the story of Adam and Eve's eating from the fruit of the tree, which has been omitted here. What is interesting about the two sections quoted above is the lack of clarity concerning whose child Eve bore when she gave birth to Cain. The phrase "their child" is ambiguous. Was Cain the child of Adam and Eve or was he the result of Eve's rape by the Archons? Did Eve become pregnant *again* (i.e. with Abel) because, as in the Genesis account, Adam knew her a second time, or was this her second pregnancy albeit by a different impregnator? Most commentators favor the latter since the rape of Eve would have no sequel and consequently the sudden birth of Cain would fit uncomfortably within the story.²⁰ In support of this conclusion is the well attested tradition that Cain was not the son of Adam, but the offspring of some type of evil being. Thus we find yet another variant of the tradition that Cain was not Adam's son.

All of these interpretations suggest much more detail about Cain's birth than is in the canonical story. The ambiguity of the Hebrew created a number of potential problems for interpreters. Translations, like the LXX, attempted to clear up the ambiguity, but sometimes only created further confusion by allowing for the possibility that Eve had experienced sexual intercourse with God. Combining the linguistic ambiguity with Eve's unusual description of baby Cain as a "man" interpreters were left to wonder what kind of a child had been born. Through careful exegesis they concluded that Cain was not the son of Adam, but of a being with more sinister origins. This conclusion allowed them the opportunity to enhance the story with what were sometimes very creative expansions.

But these expansions did more than clear up the lingering questions created by gaps in the story. In light of how the story unfolds, the expansions help to explain why Cain ended up committing fratricide. The fact that Eve's statement about Cain's birth was open to more than one interpretation meant that the ancient exegete had ample material to draw upon when attempting to explain how it was possible for such

²⁰ Bentley Layton, "The Hypostasis of the Archons," *HTR* 69 (1976): 60; Pearson, 100; Luttikhuisen, 214.

a crime to come about. By labeling Cain as the son of the devil or some other fallen angel, it demonstrated that Cain had been wholly evil from birth. Thus Cain's sinful act was not classified in the same way as that of Adam and Eve eating from the forbidden tree. While their actions could be viewed as a deviation from their original created order, Cain was acting out who he was as a being. He was the son of the devil and, thus, acted accordingly. This was to become an important theological motif in later Jewish and Christian literature as we will observe in a later chapter.

Were Cain and Abel twins?

After the numerous angles from which one could look at Cain's birth, it would seem that the birth of Abel is described more straightforwardly and is perhaps not as prone to expansion. In Gen 4:2a we read this brief description:

And again she bore his brother Abel

Unlike the depiction of Cain's and Seth's births, there is a remarkable lack of detail related to Abel's birth. There is no introductory statement about Adam *knowing* Eve as there is with the other two sons. There is also no accompanying proclamation made by Eve about Abel as there is in conjunction with Cain (4:1) and Seth (4:25). But once again, ambiguity leads to opportunity. While the occasion for expanding the story about Cain was located in his mother's proclamation about him, it was her silence in relation to Abel that encouraged interpreters to read more into the story.

The absence of a subsequent description of intercourse and pregnancy in 4:2a attracted the attention of exegetes. This observation coupled with the description of Seth's birth in 4:25 "And Adam knew his wife once again and she bore him a son and called his name Seth," makes it appear as if Eve had only been pregnant twice; once with Cain and once with Seth. When read literally, these passages could suggest that Cain and Abel were in fact twins. Abel's birth in 4:2 is not recounting a subsequent conception after Cain's birth, but the same one in which twins were delivered.²¹ Although the twins tradition is

²¹ Jacques Van Ruiten, "Eve's Pain in Childbearing," in *Eve's Children*, 7.

rejected by modern commentators, there is evidence for this reading in antiquity.²²

The earliest extant evidence that some interpreters possibly understood Cain and Abel as twins is found in the way that *Jubilees* rewrites Gen 4:1. Although Genesis provides no chronological marker that distinguishes the length of time between the brothers' births, the author of *Jubilees* is careful to add a date. Cain is said to have been born in the third week of the second jubilee while Abel is born in the fourth week. The addition of the date not only provides Cain and Abel a place within sacred history, it also makes it impossible to conclude that the brothers are twins. The author also omits the word "brother."²³ In fact, while "brother" appears seven times in Genesis 4, it only appears once in *Jubilees* (4:4). It seems the author of *Jubilees* would rather write out the phrase "Cain killed Abel" or some other variant rather than emphasize that the two were brothers (4:2a, 3a, 4b, 31e; cf. 4:5b). Van Ruiten suggests that the lengths to which *Jubilees* goes to *not* stress that Cain and Abel are brothers may suggest awareness on the part of the author of some interpretations of Gen 4:1–2 in which they are portrayed as twins.²⁴

The earliest and most explicit witness to a twins tradition is found in Philo of Alexandria. In his commentary on Genesis, Philo compares the names and births of Abel and Seth. As part of his extolling of Abel he says:

Wherefore nature separated him from his twin, and made the good man worthy of immortality, resolving him into a voice interceding with God; but the wicked man it gave over to destruction. (Philo, QG 1.78)

In this statement we find the only extant evidence indicating that Philo was aware of a twins tradition associated with the Cain and Abel story. Ralph Marcus notes that the word translated as "twin"

²² Wenham, 102; John Calvin, however, was inclined to consider the brothers as twins: "Although Moses does not state that Cain and Abel were twins, it seems to me probable that they were so; for, after he has said that Eve, by her first conception, brought forth her first-born, he soon after subjoins that she also bore another; and thus, while commemorating a double birth, he speaks only of one conception (*Commentary on Genesis* [trans. John King; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993, 189]).

²³ Any description of the brothers' occupations is also omitted.

²⁴ J. T. A. G. M. Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Jubilees* (JSJSup 66; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 137.

here corresponds to the Greek τὸν δίδυμον.²⁵ The difficulty, of course, is that extant Greek versions of *Questions on Genesis* are fragmentary and the bulk of the work is preserved in Armenian. Nonetheless, when Marcus rendered his translation he was confident that “the Armenian language is singularly well designed to reproduce the word-order, word compound and many of the idioms of the Greek.”²⁶ One possible support for this translation may be found in *Sacrifices* 4 where Philo compares Cain and Abel to Rebecca’s twins.²⁷ With the discovery of the hitherto lost works of the fourth-century Christian exegete Didymus the Blind, there is further support for the conclusion that Philo was aware of a twins tradition. Didymus’s commentary on Genesis is heavily dependent on the works of Philo and quotes Philo in a number of places.²⁸ When commenting on Gen 4:2 Didymus makes the following statement:

Philo indeed claims that they [Cain and Abel] are twins, from one conception; thus, he says, added to the words “she bore Cain” and the words “He added to this that she bore his brother Abel.” (Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Genesis*)²⁹

Didymus claims that Philo was aware of and subscribed to the twins tradition. The problem, however, is that Didymus’s quote from Philo cannot be found in any of the extant writings of Philo. While it is possible that this statement is not from Philo it is equally possible that Didymus is citing some part of a work of Philo now lost to us.³⁰ Consequently, the evidence suggests that Philo was aware of the twins tradition.

While early evidence for the twins tradition is found only in *Jubilees* and Philo, later interpreters fully engaged the tradition. The work pseudonymously attributed to the first century CE. Rabbi Eliezer, son

²⁵ Ralph Marcus, trans., *Philo*, Supplement I; (LCL 380; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 49.

²⁶ Marcus, *Philo*, vii.

²⁷ James R. Royse, “Cain’s Expulsion from Paradise: The Text of Philo’s *Congr* 171,” *JQR* 79 (1989): 224.

²⁸ A. C. Geljon, “Philonic Elements in Didymus the Blind’s Exegesis of the Story of Cain and Abel,” *VC* 61 (2007): 282–312.

²⁹ Ὁ φίλων μὲν οὖν βούλεται διδύμους αὐτοὺς εἶναι ἀπὸ μιᾶς συλλήμψεως διό, φησὶν, πρόσκειται τῷ ἔτεκεν τὸν Κάιν τὸ προσέθηκεν τεκεῖν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν Ἀβέλ. (Greek taken from Didyme l’evéugle *Sur La Genèse* [Les Éditions du Cerf, 1976], 276–78).

³⁰ James R. Royse, “Cain’s Expulsion from Paradise: The Text of Philo’s *Congr* 171,” *JQR* 79 (1989): 224.

of Hyrcanus, usually dated to the eighth century CE, contains two explicit claims that Cain and Abel were conceived simultaneously and, thus, twins.³¹

In the seventh (hour) Eve was joined to him (in wedlock), in the eighth (hour) they were commanded concerning the fruits of the tree, in the ninth (hour) they went up to (their) couch as two and descended as four. (*Pirke R. El.* 11)³²

Rabbi Joseph said: Cain and Abel were twins, as it is said, "And she conceived, and bore (with) Cain" (Gen. 4:1). At that hour she had an additional capacity for child-bearing (as it is said), "And she continued to bear his brother Abel." (*Pirke R. El.* 21)

This interpretation is based on a specific reading of the text. The Hebrew phrase וַתֵּסֶף לֵלֶדֶת in 4:2 is a double verbal form which is usually translated as "and she again bore."³³ But *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* reads the imperfect verb תִּסֵּף not as "she again," but as "she continued" (*Pirke R. El.* 21). Once the verb has been read this way it is easier to read the infinitive construct לֵלֶדֶת as "to bear." The resulting translation, then, is "she continued to bear," that is, she did not give birth to Cain only, but to Abel also. Both sons were the result of a single pregnancy. While a modern reader may consider this is a bit of a stretch, it is a clever way to read the verb and suits the translator's desire to assert a birth in addition to the obvious ones cited. By interpreting the lack of detail about Abel's birth in this fashion, ancient interpreters found a way to explain the absence of the formulaic expressions connected to both Cain and Seth's birth.

Suggesting that the two were twins would have been in keeping with other biblical stories about feuding brothers (Gen 25:23–28; 38:27; Num 26:19–22). Indeed, it is the rivalry between Cain and Abel in some interpretations that does center on the problem of twins. But the traditions which have been handed down tend to focus more on

³¹ Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna* (Judaic Studies Library 6; NY: Sepher Hermon, 1981), 78, 152. While *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* is a later work, it contains numerous points of contact with much older texts, in particular *Jubilees*, the Enochic literature and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. These connections with older literature help to identify the veracity of a tradition in spite of the distance of time between *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* and the earlier works.

³² A variant of this tradition is found in *B. Sanhedrin* 38b.

³³ Martínez, "Eve's Children in the Targumim," 38; Lieve M. Teugels, "The Twin Sisters of Cain and Abel: A Survey of the Rabbinic Sources," in *Eve's Children*, 51–52.

a twin sister or sisters that were born with the brothers. Rather than simply assert that the brothers were twins, some found an opportunity to explain how the sisters of Cain and Abel were born and to specify that they were the brothers' twins.³⁴

There is no mention of Adam and Eve's daughters in Genesis 4. In fact, apart from a passing mention about Adam's other children in Gen 5:4, we are told nothing about these women much less their names. But another related problem that perplexed interpreters was from where Cain had gained his wife. Genesis 4:17 describes how Cain "knew his wife" who bore him a son. But if Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel were the first four people in creation, how was it possible for Cain to find a wife? Quite often the answer offered was that Cain's wife was his sister.

The earliest source to provide information about the timing and naming of Adam and Eve's daughters comes from *Jubilees* which is dated to the 160s BCE.³⁵ In *Jubilees* we read that after she bore Abel, Eve had a daughter named Awan (4:1) who later become the wife of Cain (4:9). After the murder of Abel, Eve had another daughter named Azura (4:8) and she became the wife of Seth (4:11). Beyond this, *Jubilees* provides no other information about the women.

The opening line of Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* provides the names of Adam and Eve's three sons and one daughter as: Cain, Noaba, Abel and Seth. The placement of Noaba as second on the list, between Cain and Abel, suggests that Abel was the third child rather than the second as detailed in the canonical story.³⁶ Pseudo-Philo does not agree with *Jubilees*, however, by portraying Cain's wife as his sister. Instead Cain's wife is named Themech and questions about her relation to Cain prior to their marriage are left unanswered.

Josephus solves the problem of the sisters by commenting immediately after Cain and Abel's births that "daughters were also born to

³⁴ V. Aptowitzer, *Kain und Abel in der Agada: den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen, christlichen und muhammedanischen Literatur* (Vieann: R. Löewitt Verlag, 1922), 7–10.

³⁵ George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (2d ed.; Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2005), 69.

³⁶ Howard Jacobson has observed the order of names and suggests that Noaba may have been Cain's twin sister, but without further evidence this argument is less than compelling (*A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum: With Latin Text and English Translation* [AGJUC 31; Leiden: Brill, 1996], 283).

them,” but he does not provide any names or whether one of them became Cain’s wife (*Ant* 1.52).³⁷

A creative approach to the birth of Abel and the related issue of sisters in the Genesis account is found in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon*. Here we are not told the name of the daughter nor is it ever mentioned if she became Cain’s wife. But what *is* emphasized is that the daughter is Abel’s twin sister and, thus, not related to Cain. This specificity is communicated by making two additions to the Hebrew text of Gen 4:2a.

Then, *from Adam her husband* she bore *his twin sister* and Abel
(*Tg. Ps.-J. Gen* 4:2)

Prior to this statement the translator has already added the claim that Cain was the result of a sexual encounter between Eve and Sammael. In the Hebrew the birth of Abel is introduced simply as a separate birth without any mention of an encounter between Adam and Eve. It is assumed that Adam is the father of Abel. But *Pseudo-Jonathon* specifies Abel’s father by adding that Eve bore him “from Adam her husband.” This addition is necessary since it further differentiates between the different fathers of Cain, Abel and Abel’s twin sister. By specifying that Eve bore Abel and his twin sister by Adam, it is clear that Cain is not their full brother. Cain’s father is Sammael and Adam is the father of Abel and his twin sister.

The “exegetical peg” which opened the possibility for this expansion of the passage is similar to what happened in the account of Cain’s birth. In Gen 4:1 the ambiguity surrounding the translation and interpretation of the direct object marker **את** allowed for the expansion of details about Cain’s birth. But in 4:2 there is a double occurrence of the **את**, once before **את־אָהִיו**, “his brother,” and again before the name “Abel,” **את־הַבֶּל**. This double occurrence of the direct object marker indicated a double birth to the translator and that Abel, therefore, had a twin who was a sister. “Since, to our targumist, Cain and Abel are not full brothers, he cannot afford a literal translation of the Hebrew text and translates the Hebrew ‘his brother’ as **תְּיוֹמַתִּיה** ‘his twin sister.’”³⁸ The twin must be Abel’s twin since Cain is not Adam’s son, but the son of Sammael.

³⁷ Josephus does mention that Cain had a wife that was exiled with him, but he does not give her a name nor indicate that she was Cain’s sister (*Ant*. 1.58).

³⁸ Martínez, “Eve’s Children in the Targumim,” 37.

Not all interpreters connected Cain's conception to a tryst between Eve and a fallen angel, however. Sometimes the suggestion that Abel had a twin sister was also attributed to Cain. Some interpreters went so far as to describe Eve giving birth to as many as five children (quintuplets)!

And she conceived and bore Cain (Gen 4:1) R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Three wonders were performed on that day: on that very day they were created, on that very day they cohabited, and that very day they produced offspring. R. Joshua b. Karhah said: Only two entered the bed, and seven left it: Cain and his twin sister, Abel and his two twin sisters. (*Gen. Rab.* 22:2 [Freedman])

The sudden leap from two children in Gen 4:1–2 to a total of five is the direct result of attempts to explain the double use of the **וְאֵל**. Exploitation of repetition is common in rabbinic exegesis. In *Genesis Rabbah*, the repetition of the **וְאֵל** is interpreted as implying that in addition to the birth of the named child an additional, unnamed, child is also born. Thus in 4:1 the **וְאֵל** indicated that Cain was born as well as a twin sister. But in 4:2 the double **וְאֵל** suggests that three children were born, Abel and two twin sisters. Thus in contrast to what we find in *Pseudo-Jonathon* where Cain is the half-brother of Abel, these other traditions considered Cain and Abel to be simultaneously conceived twins.³⁹

Still some others arrived at the “twins” interpretation from a different angle. Rather than understanding the double **וְאֵל** as indicating additional children, they used an approach similar to *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* 21 by interpreting the Hebrew phrase **וְהָיָה לָהּ לְאֵל** (“and again she bore”) in Gen 4:2 as meaning an additional birth rather than an additional pregnancy.

And again she bore his brother Abel (Gen 4:2). This supports what R. Joshua b. Korhah said: They ascended the bed two and descended seven, for “and again she bore” implies an additional birth, but not an additional pregnancy. (*Gen. Rab.* 22:3)

And Again she bore his brother Abel [which implies] Abel and his sister; Cain and his sister. (*b. Yoma* 62a)

While *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* understands this phrase to mean that Cain and Abel were twins, *Genesis Rabbah* and the Talmud understand it

³⁹ Ibid.

as referring to twin sisters.⁴⁰ As the above citations demonstrate, it was the latter interpretation that seemed to have been the most popular.

There is one other problem that was solved by interpreting these verses this way. As noted above, in Gen 4:17 Cain takes a wife who bears him a child. But where did this woman come from? So far Genesis has only named four members in the first family. By interpreting the birth narratives as including twins, the exegetes were able to solve this problem. Cain's wife was his sister.

Rabbi Miasha said: Cain was born, and his wife, his twin-sister, with him. Rabbi Simeon said to him: Has it not already been said, "And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter and see her nakedness; it is a shameful thing"? (Lev 20:17). From these words know that there were no other women whom they could marry, and these were permitted to them, as it is said, "For I have said, The world shall be built up by love" (Ps. 89:2). With love was the world built up before the Torah had been given. (*Pirke R. El.* 21)

Normally these incestuous relationships would be condemned based on the prohibitions of Lev 20:17.⁴¹ But *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* adds a gloss that exempts the first family from this prohibition in order to populate the world. Both translations of Lev 20:17 in Targums *Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathon* provide a similar gloss exempting the first family.⁴² Without any other women for the two brothers to marry the story as presented in Genesis seems incomplete. But by introducing twin sisters the problems surrounding the identity of the unnamed wife disappears.

While this interpretation may have solved the problem of identifying the source of the brothers' wives, twin sisters also figured prominently among some interpreters as the source of the brothers' rivalry.

⁴⁰ Teugels, "The Twin Sisters of Cain and Abel," 51–52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴² *T.Neof.* Lev 20:17: "And any man who takes his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, this was a favor I did the first (men) for the building of the world. But since them, all who do so shall be blotted out before the eyes of the children of their people. He has dishonored the nakedness of his sister; he shall receive (the punishment of) his sin." *T. Ps.-J.* Lev 20:17: "And any man who has a sexual relation with his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter and he despise her nakedness, and she despise his nakedness, it is a shameful thing; because I did a favor to the first men so that the world would be filled with them before the law was given; but after the law has been given to the world, all who do so shall be exterminated by a plague and the children of their people shall see his punishment. Since he despised the nakedness of his sister, he will receive (the punishment of) his own sin."

A variety of names are given to the sisters, but there is a common tradition that a love rivalry existed between the two brothers and, in some cases, this is what eventually led Cain to murder Abel. The earliest source for this tradition is the *Testament of Adam* which cannot be confidently dated any earlier than the late second century CE.⁴³ Other renditions can be found in Jewish and Christian sources including a *tosefta* on Gen 4:8 found among the fragments of the Cairo Genizah.

You have heard, my son Seth, that a flood is coming and will wash the whole earth because of the daughters of Cain, your brother, who killed your brother Abel out of passion for your sister Lebuda. (*T. Adam* 3:5 [Robinson])

Said R. Hunna: An extra twin was born with Abel. [Cain] said, "I shall take her [as my wife]," [Abel] said "No, I shall take her" The former said, "I shall get her, since I am firstborn," while the latter said "I should get her, since she was born with me." (*Gen. Rab.* 22:7)

And she [Eve] became pregnant and bore Cain and Lebuda along with him; [some texts: "then she became pregnant again and bore Abel and his sister Qelima"]. And when the children had grown Adam said to Eve: "Let Cain take Qelima [as a wife], since she was born with Abel, and let Abel take Lebuda, who was born with Cain." Then said Cain to his mother Eve: "I will take my own sister, and let Abel take his own," for Lebuda was very beautiful. (*Cave of Treasures* 5:20–22 [Kugel, 149])⁴⁴

Rabbi Zadok said: A great Hatred entered Cain's heart against his brother Abel, because his offering had been accepted. Not only (on this account), but also because Abel's twin-sister was the most beautiful of women, and he desired her in his heart. Moreover, he said: I will slay Abel my brother, and I will take his twin-sister from him, as it is said, "And it came to pass when they were in the field" (Gen 4:8) "in the field" means woman, who is compared to a field. (*Pirque R. El.* 21)

Now, Cain had been bearing a grudge against Abel from before this, because Abel's [twin] sister was Cain's wife, and she was not as good looking as Cain's [twin] sister who was Abel's wife. When Cain recalled what was in his heart, he said: Now I have fou[nd] an opportunity for my hatred(?). (Oxford Bodleian Ms. Heb. C 74r, lines 18–26 [Klein, 12–15])

⁴³ "Testament of Adam," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; translation and introduction by Stephen Robinson; ed. James H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985), 1:990.

⁴⁴ Translation is taken from Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 149. See also E. A. W. Budge, trans., *The Cave of Treasures* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1927), 69.

The source of the brother's dispute is usually understood to be Cain's rejected sacrifice which is also assumed to be his motivation for killing Abel. But the above texts give a more earthy reason as an explanation for the dispute. The first sibling rivalry was over a woman. Since there was a limited amount of women in the world (Eve being the only other woman according to Genesis), a conflict would naturally erupt between the two bothers.⁴⁵ But even with the addition of one or more twin sisters, Cain and Abel are limited in their possible choices of women they could marry. And responsibility for the dispute rests with Cain. Cain wants the proposed bride of Abel for his own wife and, according to some exegetes, killed Abel to acquire her. This may seem like a rather far fetched interpretation to a modern reader, but it provides an important solution to yet another theological dilemma. If Cain killed Abel because he was angry over God rejecting his offering, then God appears to be complicit in Abel's murder.⁴⁶ But this theological pitfall is avoided by shifting the motivation for the first murder to a dispute over women rather than the way God accepts and rejects the brothers' offerings.⁴⁷ This interpretation answers two possibly troubling questions. It identifies the source of Cain's wife and explains the motive for Abel's murder.

Once again, we can observe that questions raised by readers of the story were answered by an approach that allowed expansions of the original which in turn provided the sought after answers. The birth of Cain and Abel does not attract the attention of the interpreter at the first reading. But as the questions begin to mount and the subtle ambiguities of the text become more pronounced, more and more material is added to the text in order to fill out the picture. The answers which were deduced by this mode of exegesis (one might call it eisegesis) then became a part of an interpretive tradition that helped to develop theology and the communities that were influenced by these stories.

⁴⁵ In *Gen. Rab.* 22:7 it is suggested by Judah B. Rabbi that "their quarrel was over the first Eve," but this is quickly rejected with the claim that Eve had already died and that the brothers fought over Abel's twin sister.

⁴⁶ The problem of Cain's rejected offering will be examined more fully in chapter two.

⁴⁷ Martínez, "Eve's Children in the Targumim," 41.

What's in a name?

Biblical writers often attached tremendous importance to the names of individuals. Names not only provided the person a way to be identified, but also described any special characteristics and/or circumstances about the individual and their birth. Although Cain and Abel is a story of firsts, the earliest account of name giving is in conjunction with their mother. In Gen 3:20 Adam calls his wife "Eve" with the added explanation that she was given this name because "she was the mother of all living." Including these types of explanations became a normative part of many birth narratives in the Bible.

Who named Cain and Abel is not clear. It is usually assumed that their names were given to them by Eve since she is the only one who speaks in the birth narrative, and such a conclusion is not without merit. But a comparison with the birth of Seth in Gen 4:25 reveals yet more ambiguity. In 4:25 we are told the following:

And Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel since Cain slew him."

Unlike the Cain and Abel birth narrative, the naming of Seth is specifically attributed to Eve. 4:1–2 describes the brothers' birth, but does not detail who gave them their names. Also, in 4:25 it is Eve who gives the reason for choosing Seth's name which coincides with her own naming earlier in Gen 3:20. None of this information is given for Cain and Abel. With this in mind we can examine the names given to Eve's first two sons.

In the Hebrew Cain's name is a part of a word play in Eve's cryptic statement made at her first son's birth. This word play is created by her claim to have "gained" (קָנָה) a man which would have had a poetic similarity to the name Cain (קַיִן). This provides the child not only with a name, but an etymology for that name which resembles other birth narratives in Genesis like that of Seth (4:25), Noah (5:29), Levi (29:34) and Judah (29:35).⁴⁸ Thus Cain's name is a pun created from his mother's excitement at his birth; Cain is her possession that she has received from the Lord.

A similar type of word play is found in Seth's birth narrative. Seth's name means "to put or place" and he is declared by his mother to have

⁴⁸ Wenham, 101.

been put in place by God to substitute for the son she lost through Cain's murderous actions.⁴⁹ Evidence of this word play is also found in *Gen. Rab.* 22:2 where Eve's proclamation is nuanced to mean that by giving birth to a child her husband became her possession.⁵⁰

When Eve's statement was translated into Greek the word play was lost and no attempt was made to retain it.⁵¹ But in spite of this, some interpreters seem to have been aware of the assonance between Cain's name and his mother's statement. Although working in Greek, they used their knowledge of this word play in Hebrew to develop traditions about Cain. Evidence of this is found in Philo who further develops the pun in the Hebrew by declaring that Cain's name means "possession" and then goes on to provide his own etymology of the name: "The first of these two views is figured by Cain who is called Possession, because he thinks he possesses all things" (*Sacrifices* 1.2). Josephus also notes that the meaning of Cain's name is "possession" (*Ant.* 1.52) as does Augustine (*City of God* 15.17).⁵² As we will discover in a later chapter, the etymology of Cain's name became important to those who sought to describe him as greedy and the archetype of the rich oppressors of the poor. As with the attribution that Cain was the son of the devil, anything that could be found to explain why he killed Abel was used to help fill out the details of the story.

The naming of Abel is complicated once again by the complete lack of any detail. Abel's birth is described almost as an add-on to that of Cain's, and there is no declaration made about the son by the mother, nor is there an etymology provided for the name as there is with Cain and Seth. In Hebrew הבל means "breath" or "vanity" and is used elsewhere to describe the shortness of human life (Job 7:16;

⁴⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁰ "And she said: I have gotten a Man, etc. R. Isaac said: When a woman sees that she has children she exclaims: 'Behold, my husband is now in my possession'" (*Gen. Rab.* 22:2).

⁵¹ Wevers, 51.

⁵² There is a different tradition about the meaning of Cain's name found in the *Life of Adam and Eve* [Vita]. Here it is Cain's bringing of a reed to his mother that explains the etymology of his name. The Latin transcriber was apparently aware of the word play in Hebrew and attempted to retain it. "And she bore a son and he was lustrous. And at once the infant rose, ran, and brought in his hands a reed and gave it to his mother. And his name was called Cain" (*Vita* 21:3). A connection with the Latin tradition may be present in *Genesis Rabbah* 22:8 where Cain is said to have killed Abel with a reed. L. Grabbe suggests that Philo and others most likely derived these etymologies from a traditional onomasticon, thus there is not necessarily a genetic connection between Philo's etymologies and those of later authors (*Etymology in Early Jewish Interpretation: The Hebrew Names in Philo* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988], 29–33; 111–13).

Ps 144:4; Eccl 1:2).⁵³ But in spite of the lack of an etymology, interpreters were able to extrapolate meaning from Abel's name which in turn allowed them to expand the text with their own interpretations. Thus Josephus says that the meaning of Abel is "nothing" (*Ant.* 1.52). There is a variant in Josephus which replaces "nothing" (οὐθέν) for "sorrow" (πένθος) and is similarly found in Philo's interpretation of Abel's name (*Migration* 13.74).⁵⁴ In either case, whether one interprets Abel's name as meaning "sorrow" or "nothing," it is clear that ancient interpreters were aware of the traditions that had been attached to the Hebrew name Abel and are reflected in their own commentary on the brothers' story.⁵⁵ As with the etymology of Cain's name, interpreters used the meaning of Abel's name to develop aspects of the story. Hence Augustine would later claim that Abel was "like an alien on earth, destined to suffer cruel persecutions at the hands of the wicked" (*City of God* 15.15).⁵⁶

Although the canonical version of Cain and Abel left out details about their names, ancient interpreters were happy to fill in those gaps through their own interpretive reading. By reading the story this way, exegetes could demonstrate that even the names of Cain and Abel communicated a message about their lives and the way that God works in the world. With Cain in particular, the connection of his name with greed became a peg on which later exegetes could hang interpretive traditions about him. Not only was his origin attributed to an evil being, but his disposition, as revealed by his name, communicated what kind of individual he would grow up to be. The accusation that Cain was a greedy grasper is repeated often in conjunction with the details surrounding his crime of fratricide and his subsequent life following his expulsion.

⁵³ Wenham, 102; Nachmanides suggested that the reason for the omission of an etymology for Abel was that the Bible did not want to make explicit the pessimism inherent in his name (Louis H. Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* [SJSJ; Leiden: Brill, 1998], 9).

⁵⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Judean Antiquities* 1–4 (translation and commentary by Louis H. Feldman; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 19.

⁵⁵ The Midrashic tradition *Yashar Bereshit* 9a, mentions that Eve's reason for giving Abel his name was that he was only destined to die.

⁵⁶ Yet another set of epithets is given to the brothers in the *Greek Life of Adam and Eve* 1:3. Here Eve names Cain "Diaphotos" which is sometimes translated as "planter" or in a variant form as "unshining". Abel is called "Amialabes" which is understood by some as "the destroyed one." But neither of these epithets can be interpreted with any certainty and Johannes Tromp has argued persuasively that both are textual corruptions ("Cain and Abel in the Greek and Armenian/Georgian Recensions of the *Life of Adam and Eve*," 278–82).

What is the meaning of the brothers' occupations?

Immediately after being told about the circumstances of their births and their names, we are told about Cain and Abel's choice of occupations.

And Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain was a worker of soil

But there is yet another twist in this tale when we notice that although Abel is the younger of the two brothers, it is his occupation that is mentioned first rather than that of Cain. This may be a subtle hint to the reader that God had a preference for Abel even before the controversy over the sacrifices that was to follow. Moreover, Abel's choice of occupation as shepherd places him in good company with Israel's patriarchs who were themselves shepherds (Gen 47:3), as was King David (1 Sam 16:11).⁵⁷ Cain's profession as a farmer, on the other hand, seems to allude to the occupation given to Adam by God when he was expelled from the Garden of Eden. By working the soil and then being cursed from it later, Cain gives the impression of perpetuating the curse on humanity that was delivered to Adam in 3:17–19.⁵⁸ Conversely, the lack of detail about Abel's name, his birth and his choice of an occupation different than that of his father and brother creates a character that seems to circumvent the effects of the curse. By not choosing the occupation of farmer and dying prematurely, he is never tainted by wrong actions.

Philo also noticed the order in which the brothers' occupations were listed and was certain that it was not without reason. Probably thinking of David and other shepherds in Israel's history, Philo connects the task of the shepherd to that which prepares one to be a ruler or king. This is important because the shepherd is one who labors and works with living things. Consequently, Cain's choice does not prepare him for any type of leadership position, but instead demonstrates a life dedicated to earthly and inanimate things.

Why does (Scripture) first describe the work of the younger man Abel, saying, "He became a shepherd of flocks, and Cain tilled the ground"? Even though the righteous man was younger in time than the wicked one, still he was older in activity. Wherefore now, when their activities are appraised, he is placed first in order. For one of them labors and takes care of living beings even though they are irrational, gladly taking

⁵⁷ Wenham, 102.

⁵⁸ David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2003), 43.

the pastoral work which is preparatory to rulership and kingship. But the other occupies himself with earthly and inanimate things. (Philo, QG 1.59)

Philo's conclusion about the brothers' occupations is rooted to some degree in his philosophical understanding of their names. He notes that Abel, as a shepherd, is one who refers all things to God while Cain, as a "worker of the soil," is one who refers all things only to himself (*Sacrifices* 14.51). It is this distinction about Cain that became the crux of Philo's interpretation. In the Greek tradition of Gen 4:2, Cain is not described as a farmer (γεωργός), but as one who "works the soil" (ἐργαζόμενος τὴν γῆν). Another famous farmer in Genesis is Noah who, after the flood, chooses the same occupation as Cain. But there is a subtle difference in description that is important since in Gen 9:20 Noah is described as a farmer (γεωργός) in contradistinction to that of Cain in 4:2 (ἐργαζόμενος τὴν γῆν). Philo seizes on this variance in terminology as an opportunity to disparage Cain and promote Noah. Cain, whose name means "possession," is said to epitomize all those who are only interested in the earthly pleasures of the body and who will travel the world in order to fulfill those desires. Rather than being a farmer like the righteous Noah who nurtures living things, the unrighteous Cain forces from the earth that which he desires to please him (*Agriculture* 5.20–25). By combining the meaning of Cain's name with the description of his occupation, Philo emphasizes the portrayal of Cain as a greedy grasper.

A similar line of interpretation is found in *Antiquities* where Josephus uses the brothers' choice of occupation to further impugn Cain and explain why God rejected the latter's sacrifice. Whereas Genesis merely describes the brothers' occupation as a way to introduce the content of their sacrifice, Josephus expands the narrative to include details of the brothers' character. Abel, we are told, loves virtue and respects justice. Cain, on the other hand, is depraved and has insatiable desire for gain. While Cain's agrarian occupation in Genesis mirrors that of his father, Josephus reconfigures the narrative in such a way that Cain is now viewed as the inventor of plowing so that his occupation is actually a violation of God's natural order in creation.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The violation of God's created order also plays a part in the way that Josephus describes Cain's rejected offering. For further discussion see the discussion on the timing of Cain's offering in chapter two.

Now the brothers took pleasure in different pursuits. Abel, the younger, had respect for justice and, believing that God was with him in all his actions, paid heed to virtue; he led the life of a shepherd. Cain, on the contrary, was thoroughly depraved and had an eye only to gain: he was the first person to think of plowing the soil, and he slew his brother for the following reason. The brothers having decided to sacrifice to God, Cain brought fruits of the tilled earth and of the trees; Abel came with milk and the firstlings of his flock. This was the offering which found more favor with God, who is honored by things that grow spontaneously and in accordance with natural laws, and not by the products forced from nature by the ingenuity of grasping man. (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.53–54 [Thackeray])

The interpretation of Cain's name that led him to be described as a greedy oppressor of others was also used to describe how even his choice of occupation was wrong. Rather than understand his role as a farmer simply as one who chose to pursue agriculture, ancient exegetes viewed it as an insight into the scheming way that his mind worked. In the end, while Genesis provides no hint of how or why the two brothers chose their positions in life, Josephus makes it clear that Cain was predisposed to take that which was not his, by force even, and that his only reason for choosing to work the soil was because he could force from it that which would please him.

Distaste for farmers was not always relegated to Cain, however. While Philo may attempt to exonerate Noah through the subtleness of language, the rabbis did not. They not only looked down on Cain and his choice of occupation, but lumped him together with other agrarians whose lives ended with a blemish.

And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground Three had a passion for agriculture, and no good was found in them: Cain, Noah and Uziah. Cain was a tiller of the ground; Noah the husbandman (Gen 9:20); Uziah: For he loved husbandry (2 Chron 26:10). (*Gen. Rab.* 22:3)

The story of all three of these who worked the soil ended with a tragedy. Cain became a murderer, Noah a drunkard and Uziah a leper.

There is yet another tradition about the brothers' choice of occupation in the Latin recension of the *Life of Adam and Eve*. In this document the choice is not made by the brothers, but by their parents in response to their mother's dream.

Eve later conceived and bore a son, whose name was Abel. And Cain and Abel used to stay together. And Eve said to Adam, "My lord, while

I was sleeping I saw a vision, as if the blood of our son Abel was on the hands of Cain [who was] gulping it down in his mouth. This is why I am sad.” And Adam said, “God forbid that Cain should kill Abel! Let us separate them from each other and make separate places for them.” And they made Cain a farmer and Abel a shepherd, that in this way they might be separated from each other. (*L.A.E. [Vita]* 23:1–4)

This is a rather unpleasant tradition that is quite different than the others in that there are no negative connotations attached to an agrarian lifestyle.⁶⁰ But amid the gruesome embellishments there is a theme present which is consistently found throughout the tradition as a whole: Cain’s occupation is a result of his predisposition to commit acts of evil. The fear created by Eve’s dream is the direct cause of Cain’s placement in an agricultural career. Cain’s occupation as a farmer is an attempt to prevent him from murdering Abel.

Summary

The exegetical traditions that developed around Gen 4:1–2 provide far more detail than is contained in the canonical version. The presence of linguistic and grammatical ambiguities coupled with the lack of specific details provided translators and interpreters with a number of exegetical pegs on which they could expand the story. The focus of these expansions is to respond to a number of questions that the story left unanswered. Thus, a problem like the source of Cain’s wife is explained further for the observant reader who notices the disjuncture between various aspects of the story.

The openings left in the original version also provided the interpreters an opportunity to paint an even more negative picture of Cain. In a search of the cause behind his crime, tradition portrayed Cain as wholly evil even before his birth by labeling him the son of a fallen angel. By depicting him as the offspring from an encounter between Eve and the devil, heirs of the tradition would have concluded that Cain’s actions were the result of a man doomed from birth. What other result could be expected from one who is half demonic? Correspondingly, Abel was Cain’s half brother and thus, until the birth of Seth, the only true descendant of the first man and woman.

⁶⁰ The description of Eve’s vision of Cain murdering Abel is even more grisly in the Georgian version which has Cain drinking Abel’s blood to the point that it begins to exit his own body and stains him (Anderson and Stone, 27E).

By building on the etymology of Cain's name, interpreters laid the groundwork for another tradition that would declare him as the archetype of the greedy and oppressive rich. In the story of the brothers' love rivalry over their twin sisters, the attribution that Cain had an insatiable drive to "posses" everything led him to desire Abel's wife and a willingness to kill him if necessary.

The brothers' choice of respective occupations also became an occasion to further point the finger at Cain. The story was interpreted as a declared preference for sheep herding over farming by defining Cain's actions as forcing things from the earth. Cain was depicted as one unable to avoid his own destiny since his name "possession" means that he attempted to own everything and was willing to force it from the ground if it fit his needs.

On reflection, Cain is as much a victim in the story as is Abel. The lack of detail associated with Abel combined with the grammatical and linguistic ambiguities associated with Cain added to his notoriety as the first murderer and meant that Cain was destined to become the archetypical scapegoat for generations of interpreters. As we will see, the description of Cain's birth and the meaning of his name were just the beginning of what appears to be an exegetical campaign to defame him beyond what is found in Genesis.

CHAPTER TWO

REJECTED OFFERING—DEJECTED PERSON GENESIS 4:3–7

Thy burnt-flesh offering prospers better;
See how heaven licks up the flames, when thick with
blood!

(Lord Byron, *Cain* 3.1)

As a story of firsts, Cain and Abel represents the first account of an offering made to God. The questions that quickly rise to the surface when reading Gen 4:3–7 are these: What was wrong with Cain's offering? Why did God reject it? While it may be possible to draw some preliminary conclusions, the task is hindered by the fact that the Bible does not provide enough detail. At no point are we told why God accepted Abel's offering over that of Cain's;¹ Cain's anger suggests that the rejection by God caught him by surprise.² This lack of detail creates two problems, one on the narrative level and the other theological. First, the absence of an explanation for the rejection leaves a gap in the narrative that makes it impossible for the reader to learn from Cain's actions. How can one offer God a better sacrifice if the text is not clear about the nature of the problem? Second, the absence of an explanation makes God seem unpredictable.³ Indeed, the Emperor Julian declared that God appeared to act somewhat capriciously in the way Abel's offering was accepted over that of Cain's (*Contra Galilaeos* 346E–347C).⁴ God's seemingly capriciousness in rejecting one

¹ The paucity of details led Hermann Gunkel to conclude that "something seems to be missing here" (*Genesis* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997], 43). N. M. Sarna has commented that the narrative is "extraordinarily terse and sketchy" (*JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* [New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 31).

² H. B. Huffmon, "Cain: The Arrogant Sufferer," in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry* (ed. A. Kort and S. Morhauser; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 110.

³ Huffmon, 112.

⁴ Feldman, *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible*, 8; John G. Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (STAC, 23; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 267–69.

sacrifice over the other creates a theological problem.⁵ The problem is compounded by Abel's murder. Since Cain's act of fratricide is precipitated by God's unexplained rejection of the sacrifice which resulted in Cain's anger, God becomes complicit in the act. These problems opened the door for ancient interpreters to expand and rework the story in a way that relieved God of appearing capricious and, by extension, complicit in Abel's murder. What follows below traces the interpretive approaches used by Jewish and Christian exegetes to respond to a theological problem created by gaps in the narrative.

Was something wrong with the offering?

The Hebrew tradition of Gen 4:3–5 does not contain any of the linguistic and grammatical ambiguities found in 4:1–2. In fact, the narrative is fairly straightforward. Beginning with Cain, the eldest, the brothers are said to have brought a “gift/offering” (מנחה) to God which was representative of their respective occupations. Cain brought an offering “from the fruit of the earth” and Abel an offering from “the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.” Though it is not spelled out, the more detailed description of Abel's offering is usually taken by modern commentators to provide the reason God was pleased with his sacrifice.⁶ The care used by the author to describe Abel's offering as being from among the choice of his flock echoes biblical mandates for such (Exod 22:28–29; 34:19–20; Lev 3:16; Deut 32:38; Ps 147:14).⁷ The obvious conclusion, based on the descriptions offered, is that Cain's sacrifice was defective since, unlike Abel's, it was not taken from the choicest part of the harvest. Thus, even though a strict chronological reading would recognize that the regulations concerning sacrifice had

⁵ James L. Kugel, “Cain and Abel in Fact and Fable: Genesis 4:1–16,” in *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament? Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. R. Brooks and J. J. Collins; Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity, 5; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame press, 1990), 175; Anglea Y. Kim, “Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A study in the History of Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4:1–16,” *JSP* (2001): 65–66; Alan D. Crown, “Samaritan Midrash” in *Encyclopedia of Midrash: Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism* (ed. J. Neusner and A. J. Avery Peck; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 2:765–66.

⁶ For a review of how Abel's offering was interpreted in antiquity see Jack P. Lewis, “The Offering of Abel (Gen 4:4): A History of Interpretation,” *JETS* 37 (1994): 481–96; for a list of the different types of explanations that have been offered by modern commentators see: Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 104.

⁷ Wenham, 103. This is also the explanation offered by Philo (*Sacrifices* 88–89).

not yet been mandated, Abel is portrayed in the Genesis account as one who fulfilled the law even before it had been handed down. Such a portrayal would make Abel, as one of the first pair to sacrifice, a model for acceptable sacrificial practice. A sampling of Jewish and Christian literature demonstrates that this has been a standard interpretation.⁸

And therefore Cain retained in his own keeping the firstlings of the fruits of his husbandry and offered, as we are told, merely the fruits at a later time, although he had beside him a wholesome example. For his brother brought to the altar the first-born, thus confessing that even the causes which come higher in the chain of causation owe their existence to the Cause which is highest and first of all. (Philo, *Confusion* 124)

Abel was very discerning in his choice of offerings, whereas Cain showed no such discernment. Abel selected and offered the choicest of his first-born and of his fat ones, while Cain either offered young grains or certain fruits that are found at the same time as the young grains. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3.2.1 [Matthews, Amar and McVey])⁹

And Cain brought of the fruit of the Ground: of the inferior crops, he being like a bad tenant who eats the first ripe figs, but honors the king with the late figs. (*Gen. Rab.* 22:5)

Cain brought the remnants of his meal of roasted grain, and the seed of flax, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his sheep, and of their fat, he-lambs, which had not been shorn of their wool. (*Pirqe R. El.* 21)

But not every interpreter was content to explain God's acceptance or rejection based on the slightly more detailed explanation of Abel's sacrifice. The LXX tradition attempted to create an even sharper distinction between the brothers' offerings as reflected in the translator's choice of terminology. While the Hebrew simply has one term to describe both of the brothers' offerings (מנחה), the Greek has two. Cain's offering was rendered in Greek as a "sacrifice," (θυσία) while Abel's as a "gift" (δῶρον). In Greek Genesis δῶρον is used as a translation for מנחה only ten times, one of which is to describe Abel's offering (Gen 4:5). In the other nine cases when מנחה is translated by δῶρον the occasion is not

⁸ Victor Aptowitzer, *Kain und Abel in der Agada: den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen, christlichen und muhammedanischen Literatur* (Vieann: R. Löewitt Verlag, 1922), 37–41.

⁹ Ephrem goes on to claim that "Cain had bulls and calves and an abundance of animals and birds that he could have offered. But he offered none of these on that day when he offered the first fruits of his land" (Edward G. Matthews, Joseph Amar, trans., and Kathleen McVey ed., *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America Press, 1994], 124).

one of sacrifice, but of gifts made in offers of peace like that of Jacob to Esau and to Joseph by his brothers in Egypt.¹⁰ *θυσία*, on the other hand, only translates *מנחה* twice in Greek Genesis, both of which refer to Cain's offering (Gen 4:3, 5). The modern interpreter should probably err on the side of caution here and conclude that the translator's choice of terminology was only intended to further differentiate the brothers' sacrifices from one another and not to portray Abel's gift as a peace offering to God.¹¹ However, as Kim points out, the variation in terminology leads the reader to conclude "that Cain's sacrifice was different either qualitatively or substantially."¹²

Another way of explaining the choice of terms has been offered by C. T. R. Hayward who notes that the translator's selection of *θυσία* to describe Cain's sacrifice might indicate an offering that would be divided between the altar and worshipper. Whereas Abel handed over his entire "gift" to God, Cain kept some of the "sacrifice" for himself. "This translation, therefore, may further hint at a lack of generosity in Cain, a concern with himself and his possessions possibly representing a defect in his character contrasted with Abel's open-handedness."¹³ Thus, although the translators do not give the corresponding etymology of Cain's name, the choice of terminology may signal a nod towards the tradition which associated Cain's name with his greedy character.¹⁴

¹⁰ John William Wevers, *LXX: Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies 35; Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1993), 52. A survey of the wider corpus of the LXX reveals that *δῶρον* is used more often as a translation for *קרבן* than *מנחה* and that of the twenty-nine times *δῶρον* is used as a translation for *מנחה* only four are cases in which the gift is offered to God while the rest are better described as peace offerings to kings (Gen 4:4; 1 Chr 16:29; 2 Chr 32:23; Isa 66:20). What makes Gen 4:4–5 unusual is that two different terms were used to translate *מנחה*. To the best of my knowledge, the only time that we have a combination of *δῶρον* and *θυσία*, as we do in Genesis, is when both *מנחה* and *קרבן* appear. This is particularly evident in Leviticus.

¹¹ C. T. R. Hayward suggests that: "By selecting these particular terms, the translators suggested that what Cain offered was something in which he himself would have a share, *thusia* indicating an offering divided between the altar and the worshipper; whereas Abel bringing "gifts", had handed over his entire offering to God" ("What Did Cain Do Wrong? Jewish and Christian Exegesis of Genesis 4:3–6," in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* [ed. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling; Jewish and Christian Perspective Series 18; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 102–103).

¹² Kim, 75.

¹³ Hayward, "What Did Cain Do Wrong?" 103.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

There were many ancient interpreters who were heirs to the LXX tradition and preserved the distinction in terminology used to describe the brothers' offerings. Thus a fragment of *Jubilees* contains both *θυσία* and *δῶρον* as does *1 Clem.* 4:1–2.¹⁵ Philo, however, not only preserved this tradition, but used it as yet another opportunity to demonstrate Cain's baseness. Commenting on the differentiation between a gift and a sacrifice he says:

What is the difference between a gift and a sacrifice? He who slaughters a sacrifice, after dividing it, pours the blood on the altar and takes the flesh home. But he who offers something as a gift offers the whole of it, it seems, to him who receives it. And the lover of self is a divider, as was Cain while the lover of God is a giver as was Abel. (Philo, QG 1.62)

Philo's logic is not entirely clear and his illustration, if pushed too far, breaks down. He attempts to explain the differences between a sacrifice and gift, but chooses to do so by describing the sacrifice as an animal offering. The gift, however, is not given any description other than something that is not divided. All of this seems a bit odd since the Genesis story affirms the animal sacrifice of Abel and condemns the grain offering by Cain. But the crux of Philo's analysis is not whether it is an animal or grain offering. For Philo his interpretation of Cain is wrapped up in his understanding of Cain's name. Since "Cain" means "possession," Philo consistently portrays Cain as a greedy individual only seeking to gain more.¹⁶ As Hayward points out above, even the terminology used to describe Cain's offering reveals that every action is predicated on how he can obtain more for himself.¹⁷ The result of Philo's interpretation is that responsibility for the rejection belonged to Cain. Neither the sacrifice nor God were deficient, rather it was Cain's action of keeping a portion of the offering for himself. Cain was a greedy worshipper who did not give God all of the offering.

¹⁵ *T. Neofiti* Genesis 4 uses the Greek loan word *δῶρον* to describe both of the brothers' sacrifices (Martin, McNamara, *Targum Neofiti* [Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1987], 64).

¹⁶ See Hindy Najman, "Cain and Abel as Character Traits: A Study in the Allegorical Typology of Philo of Alexandria" in *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. G. P. Luttikhuisen Leiden: Brill, 2003), 113, 115; John Byron, "Living in the Shadow of Cain: Echoes of a Developing Tradition in James 5:1–6," *NovT* 48 (2006): 265–66.

¹⁷ Josephus does not use these two terms. He describes both brothers as offering a *θυσία*. But Josephus does agree with Philo that the difference between Cain and Abel's sacrifice was that Cain was a greedy individual who forced it from the ground (*Ant.* 1.53–54).

Was it a problem of timing?

While some interpreters focused on the quality of the offering Cain presented to God others questioned whether it was a problem of timing that caused God to reject Cain's sacrifice. The Cain and Abel story is abrupt in its shift of action. In 4:1–2 we are introduced to the birth of the brothers and then in the next verse we find them old enough to bring sacrifices to God.¹⁸ The only chronological marker in the Cain and Abel story is located in Gen 4:3 where it introduces the sacrifice scene. The Hebrew phrase *וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים* is usually rendered in English translations as “after days” or “after a year” or, as in the NRSV, “in the course of time.” The LXX provides even less clarity since it translates the Hebrew idiom with remarkable woodenness “and it happened after some days” (καὶ ἐγένετο μεθ’ ἡμέρας).¹⁹ The variety of translations reflects the vagueness of the phrase. Sometimes it can be used to describe an indefinite period of time, either short or long (Gen 24:55; 40:4), or it can designate a time period as much as a year (Lev 25:20; 1 Sam 1:21). The phrase's meaning in 4:3 is further complicated by the fact that it is usually followed by more detail expressing a precise period of time (e.g. Gen 8:6; Exod 12:41). Modern commentators are inclined to understand the phrase as referring to an exact year or, more specifically, the end of the agricultural year when crops would be harvested and offerings made to God.²⁰ But since this is the only chronological marker in the Cain and Abel story some exegetes in antiquity concluded that the phrase added some type of significant meaning to the interpretation of the story.

Philo's condemnation of Cain for not bringing the first fruits is compounded with the added crime of not bringing an offering immediately. Basing his interpretation on the LXX, Philo concluded that Cain delayed and only brought his gift to God “after some days.” Consistent in Philo's critique of Cain, his interpretation of this phrase too is predicated on Cain's name meaning “possession.”

And it came to pass after some days that Cain brought of the fruits of the earth as an offering to God (Gen. 4:3). There are two charges against the self-lover: one that he made his thank-offering to God “after some days”

¹⁸ David K. Delaney, “The Sevenfold Vengeance of Cain: Genesis 4 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1996), 9.

¹⁹ Wevers, 52.

²⁰ Wenham, 103.

instead of at once; the other that he offered of the fruits and not of the earliest fruits, or in a single word the first-fruits. (Philo, *Sacrifices* 52)

So then every imagination which counts that all things are its own possession and honors itself before God—and such a mind is shown in the words “to sacrifice after some days”—may know that it stands in danger to be brought to the judgment bar for impiety. (Philo, *Sacrifices* 71)

Scripture manifests a distinction between the lover of self and the lover of God. For one of them took for himself the fruit of firstfruits and impiously thought God worthy only of the second fruits. For the words “after some days” instead of “immediately” and “from the offerings” instead of “from the firstfruits” indicate great wickedness. But the other offered the firstborn without any delay at all or rejection by his Father. (Philo, QG 1.60)

Once again Philo’s interpretation is not in keeping with the Genesis story. It is clear by the way Gen 4:3–4 narrates the order of the brothers’ offerings that Abel either brought his offering simultaneously with Cain or soon after. By focusing on the timing of Cain’s offering only, Philo has found an opportunity to impugn the character of Cain without extending the same critique towards Abel.²¹ Cain is presented as the antitype to Abel who was the model for acceptable sacrificial practice. The result is that another degree of disrepute is added to Cain’s character. Not only is Cain a greedy worshipper, he is also one who procrastinates in fulfilling his duties to God. Cain’s birth, name, choice of occupation coupled with the timing and type of sacrifice that he offers to God are all early indicators in the story of a human being who will ultimately become the first murderer.

Josephus does not incorporate the “after days” phrase into his account of the Genesis story and, unlike Philo, there is no discussion of the timing of Cain’s offering. Josephus’s description of what Cain offered, however, may imply a critique of timing. In agreement with Genesis, Josephus says that Cain brought fruits from the ground, but he expands this description to include the “fruit of the trees” (*Ant.* 1.54).²²

²¹ Origen, on the other hand, developed Philo’s exegesis in his commentary on Romans to apply the phrase “after some days” to include both Cain and Abel and to prove that “all have sinned” (Johannes Bartholdy Glenthøj, *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4th–6th Centuries)* [CSCO; Lovanii: Peeters, 1997], 21).

²² Josephus has also changed the description of Abel’s offering so that the fat portions is excised and replaced with honey. Why Josephus has done this is not entirely clear and may demonstrate that he is working independently of the Greek tradition and has misunderstood the Hebrew (Thomas W. Franxman, *Genesis and the “Jewish Antiquities” of Flavius Josephus* [BeO 35; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979], 67).

Franxman has suggested that Josephus may be alluding to the fruit offering described in Lev 19:23–25 which, though completely restricted for three years, in the fourth year could be offered to the Lord and in the fifth year consumed.²³ The purpose of this law seems to have been to remind the people that the land was owned by God.²⁴ If Josephus understood the phrase “after days” in Gen 4:3 as a gloss referring to the first agricultural year, then expanding the offering to include fruit from trees would have meant that Cain’s timing was wrong.²⁵ By offering fruit at an improper time he would have been viewed as transgressing the law. Such a reading is possible when considered in light of how Josephus follows this expansion with a description of Cain as one who forced his offering from the ground in unnatural ways and, for this reason, was rejected by God. Cain’s premature offering from fruit trees symbolizes his rejection of God’s ownership of the earth and emphasizes the perception of him as a greedy individual.

In rabbinic literature the phrase “after some days” tended to be understood as indicating a specific date in relation to creation and the feast days of the year rather than a description of Cain’s failure to offer promptly.²⁶ For instance, in *Genesis Rabbah* Pentecost and Hanukkah are both suggested as possible interpretations of the phrase each with a view towards calculating how long Abel lived before he was murdered.

And at the end of days it came to pass (Gen 4:3). R. Eliezer and R. Joshua disagree. R. Eliezer said: The world was created in Tishri; R. Joshua said: In Nisan. He who says in Tishri holds that Abel lived from the Festival (Tabernacles) until Hanukkah. He who says in Nisan holds that Abel lived from Passover until Pentecost. In either case, all agree that Abel was not in the world more than fifty days. (*Gen. Rab.* 22:4)

An interpretation of the “after some days” phrase that may incorporate a critique of Cain’s timing of the offering as well as providing a date is found in the closely related works *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon* and *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer*. Both provide the exact date of the brothers’ offerings as

²³ Franxman, 67.

²⁴ John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word, 1992), 319.

²⁵ Salomo Rappaport suggests that the fact that Cain also brought fruit from trees indicates that Josephus was thinking of the Feast of Weeks as the timing for the brothers’ offering (*Agada und Exegese bei Flavius Josephus* [Vienna: Verlag der Alexander Kohnt Memorial Foundation, 1930], 5–6).

²⁶ Aptowitzer, 3–7.

being the fourteenth of Nisan, which, of course, is Passover.²⁷ Hence in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon* we find a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase “after days” followed by an expansion (in italics).

After a certain time, *on the fourteenth of Nisan*, Cain brought of the produce of the land, *of the seed flax*, as an offering *of first fruits before* the Lord. Abel, on his part, brought of the firstlings of the flock and of their fat parts. (*Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 4:3–4*)

Targum Pseudo-Jonathon often specifies times that are vague in the biblical text.²⁸ But why choose the fourteenth of Nisan? It is possible that, in light of the sacrificial context and Abel’s offering of the firstlings of his flock, the problem was viewed not to be with Cain’s offering, but the time in which he offered that type of offering. Unlike other exegetes examined above, the targumist has been very careful to tell us that Cain’s offering *was* from the firstfruits rather than leftovers. The problem, however, was the offering of seed flax when what Cain should have brought was a lamb as had his brother Abel.²⁹

By specifying a date of the fourteenth of Nisan the targumist implies that the rejection of Cain’s offering had more to say about his timing rather than the gift itself.³⁰ Support for this conclusion may be found in *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* which fills out the scene even more.

The Evening of the festival of Passover arrived. Adam called his sons and said to them: In this (night) in the future Israel will bring Paschal offerings. Bring ye also (offerings) before your creator. (Cain) brought the remnants of his meal of roasted grain, (and) the seed of the flax, and Abel brought of the firstlings of the sheep, and of their fat, he-lambs, which had not been shorn of their wool. The offering of Cain was precluded and the offering of Abel was acceptable. (*Pirke R. El. 21*)

Pirke Rabbi Eliezer often imitates *Jubilees* in the way that it connects various laws with the patriarchs. In contrast, however, is the emphasis

²⁷ For a discussion of the possible interrelationship between these two works see C. T. R. Hayward, “Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer and Targum Pseudo-Jonathon,” *JJS* 42 (1991): 223–24.

²⁸ Michael Mahr, trans., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon: Genesis* (ArBib 1B; Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1992), 31 n. 2.

²⁹ Hayward, “What Did Cain Do Wrong?” 118.

³⁰ *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon* is the only Targum that provides a date. See the synopsis in Vermes, “The Targumic Versions of Genesis 4:3–16,” in *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (SJLA 8; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 93, 111; Per A. Bengtsson, *Passover in Targum Pseudo-Jonathon Genesis: The Connection of Early Biblical Events with Passover in Targum Pseudo-Jonathon in a Synagogue Setting* (Scripta Minora; Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001), 34.

on Passover rather than Pentecost and Tabernacles as is the case in *Jubilees*.³¹ Thus the introduction to the Cain and Abel sacrifice scene via Adam's explanation of the yet to be initiated feast of Passover, provides a commentary on not only Cain's offering, but also the timing of it. Unlike *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon*, *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* does accuse Cain of bringing leftovers from his dinner rather than the firstfruits of the harvest. Compounded with this is the fact that even though Adam had exhorted Cain to bring an offering to his creator in celebration of Passover, he failed to bring the proper type for the feast. Adam's explanation that future offerings would bring a "Paschal offering" can be read as a direct reference to the lamb eaten at the feast and anticipates the acceptance of Abel's offering. *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* implies that Cain's rejected offering was a result of both the type and timing of the gift.

Was it the way it was offered?

One suggestion popular among exegetes was that the problem centered on the way Cain presented the offering rather than the offering itself. This tradition finds its development from the way that the LXX version deviates from the Hebrew to relate God's rebuke of Cain in Gen 4:7a. The Hebrew in 4:7a contains a rhetorical question that God asks Cain: "If you do well will you not be accepted (or forgiven)? And if you do not do well sin is crouching at the door." But the LXX reads: "Have you not sinned if you brought it rightly, but did not rightly divide it?"³² This is a significant alteration on the part of the LXX that goes beyond merely sharpening the distinction between the offerings through the use of different terms. Since the context of the rebuke is the rejected sacrifice, the translator saw fit to add a cultic interpretation. This seems to be a result of three shifts in the understanding of the Hebrew by the translator.

First, שאת is translated in the sense of "raising up" (προσενέγκης), as in offering a sacrifice, rather than as "acceptance" or "forgiveness." This, in turn, requires that תיטיב be translated adverbially which results in the translation: "Is it not: if you should offer correctly."³³

³¹ Ibid.

³² This verse will be examined in more depth below.

³³ Wevers, 55.

The second shift is found in the contrast between dividing correctly or incorrectly (ὀρθῶς δὲ μὴ διέλγης). It is possible that this translation is the result of misreading לפתח “at the door” for לנתח which means “to divide,” and since the verse is being given a cultic interpretation, it may also be a nod to the description in Lev 1:12 of how to properly divide and offer a burnt sacrifice.³⁴ While this is a plausible explanation, it would need to assume that the translator was not familiar enough with the story to recognize the error. In light of the efforts to use a variety of Greek terms to clarify the Hebrew, the translator appears to have been very familiar with the story and the cultic interpretation is better understood as an attempt to explain why Cain’s offering was rejected rather than as a scribal error.

The third shift in understanding is found in the way that the LXX makes “sin” (ἁμαρτία) part of God’s pronouncement about Cain’s failure to offer correctly and then ends the sentence there. In the Hebrew version the sentence continues and “sin” (חַטָּאת) is personified as a character waiting at the door to conquer Cain rather than as a declaration about his actions.³⁵

At the end of the day, the attempt by the LXX to add a cultic interpretation to the situation does not provide any further clarity about why God rejected Cain’s sacrifice since it remains unclear as to what was meant by “dividing correctly.” This may be reflected in the translations later provided by Symmachus, Theodotion and Aquila all of which are more in keeping with the Hebrew version.³⁶ But in spite of this, the heirs of the LXX continued to understand Cain’s rejected sacrifice as the result of an improper cultic technique.

Philo, for instance, used the LXX tradition to build on his earlier comments about Cain’s offering not being from the firstfruits. For Philo, the “division” symbolizes the order in which God made the world and Cain’s failure to “divide properly” is further evidence of his propensity towards greed and ingratitude towards God.

³⁴ Aptowitz, 16; Wevers, 55.

³⁵ Wenham, 106.

³⁶ Symmachus: ἀλλ’ ἐὰν ἀγαθῆς ἀφῆσω ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ἀγαθῆς παρὰ θύραν ἁμαρτία ἐγκάθεται καὶ πρὸς σὲ ἡ ὁρμή αὐτῆς ἀλλ’ ἐξουσίαν αὐτῆς.

Theodotion: οὐκ ἂν ἀγαθὸς ποιῇς δεκτὸν καὶ ἐὰν μὴ ἀγαθὸς ἐπὶ θύρᾳ ἁμαρτία ἐγκάθεται καὶ πρὸς σὲ ἡ ἀποστροφή αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀρεῖς αὐτοῦ.

Aquila: ἐὰν ἀγαθῆς ἀρέσεις.

First of all, correct division and incorrect division are nothing else than order. And through order equally are made the whole world and its parts... In the second place, to give thanks to God is right in itself specifically, but it is blameworthy that He should not first receive them nor receive the first of the new products. For it is not proper to offer the best things to that which is created, namely oneself, and the second best to the All-wise. This is a reprehensible and blameworthy division, showing a certain disorderliness to order. (Philo, QG 1.64)

Philo's mode of interpretation was particularly popular among Christian exegetes like Augustine who used the LXX to condemn Cain as a person whose mind was divided against God.³⁷ Others, like Irenaeus and Ambrose of Milan, used the interpretation to connect Cain either to the Jews who killed Jesus or to those who did not "rightly divide" the natures between God the Father and Jesus the Son.³⁸

How did they know which offering was accepted?

Genesis makes it clear that, whatever the reason, God rejected Cain's offering as unsatisfactory. But the lingering question is: how did the brothers know that God had accepted Abel's offering but not that of Cain? Once again, the canonical version does not provide any clues. In the Hebrew version of Gen 4:4b–5a, God's response to both of the offerings is presented by means of a chiasmic chain which expresses God's pleasure or displeasure through the use of the term שָׁעָה ("pay attention").³⁹ Thus it is only the use of the negative particle לֹא ("no/not") in conjunction with Cain's offering that delineates God's displeasure, but it does not specify *how* the brothers knew which was accepted and which was not.

In the LXX we find once again an apparent attempt to clarify the story for the reader. The translator uses the same strategy employed to create a sharper distinction between the offerings by once more choosing to use two different Greek terms. For Abel's offering the Greek translates the phrase וַיִּשַׁע as καὶ ἐπεῖδεν "he looked upon," which is the only instance in which the LXX translates שָׁעָה this way.⁴⁰ For Cain, however, the Greek translates וַיִּשַׁע as οὐκ προσέσχεν, "he did

³⁷ See Augustine, *City of God* 15.7.1.

³⁸ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer* 4.18.3; Ambrose, *Sacrament of Incarnation* 2.6.

³⁹ J. Lundbom, "שָׁעָה," *TDOT* 15:349–51; Wenham, 103.

⁴⁰ Lundbom, 350.

not turn his attention,” which occurs as a translation for שעה only in LXX Gen 4:5. Neither of these translations brings much clarity to how the brothers knew which sacrifice was acceptable. However, associating ἐπεῖδεν with Abel’s offering may provide a more descriptive picture of God’s actions. Hayward notes that this is only one of four occasions on which ἐπεῖδεν is used in the Pentateuch, all of which refer to God’s vision. In LXX Gen 16:13 Hagar refers to God as “the God who looks upon me.” In LXX Gen 31:49, Laban heaps rocks as a sign between himself and Jacob and invokes “may God look upon me and you.” In LXX Exod 2:25, God sees the sons of Israel laboring in Egypt and “takes notice of them.”⁴¹ “This verb, then, indicating God’s oversight, providence and care, is also associated with the vision of God; and its use in LXX Gen. 4:4 opens the possibility that in some sense the Almighty appeared to Abel, while Cain had no such experience.”⁴² Whatever the exact nature of the problem with Cain’s sacrifice, it did not even warrant God’s consideration let alone God’s acceptance.

Some interpreters suggested that God’s pleasure was communicated through fire descending from heaven that ignited the one sacrifice but not the other. This tradition finds its earliest witness in Theodotion’s translation which rendered שח as ἐπύρισεν “he/it burned.”⁴³ The influence for this interpretation may be the stories about Aaron (Lev 9:24), Gideon (Judg 6:21), Elijah (1 Kgs 18:38) and Solomon (2 Chr 7:1) in which God communicated pleasure with a worshipper and the sacrifice by sending fire to consume it. According to Theodotion, then, Abel’s sacrifice was consumed on the altar while Cain’s remained untouched as a sign of God’s rejection. This interpretation was adopted by a number of Christian commentators.⁴⁴ The following is a selection of fourth century commentators.

⁴¹ Hayward, “What Did Cain Do Wrong?” 103.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Wevers, 53; Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah: Genesis 1–VI 8* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 207.

⁴⁴ See the inventory provided in Glenthøj, 97–100. Among Jewish exegetes, however, the legend is not found until the eleventh century commentaries by Rashi which may be a response to its popularity among Christians (Glenthøj, 6 n. 32). Aptowitz has suggested that the tradition existed before Theodotion, but was ignored by intermediate sources (42–43).

How did Cain know that God had not accepted his sacrifice? ...in the book of the Testament it is written that fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice [of Abel] that had been offered correctly. (Didymus the Blind, *On Genesis* 4:5)⁴⁵

How was it that Cain had been able to know that God had received his brother's offering and had rejected his own, unless the interpretation which Theodotion posited is true: *and the Lord sent forth a flame over Abel and over his sacrifice; but over Cain and his sacrifice He did not send a flame?* Indeed, we read that fire used to come from heaven to consume the sacrifice, both at the dedication of the temple in the days of Solomon, and when Elias built the altar on Mount Carmel. (St. Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* 4:4–5 [Hayward])

When Cain and Abel brought together their sacrifices, the living fire that served before God went down and consumed Abel's pure sacrifice, but to Cain's sacrifice, which was impure, it did not come near; from this did Abel know that his sacrifice had been accepted and Cain knew that his was rejected. (Aphrahat the Persian)⁴⁶

Cain was angry because the offering of his brother had been accepted. Cain became angry on account of the fire that had come down and distinguished between the offerings. His face became gloomy because there was laughter in the eyes of his parents and his sisters when his offering was rejected. They had seen that Cain's offering had been placed in the midst of the fire and yet the fire did not touch it. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3.3.3)

With Ephrem we find not only the display of fire, but also the presence of Cain and Abel's parents and sisters at the scene of the sacrifice. Didymus and Aphrahat do not mention the presence of anyone else as witnesses to Cain's rejection. Ephrem's interpretation, on the other hand, seems calculated to increase the scorn heaped on Cain.

The connection of Cain's sullen complexion with the knowledge that his offering had been rejected is similar to Philo, who, although not aware of the falling fire tradition, had earlier connected knowledge of his rejection with his feelings of dejection.

How did Cain know that his sacrifice was not pleasing? Perhaps his difficulty was resolved through the cause mentioned in the addition; for he was grieved and his countenance fell. He therefore took his grief as a sign of having sacrificed something not pleasing. For joy and gladness

⁴⁵ Translation taken from James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 159.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

ought to come to him who sacrifices something purely and blamelessly.
(Philo, QG 1.63)

The legends attached to the story add an element of the fantastic. Fire falling down from heaven helps to answer the question of how the brothers knew which offering God had accepted. If this expansion of the story is influenced by other stories of fire falling on offerings then a second goal is fulfilled. The sign of approval God gave to Abel places him in the company of others who also offered an acceptable sacrifice to God.⁴⁷ Aaron, Gideon, Elijah and Solomon all received divine recognition for their offering. More importantly in the case of Abel, as a prototype for acceptable sacrifice, he sets the example for those who would follow him. Cain, on the other hand, has no claim to the pious company of those who offer to God in the correct way.

What did God say to Cain?

Since the story makes it clear that God favored Abel over Cain, it seems peculiar that God never speaks to Abel. Rather than warn Abel or his parents of the upcoming tragedy, God chooses to speak to Cain in what appears as an effort to prevent him from committing fratricide.⁴⁸ The question, however, is what exactly did God say to Cain and how should it be interpreted? Modern commentators usually reflect on how this verse is the most obscure in Genesis due to “its grammatical improprieties and its unusual terminology.”⁴⁹ To be sure, they are not alone. The rabbis struggled with the interpretation of Gen 4:7 and declared it to be among five verses in the Bible whose meaning was indeterminable (*B. Yoma*, 52a–b).

The Hebrew version of Gen 4:7 presents at least three difficulties for the interpreter. First, as we saw above, how should שׂאת be understood; as “forgiveness” or “lifting up”? Second, how should רִבֵּץ be understood? It is usually read in 4:7 as “crouching” as in an ambush (cf. Gen 49:9), but this is a rare meaning since the term is used more

⁴⁷ Augustine suggests that God gave some type of visible sign, but does not elaborate: “For when God had made a distinction between their sacrifices, neglecting Cain’s, regarding Abel’s, which was doubtless intimated by some visible sign to that effect” (*City of God* 15.7).

⁴⁸ David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2003), 42.

⁴⁹ Wenham, 104.

often to describe someone laying down or at ease.⁵⁰ Third, how to understand God's statement to Cain about how personified sin desires Cain, but he must master it, which is a direct parallel of God's earlier statement to Eve in 3:16?⁵¹ The NRSV renders 4:7: "If you do well will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at your door and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Exegetes in antiquity, as we might expect, were willing to provide their interpretation of this difficult verse.

We have already seen how the LXX reworks Gen 4:7a to provide a cultic interpretation that accuses Cain of not dividing his sacrifice correctly. We also saw that, unlike the Hebrew, the LXX does not portray sin as personified and waiting to conquer Cain. Rather, sin became part of the accusation made by God against Cain's poor sacrificial practices. The results of this alteration and expansion meant that the translator had to alter the second half of the verse as well. Hence, instead of reading רבץ as sin "lurking" or "crouching" at the door waiting for Cain in ambush style, it was taken in its more common usage of "relax" or "be still" and then put in the imperative form (ἡσυχασον). The result is a command from God ordering Cain to "be still" or "take it easy." Such a translation of the Hebrew with what follows in the rest of the verse could be understood by readers of the LXX as an assurance from God that Cain's future is secure in spite of the rejected offering.⁵²

The remainder of 4:7 mirrors God's statements to Eve in 3:16 in the LXX as it does in the Hebrew. But an ambiguity arises with the Greek. While the Hebrew makes it clear that Cain must "rule over sin," the way that the sentence has been split in two in the LXX means that Cain is told either "to you will be *its* return and you will rule over *it*" or "to you will be *his* return and you will rule over *him*."⁵³ The uncertainty resides in the two possible genders of the pronoun αὐτοῦ which can be either masculine or neuter. The nearest antecedent is Abel which, in conjunction with the command to "be still" could be interpreted as a promise that Cain's rule over Abel would be restored. All of this is very strange since there is no indication in the story that a split has occurred between the brothers requiring reconciliation or that Cain ever had any type of authority over Abel. It is possible that

⁵⁰ Wenahm, 104.

⁵¹ Susan Foh, "What is the Woman's Desire?" *WTJ* 37 (1974/75): 376–83.

⁵² Wevers, 55.

⁵³ Πρὸς σὲ ἡ ἀποστροφή αὐτοῦ καὶ σὺ ἄρξεις αὐτοῦ.

the statement implicitly refers to sin suggesting that it will keep coming back to haunt Cain until he conquers it.⁵⁴ Yet the αὐτοῦ could also be taken as referring to Abel and implying that Cain, as the eldest, would rule over his younger brother. Rather than bring clarity to the verse, the LXX actually obscures its meaning even more. The problems with this reading was apparently recognized and both Symmachus's and Theodotion's translations are closer to the Hebrew.⁵⁵ The Peshitta, however, supports the LXX reading.⁵⁶

Philo follows the LXX version of Gen 4:7 which included the command for Cain to be quiet or still (*Agriculture* 127; *Sobriety* 50; *Names* 195; QG 1.64–65). Philo does not, however, consider Abel to be the referent of the pronoun. Aware of a possible reading that viewed Abel as being delivered into the hands of Cain, Philo attempts to refute it by interpreting the phrase as the beginning of voluntary sin.

Why does He seem to give the good man into the hands of the evil man saying, “to you is his return”? He does not give him into his hands, but the sense is quite the contrary, for he speaks not of the pious man but of an act already done. And He says to him, “the return and the reference” of this impiety is you. Do not therefore blame necessity, but your own character, so that in this place He represents it as voluntary. But the words “you shall rule over him,” again have reference to an act.” In the first place you did begin to act impiously, and then another wrong, follows a great and impious lawlessness. And so He considers and proves that this is the beginning of every voluntary wrongdoing. (Philo QG 1.66)

Philo's reasoning is not entirely clear. He is aware that the LXX tradition can be read as referring to Abel and he insists that it not be read that way. His interpretation, however, resembles an attempt to make sin the referent and the discussion of impious acts could be referring back to Cain's failure to offer the sacrifice correctly. In any case, what is clear is that Philo does not want it to appear as if his hero, Abel, was given into the hands of Cain by God.

⁵⁴ Wevers, 55.

⁵⁵ Symmachus: ἀλλ' ἐὰν ἀγαθὸν ἀφῆσω ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ἀγαθὸν παρὰ θύραν ἁμαρτία ἐγκάθεται καὶ πρὸς σὲ ἡ ὁρμή αὐτῆς ἀλλ' ἐξουσιάζει αὐτῆς.

Theodotion: οὐκ ἂν ἀγαθὸς ποιῆς δεκτὸν καὶ ἐὰν μὴ ἀγαθὸς ἐπὶ θύρᾳ ἁμαρτία ἐγκάθεται καὶ πρὸς σὲ ἡ ἀποστροφή αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀρξείας αὐτοῦ.

⁵⁶ Etan Levine, “The Syriac Version of Genesis IV 1–16,” VT 26 (1976): 70–78. This confusion surrounding the pronoun also exists between English translations. For instance, the KJV reads: “Unto thee shall be *his* desire and thou shall rule over *him*,” whereas the NRSV reads: “*its* desire is for you, but you must master *it*.”

Other interpreters in antiquity did not follow Philo's lead. Irenaeus, for instance, interpreted the ambiguous pronouns as referring to Abel being made subject to Cain's murderous intentions in order to demonstrate who was righteous and who was not.

God subjecting the just to the unjust, that the former might be proved as the just one by the things which he suffered, and the latter detected as the unjust by those which he perpetrated. (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.23.4)

The interpretation offered by Ephrem, on the other hand, incorporates the view promoted by Irenaeus with an expansion that makes Abel willingly follow Cain to his death while at the same time describing Cain's conquest by sin. This seems to reflect Ephrem's recognition and acceptance of both interpretations. Cain will rule over Abel and will himself be ruled over by sin.

But if you do not do well sin is crouching at the first door. Abel will listen to you through his obedience, for he will go with you to the plain. There you will be ruled over by sin, that is, you shall be completely filled with it. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3.4.1–3)

Exegetes who interpreted Abel as the subject of the pronouns were, for the most part, Christians rather than Jews.⁵⁷ This is evidenced from early on by Philo's argument against this conclusion as well as the fact that the heirs of the LXX were essentially Christians rather than Jews. Jewish exegetes, on the other hand, followed a different interpretive trajectory of Gen 4:7. The Targums contain a common tradition that expands God's words to Cain by adding an eschatological dimension to the story. All of them follow the Hebrew version closely and do not reflect the ambiguous problems caused by the LXX. Since there is almost virtual harmony on the interpretation of Gen 4:7 between all of the Targums and the fragments from the Cairo Genizah, I will only quote here from *Pseudo-Jonathon* and then *Onqelos* in which are found the major differences of interpretation between the Targums.⁵⁸

If you perform *your deeds* well *your guilt will be forgiven you*. But if you do not perform *your deeds* well *in this world your sin will be retained for the day of great judgment*. Sin crouches at the gates of your heart, but in your hand I have placed power over the evil inclination. Its desire will be

⁵⁷ For an inventory of other interpretations of this verse among Greek and Syriac writers see Glenthøj, 117–19.

⁵⁸ See the synopsis in Vermes, "The Targumic Versions of Genesis 4:3–16."

towards you, but you will have dominion over it, *whether to be innocent or to sin*. (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 4:7)

If you perform *your deeds* well it will be *forgiven* you. But if you do not perform *your deeds* well *your sin shall be retained for the Day of Judgment when punishment will be exacted of you, if you will not repent; but if you will repent you will be forgiven*. (Tg. Onq. Gen 4:7)

With these translations we have come full circle to the Hebrew version. Gone is the confusing language of the LXX which attempted to turn Gen 4:7 into a cultic critique of Cain's defective sacrificial practices. Moreover, it is clear that sin, as a controlling force, is what seeks to dominate Cain rather than ambiguous statements about Abel or sin being subject to Cain. But even with the closer adherence to the Hebrew, the Targums expand the verse in a way that further develops God's words on two levels.

First, the focus is no longer on Cain, but has shifted to his deeds. While the Hebrew version certainly hinted that the problem was with Cain's actions, the Targums have made it explicit by adding an eschatological element that warns Cain of a final reckoning for all of his sin. Such a statement goes beyond the Hebrew since Gen 4:7 only warns Cain of potential sin while the expansions in the Targums are blatantly accusing him of being guilty. The implication of this interpretation is that Cain's rejected offering represented something that he had done wrong. Other interpreters accused Cain of failing to bring the firstfruits of his crop to God. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon*, as we have already seen, alludes that Cain's offering was rejected because it was the wrong offering at the wrong time, even though he had brought the firstfruits.

Second, the Targums have paraphrased the words "its desire is for you, but you must master it" as referring to the evil inclination that leads human beings to sin.⁵⁹ According to the Targums, Cain has the ability to choose not to sin. Such a paraphrase goes beyond the Hebrew original which only implies a struggle with sin and creates a more explicit picture in which God has given Cain the ability to choose whether or not to sin. This echoes Philo's statements about this verse (see above) when he, using the LXX, argued that this was the beginning of voluntary sin. The upshot of this is we now have an interjection into the text that claims Cain had divine empowerment

⁵⁹ Mahr, 33.

to overcome sin, but failed to follow through. Such an interpretation would remove any doubts that Cain's actions were an unintended accident.

The essential difference between *Onqelos* and the interpretations offered in the other Targums is that *Onqelos* completely abandons 4:7b. Rather than include an expansion addressing Cain's ability to overcome sin, *Onqelos* provides what amounts to a divine admonition to repentance. This difference is even more pronounced in the following lines where all of the Targums except *Onqelos* introduce an expansion to the text that addresses the notion of divine justice in the world.⁶⁰ But for *Onqelos* there is a presumption of guilt attached to Cain that requires he repent.

But was it sin?

After reviewing the various interpretations and traditions that were attached to Cain and his offering, it seems reasonable to ask if Cain's rejected sacrifice represented a sinful act. The answer, it seems, depends upon who you ask.

The Hebrew version does not define Cain's rejected sacrifice or his downcast face as sin. In spite of the difficulty of translating and interpreting Gen 4:7, God's warning to Cain and the mention of sin is of a more general nature about the future that at the same time alludes to the murderous act Cain will commit in the next verse.⁶¹ Thus there is no hint that, whatever the problems with Cain's sacrifice, it qualified as sin.

There is, however, some significance to the mention of sin in Gen 4:7. In our story of firsts, this is the first time that sin has been introduced to the equation of humanity's relationship with God. Even though Adam and Eve had both clearly disobeyed God and suffered the consequences of that disobedience through exile from their home in the garden, their act of eating forbidden fruit is never described in Genesis as sin. It is only in the Cain and Abel story that sin makes its debut and only in relation to Cain. Cain, therefore, has the distinction of being the first human condemned for an act that is defined as sin.

⁶⁰ Vermes, 113.

⁶¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 297–99.

Although the occurrence of sin in 4:7 is only part of God's warning to Cain about the necessity of resisting sin, it also serves as an introductory commentary regarding what Cain is about to do in the next verse. Cain is the first sinner.

The question takes on a new dimension, however, when the LXX is taken into consideration. Since every translation is at the same time an interpretation, it is legitimate to enquire what the translator may have been trying to communicate about Cain when Gen 4:7 was reworked. We have already seen how the Greek version of Gen 4:7 provides a cultic interpretation of the story by changing God's statement to Cain to indicate that the problem with the sacrifice was the way it was divided. When we also consider the way that the LXX divides the single Hebrew sentence into two sentences, we discover that there is another implication. In the LXX God's rhetorical question to Cain suggests that he has divided the sacrifice incorrectly and therefore has sinned. This is emphasized by the second sentence which changes לָרֹחֵץ from "lurking" or "crouching" at the door waiting for Cain in ambush style to a command telling Cain to "be still." The command suggests that Cain's action, the incorrect division of the sacrifice and perhaps the angry reaction to God's rejection of the sacrifice, was a sin. Thus while the Hebrew version of Gen 4:7 serves as an introductory commentary regarding what Cain is about to do (murder Abel), the LXX version, by dropping the allusion to Abel's murder, changes the sentence in a way that condemns Cain's incorrect division and pronounces it as sin.

Along with his other critiques of Cain's offering, Philo also accused Cain of sin prior to his murder of Abel. As an heir of the LXX tradition, Philo adapts the two sentence division of Gen 4:7 which attributes Cain's act as sin and portrays God as commanding Cain to "be still." For Philo the declaration of sin and the command to be still or quiet became two sides of the same interpretive coin. In a comment on the virtues of a life of quietness as opposed to one in which vice grows through constant agitation and movement of the individual, Philo quotes the LXX version of the Gen 4:7, but does so in a way that rewrites it again.

And a similar lesson is contained in a more striking form in the oracles in Genesis. For God says to the wicked one (φάυλον), "man thou hast sinned, be still" (ἡμαρτες, ἡσύχασον). This implies while sin, inasmuch as it is movement and activity with vice as its motive, is liable to punishment; stillness, because it is stationary and quiescent is exempt from arraignment and a means of safety. (Philo, *Sobriety* 50)

Unlike the LXX version, Philo has rewritten Gen 4:7 so that sin is no longer the apodosis of correct and incorrect division. Instead he takes the mention of sin as the beginning of a new sentence that is combined with the imperative reading of רבץ and makes God's condemnation of Cain's action as sin even clearer than in the LXX. By rewriting Gen 4:7 in his own way, Philo has, in effect, created three sentences whereas the Hebrew has only one and the Greek two. Combined with this is his designation of Cain as the "wicked one" (φαῦλον) which further emphasizes Philo's view that Cain was evil even before he killed Abel. This is certainly creative and interpretive reading, but Philo maintains a consistency when he quotes Gen 4:7 as seen in the context of a discussion about the rape of Dinah by the Shechemites.

Now they should either make their actions conform to their words or if they persist in iniquity keep still. For by keeping still men say evil is halved. And so Moses by rebuking him who adjudges the chief honors to creation and only the second to the imperishable God says, "Thou hast sinned, be still." For to rant and boast of evil things is double sin. (Philo, *Names* 195)

Here again Philo's reworking of Gen 4:7 has God declare that Cain has sinned rather than being in danger of committing sin as found in the Hebrew tradition. Added to this is Philo's other critique of Cain that he did not offer to God what was due (i.e. firstfruits). New here is the interpretation of the injunction to be quiet as referring to boasting. Philo apparently understood the imperative in the verse as an indicator that Cain was boasting in his failure to divide correctly and, as a consequence, was in danger of multiplying his sin. This interpretation is explained further in Philo's commentary on the Genesis text.

What is the meaning of the words "Thou has sinned, be quiet"? The oracle utters something very useful. For not to sin at all is the greatest good. But he who sins and is abashed and ashamed is kin to this man and as one might say, the younger beside the elder. For there are some who rejoice over sins as if over good deeds, thus having a disease that is difficult to cure or rather is incurable. (Philo, *QG* 1.65)

Boasting about sin is something that Philo associates with Cain and applies to others. This commentary follows immediately on Philo's accusation that Cain did not divide the offering correctly and failed to present firstfruits to God as an offering. Thus the picture of Cain as formed by Philo is of a greedy individual who offers less than the best to God and then, having knowingly sinned, boasts about the evil act which he has committed.

Outside of the LXX and Philo there is no other extant literature that labels Cain's sacrificial practices a sin. The implication as such may, however, be resident in some interpretations. Josephus's inclusion of fruit trees in his expanded description of Cain's offering may imply that Cain has sinned, if it is a commentary on his offering fruit before it was time. Likewise, specifying that the brothers' sacrifices occurred at Passover may also imply that Cain has sinned by failing to offer the proper sacrifice at the proper time. And by dropping the whole second half of Gen 4:7 and including a divine admonition to repentance, *Targum Onqelos* presumes that Cain has committed a sin which requires repentance. In each of these documents we find a trace of the accusation that Cain's rejected offering qualified as a sin. As we will see in a later chapter, this became a theme among some interpreters who designated Cain as the one who introduced sin into the world rather than his father Adam.

Summary

The unexplained rejection of Cain's offering afforded interpreters in antiquity numerous opportunities to expand the story and provide a reason for God's displeasure with Cain. Gaps in detail and ambiguities in grammar and vocabulary meant that interpreters had to offer suggestions about what the story was saying.

Although there is less said about Abel than Cain, Abel came to be a model for acceptable sacrificial practice. His offering of the choice among his flock to God and God's acceptance led exegetes to this conclusion. At the same time, Abel also became one who fulfilled the law in his sacrificial practice. Thus, later interpreters identified Abel's sacrifice as a Paschal offering as required for the Passover feast. All of this is overshadowed by Cain. Since Cain is the first person to be mentioned in conjunction with sin it is implied that Abel has not sinned. While this probably has more to do with the way the story was told rather than with an attempt by the author to designate one brother a sinner and the other innocent, it is what is unsaid that attracts the interpreter's attention. Hence Abel is a silent witness to his own righteousness through the words spoken by God to his brother.

Cain is everything his brother is not. Ancient interpreters capitalized on the meaning of his name and his notoriety as the first murderer. The result is a characterization that portrays Cain as a greedy individual who attempts to cheat God by offering less than the best of

his produce. Compounded with this less than acceptable offering is the description of Cain's delay in bringing his gift to God and his failure to divide it correctly. Thus the rejection of Cain's sacrifice was the result of both the type of offering and the time in which he brought it. All of this led some interpreters to conclude that Cain's less than stellar sacrificial practices were sin.

The most intriguing aspect of all of these interpretations is the way that exegetes mitigated the problem of God's unexplained acceptance of Abel's sacrifice. By providing the omitted details for God's rebuff of Cain's sacrifice, ancient interpreters were able to circumvent the more serious theological dilemma of God's apparent capriciousness. By characterizing Cain as a greedy individual who practiced poor sacrificial rites, the focus shifted away from why God rejected the offering and centered instead on what Cain had done that caused this rejection. Moreover, such interpretations help to set the stage for explaining another unanswered question, why Cain killed Abel.

CHAPTER THREE

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

GENESIS 4:8–10

In the case of Cain his wickedness did not begin
when he killed his brother.
For even before that God, who knows the heart, had
no regard for Cain and his sacrifice.
But his baseness was made evident when he killed
Abel.

(Origen—*On Prayer* 29.18)

The central scene in this tale of firsts is the murder. The main actors are Cain and Abel, but the story is now quickly beginning to center only on Cain. Abel, whose role has been minimal at best, is about to exit the stage as the victim of the first violent crime. Two things that attracted the attention of interpreters in antiquity was the lack of detail surrounding the murder and God's interrogation of Cain. Why did Cain decide to kill Abel and why does God ask Cain where Abel is? From these and a few textual anomalies translators developed interpretive traditions that portrayed the brothers not only as the models of proper and improper sacrificial practice, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, but also as representatives of two opposing theological viewpoints.

What did Cain say to Abel?

Gen 4:8 introduces another abrupt shift in the narrative's action. Earlier we saw how the narrative quickly shifted from a birth narrative to a description of the brothers' sacrificing to God. Now, having completed his conversation with God in 4:7, Cain is next made to speak to his brother Abel, which appears to be nothing more than a ruse to abet Cain's murderous intentions.¹ The difficulty with Gen 4:8, however, is that we are never told what Cain said to his brother. The Hebrew

¹ In reality Gen 4:7 is not a conversation since the only speaker is God and Cain is not afforded the opportunity to answer.

simply does not tell us anymore than “Cain said to his brother Abel” (וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל), which is immediately followed by the locative picture of the brothers together in a field. The problem turns on the meaning of אָמַר (“said”) which, in contrast to דָּבַר (“spoke”), is typically used when a speech is about to be quoted.² This lacuna in the text leaves the reader of the Hebrew version wondering: what did Cain say to Abel? What was the content of their conversation? Modern commentators suggest that if there ever was a conversation between the two brothers recorded, it was either inadvertently dropped through a scribal error or was deliberately suppressed in order to focus attention on the action.³ In spite of this gap, the point of the story is quite clear. Cain was unwilling or unable to master sin and, having succumbed to the very thing God warned him against, committed the first act of violence.⁴

Taking into account the flow of the action, it is easy to posit that the content of Cain’s words to Abel was an invitation to join him in the field as part of a plan to murder him. This was the assumption commonly adopted by translators in antiquity. The LXX, Samaritan Pentateuch, Peshitta and the Vulgate all fill the lacuna in the text with some variation of an invitation for Abel to accompany Cain into the field.⁵ This addition has also been accepted by modern translations as witnessed by the NRSV which reads: “Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out to the field.’” But other interpreters in antiquity were not satisfied with simply inserting a phrase that continued the action. Some concluded that the presence of אָמַר in 4:8 meant that there had been a conversation between the brothers prior to Abel’s murder. This,

² Kenneth M. Craig, “Questions Outside Eden (Genesis 4.1–16): Yahweh, Cain and Their Rhetorical Interchange,” *JSOT* (1999): 117.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 106. In a brief article, Pamela Tamarkin Reis suggests that וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל is better translated as “Cain spoke against Abel” rather than “Cain spoke to Abel.” Her suggestion, if correct, would remove the supposed defect in the text and provide a simpler approach to the problem (“What Cain Said: A Note on Genesis 4:8,” *JSOT* 27 [2002]: 107–13). Another suggestion, offered by Howard Jacobson, is that the phrase be translated as “Cain plotted against his brother Abel” (“Genesis IV 8,” *VT* 75 [2005]: 564–65). For a brief overview of how this verse has been interpreted from antiquity through the modern era see Mark McEntire, “Being Seen and Not Heard: The Interpretation of Genesis 4:8,” in *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture* Vol. 1 (ed. Craig A. Evans; SSEJC 9; New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 4–13.

⁴ Craig, 119.

⁵ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 302; John William Wevers, *LXX: Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies 35; Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1993), 56.

of course, led to a number of expansions that exegetes thought were appropriate to the story.

Philo provides the earliest example of expanding the story to include a conversation between Cain and Abel. In his comments on Gen 4:8, he quotes the LXX version with Cain's invitation for Abel to join him in the field. In an allegorized reading of that text, Philo identifies the field/plain as the place where a competition of intelligence and argumentation takes place.⁶

And Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us make our way to the Plain." And it came to pass when they were on the plain that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him (Gen 4:8). What Cain is aiming at is by means of a challenge to draw Abel into a dispute, and to gain mastery over him by plausible sophistries that have the appearance of truth. For, drawing our conclusions about things that are obscure from things that are manifest, we say that the plain, the rendezvous to which he summons him, is a figure of contest and desperate battle. (Philo, *Worse* 1)

Philo supports his allegorical reading of the passage by demonstrating that in Genesis the meaning of "plain" is usually an indicator that a discussion is occurring. Thus Jacob meets Rachel and Leah on the plain to contend with them about their father (*Worse* 3). Joseph is described as looking for his brothers on the "plain" which is a place where he can learn virtues through a contest of words (*Worse* 28). Isaac's presence on the plain when Rebecca spies him is evidence that although he seems to be alone, he is actually conversing with the unseen God (*Worse* 29–30). After concluding his review of the meaning of the "plain" in Genesis, Philo returns to Gen 4:8.

Well, I think that it has been made sufficiently clear that the plain on to which Cain challenges Abel to come is a figure of a contest to be fought out. We must next endeavor to discover what the subjects of their investigations are when they have gone forth. It is evident that they are to investigate opposing views clean contrary to each other. For Abel, referring all things to God is a God-loving creed; but Cain, referring all to himself—his name means "acquisition"—a self-loving creed. And lovers of self, when they have stripped and prepared for conflict with those who value virtue keep up the boxing and wrestling until they have either forced their opponents to give in or have completely destroyed them. (Philo, *Worse* 32)

⁶ D. M. Gunn and D. N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14.

Once again Philo's characterization of the two brothers influences his interpretation of the story. Cain is a greedy lover of self who not only looks to gain, but is willing to abuse and kill others to succeed. Philo then provides a sample of the kind of speech a lover of self, Cain, would give to support his desire to gain more for themselves.

Is not the body the soul's house? Why, then, should we not take care of the house, that it may not fall into ruins? Are not eyes and ears and the band of the other senses bodyguards and courtiers as it were, of the soul? Must we not then value allies and friends equally with ourselves? Did nature create pleasures and enjoyments and the delights that meet us all the way through life, for the dead, for those who have never come into existence, and not for the living? And what is to induce us to forgo the acquisition of wealth and fame and honors and offices and everything else of that sort, things which secure for us a life not merely of safety but of happiness? (Philo, *Worse* 33)

Philo presents Cain as a well trained debater, one who can effectively defend his philosophical outlook on life and make it sound correct. Abel, however, is criticized for accepting Cain's invitation to the field since he lacked the skills for such a debate.

Now Abel has never learned the art of speech and, and knows the beautiful and noble mind only. For this reason he should have declined the meeting on the plain, and have paid no regard to the challenge of the man of ill-will. (Philo, *Worse* 37)

Philo's interpretation of the plain as a place for argument allows him to further develop the characters of Cain and Abel. The fact that Cain is portrayed as a greedy individual who only offers second best to God, and even then with a delay, is accentuated by the mock up speech that defends the self-lover's way of life. What Philo has accomplished is an expansion of the brothers' characters that establishes them as representatives of two opposing theological viewpoints.⁷ Abel represents those who believe that they should love and honor God. Cain represents those who are self-absorbed, have little or no regard for others and, by implication, are anti-God.

Another extant tradition predicated on the lacuna in Gen 4:8 is found in the Targums. Variants of a supposed conversation between

⁷ Geza Vermes, "The Targumic Versions of Genesis 4:3–16," in *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (SJLA 8; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 114 n 39; James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 162.

the brothers are found in Targums *Neofiti*, *Pseudo-Jonathon* and the Leningrad manuscript from the Cairo Genizah.⁸ All of these introduce the conversation with an expansion of Cain's words that reflects the LXX and other traditions which have Cain inviting Abel to go with him into the field. The only exception is *Targum Onqelos* which reads closer to the Hebrew version and does not include Cain's invitation to Abel or a conversation between the brothers. In the previous chapter we saw how *Targum Onqelos* stood alone in its presentation of Gen 4:7 by not expanding the Hebrew version to include a larger eschatological element to God's words to Cain. All of the other Targums, however, do include this expansion, and it is based on the expansion of 4:7 and the lacuna in 4:8 that a discussion on the nature of divine justice between the brothers was contrived. The following is the conversation between the brothers as the tradition was preserved by *Targum Neofiti*.

And Cain said to Abel his brother. "Come! Let the two of us go out into the open field." And when the two of them had gone out into the open field, Cain answered and said to Abel: "I perceive that the world was not created by mercy and that it is not being conducted according to the fruits of good words, and that there is favoritism in judgment. Why was your offering received favorably and my offering was not received favorably from me?" Abel answered and said to Cain: "I perceive that the world was created by mercy and that it is being conducted according to the fruits of good words. And because my works were better than yours, my offering was received from me favorably and yours was not received favorably from you." Cain answered and said to Abel: "There is no judgment, and there is no judge and there is no other world. There is no giving of reward to the just nor is vengeance exacted of the wicked." Abel answered and said to Cain: "There is judgment, and there is a judge, and there is another world. And there is giving of reward to the just and vengeance is exacted of the wicked in the world to come." Concerning this matter the two of them were disputing in the open field. And Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. (Tg. Neof. Gen 4:8)

The Targum not only fills the lacuna in Gen 4:8, but also provides a fuller explanation of the Cain and Abel story. The reason for Cain's violent act against his brother is connected to the offering, but it goes even further to make a general claim that, in contrast to Abel, none of

⁸ Michael L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (2 vols. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986), 6–7.

Cain's works can be viewed as good even prior to the offering.⁹ Abel's works, on the other hand, were always considered to be good which is why his offering was accepted. The problem then was not with the offering itself but with the individual.¹⁰ The implication is that God rejected the offering as a symbol of the person making the offering. Once again, Cain has been painted as evil and the murder is depicted as him acting upon his character flaws. As in Philo, each brother represents a theological principle relative to God's attitude toward the world.¹¹

The Targums introduce a new role for Abel in the story that is found in neither Genesis nor Philo. For the first time Abel's character had been allowed to develop to the point that he is given a voice in the narrative. This may reflect a debate contemporary to the composition of the Targum tradition, and each brother may represent opposing sides of the debate, one orthodox the other heterodox. How accurately the contenders in such a debate can be identified is difficult to say.¹² What is clear, however, is that Abel's character has developed within the tradition to the point that he has moved from the background of the story and acquired a more substantive role.¹³ The result is an Abel portrayed as a confessor of faith who is no longer a silent helpless victim, but is now a martyr for the cause of correct doctrine.¹⁴ Although all of the Targums, with the exception of *Onqelos*, fill in the Gen 4:8 omission, they each highlight a characteristic of Abel not found in the Genesis account. *Targum Neofiti* emphasizes Abel's righteous deeds, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon* his mercy.¹⁵

⁹ This view is already found in 1 John 3:12 where the reason for Cain's slaughter of Abel is predicated on his evil works in contrast to his brother's good works.

¹⁰ James L. Kugel, "Cain and Abel in Fact and Fable: Genesis 4:1–16," in *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament? Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. R. Brooks and J. J. Collins; Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 5; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 179.

¹¹ Vermes, 114.

¹² Sheldon Isenberg, "An Anti-Sadducee Polemic in the Palestinian Targum Tradition," *HTR* 63 (1970): 433–44; Etan Levine, "The Syriac Version of Genesis IV 1–16," *VT* 26 (1976): 70–80; Bruce Chilton, "A Comparative Study of Synoptic Development: The Dispute between Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums and the Beelzebub Controversy in the Gospels," *JBL* 101 (1982): 533–62; Jouette M. Bassler, "Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums," *JSJ* 17 (1986): 56–64.

¹³ Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966), 156.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁵ Martinez, "Eve's Children in the Targumim," in *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. G. P. Luttikhuisen;

Cain's role in the Targums is, once again, to be everything his brother is not. His character has developed to such a degree that he is made to question the principles of justice and mercy by which Judaism believed God governed the world.¹⁶ This is compounded by his claim that there is no "other world" and no divine recompense for sin. The result of placing this speech in Cain's mouth is that his character has edged closer to atheism. He has rejected the existence of divine justice in the present world and the one to come.¹⁷ Thus, the act of killing Abel immediately after their debate about the existence of divine justice is not only the result of his jealous anger against his brother, but is also a demonstration of his belief that he will not be held accountable. The murder is the climax to a life marked by evil deeds and wrong doctrine. Ultimately, the reason Cain killed Abel is because of their differing theological positions.

Other expansions of Gen 4:8, however, did not focus on a theological debate between the brothers. The Leningrad manuscript from the Cairo Genizah, for instance, contains a conversation between the brothers that focuses on the reason Cain's offering was rejected.

And Cain said to his brother Abel: Come Let us both go out to the open field; and when they had both gone out to the open field, [Cain] spoke up and said to Abel: I have observed that the world was created with partiality, and it is conducted with partiality; for that reason was your offering received from you with favor, and mine was not received with favor. Abel then began and said to Cain: How can it be that the world was created with partiality, and is conducted with partiality? Rather it is conducted according to the fruits of good deeds. Because my deeds were better than yours, my offering was received from me with favor, and yours was not received with favor. And they were both arguing in the open field; and Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. (St. Petersburg, Saltykov-Shchedrin MS Antonin Ebr. III B 739v [Klein])

The brothers' discussion in the Leningrad manuscript is yet another attempt to grapple with the apparently capricious manner in which God accepted one sacrifice over that of the other. While the argument over God's impartiality is certainly theological in nature, it is not as developed as it was in *Targum Neofiti*. The focus is more on the

Leiden: Brill, 2003), 41. This picture of Abel is not confined to the Targums, however. Hebrews 11:4 also attributes Abel's faith as the reason for his sacrifice being better than Cain's.

¹⁶ Bassler, 61.

¹⁷ Vermes, 115.

individual works of the brothers than the role of God. It was Abel's good deeds that caused his offering to be accepted and, with the rather self-righteous way that he informs Cain of his deficiency in this area, this is what led to his murder.¹⁸ Rather than use the inserted conversation to establish the brothers as representatives of vying theological view points, the author has instead used it to comment on Cain's lack of good deeds.

The Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* also inserts a conversation between the brothers in Gen 4:8. Rather than focus on theology or the rejection of Cain's offering, it offers several other possible topics that the brothers argued over, all of them of a more earthy nature.

And Cain spoke unto Abel his brother, etc. (Gen. 4:8). About what did they quarrel? "Come" said they, "let us divide the world." One took the land and the other movables. The former said, "The land you stand on is mine," while the latter retorted, "What you are wearing is mine." One said: "Strip;" the other retorted: "Fly [off the ground]." Out of this quarrel, *Cain rose up against his brother Abel, etc.* R. Joshua of Siknin said in R. Levi's name: Both took land and both took movables, but about what did they quarrel? One said, "The Temple must be built in my area," while the other claimed, "It must be built in mine." For thus it is written, *And it came to pass, when thy were in the field*: now field refers to nought but the Temple, as you read, *Zion* [i.e. the Temple] *shall be plowed as a field* (Micah 3:12). Out of this argument, *Cain rose up against his brother Abel, etc.* Judah b. Rabbi said: Their quarrel was about the first Eve. Said R. Aibu: The first Eve had returned to the dust. Then about what was their quarrel? Said R. Huna: An additional twin was born with Abel, and each claimed her. The one claimed: "I will have her because I am firstborn;" while the other maintained: "I must have her because she was born with me." (*Gen. Rab.* 22:7)

The number of possible topics for debate between the brothers is diverse and resembles a somewhat comical reading of juvenile rivalry. However, although the rabbis disagreed on the topic, they all agreed that the lacuna in Gen 4:8 should be filled with an argument between the brothers and not just an invitation by Cain to go into the field. Noticeably different from the version found in the Targums is that the discussion is not predicated on the acceptance and rejection of the brothers' offerings. Instead all of the arguments center on ownership of land, the temple or a wife.

¹⁸ This is similar to 1 John 3:12 which, although not including a conversation between the brothers, says that Cain killed Abel because his deeds were righteous.

Among the fragments of the Cairo Genizah there is a *tosefta* that brings together the elements found both in the Targums and *Genesis Rabbah*. The text begins with a more abbreviated version of the debate over the role of justice and mercy in the world than found in the Targums. But rather than follow the debate with Cain's murder of Abel as in *Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathon*, this *tosefta* continues with the division of possessions between the two brothers as already mentioned in *Gen. Rab.* 22:7.¹⁹

Cain answered and said to his brother Abel: There is neither Justice nor Judge, nor is there any world besides this one. Abel answered him [and said:] There is just[ice, and there is] a Judge, and there is another world for the requiting of evil and the good. At that moment [Cain] considered what he might do to him, but found nothing [suitable]. Afterwards his wrath subsided, and he said to Abel: Now. Let there not b[e a quarrel] between me and you; separate from me and take the flock as your lot. Said Abel to him: [All that] I desire is a f[air] division. [After] Abel had gone to his sheep and departed from Cain, Cain thought it over and said: What have I done? The summer [months] will pa[ss], and [I] will have no milk to drink and no wool to wear. He began to pursue him, and overtook him, and said [to him: this is not] a fair division. You take half the flock and half the land; and I will take half the flock and ha[lf] the land. Said Abel to him: This is an equal division which is done in fairness: [and] Abel went on his way. Cain [then] tried to graze his portion of the she[ep], but found he was unable to graze sheep, and [thereby] neglect working the land. He [then] went to Abel, and said: There is another fairer [division] than this; you take the flock as your lot and I shall take the land as my lot. Abel agreed to go along with Cain's desire. Now, Cain had been bearing a grudge against Abel from before this, because Abel's [twin] sister was Cain's wife, and she was not as good looking as Cain's [twin] sister who was Abel's wife. When Cain recalled what was in his heart, he said: Now I have fou[nd] an opportunity for my hatred(?). He ran after him, and sai[d] to him: Get off my land, which I have taken as my lot. Abel could not find any place to go to. (Oxford Bodleian Ms. Heb. C 74r, lines 6–17)

Within this *tosefta* the traditions preserved in the Targums and *Genesis Rabbah* come together. The division of the land and the flocks is no longer an alternative interpretation of what Cain said to Abel, as in *Genesis Rabbah*, but is part of a series of proposals made by Cain to Abel who accepts each one in turn.²⁰ The characterization of Cain,

¹⁹ Martinez, "Eve's Children in the Targumim," 43.

²⁰ Ibid., 44.

however, is one of vacillation and ineptitude. In this *tosefta* Cain is less a representative of a particular theological principle, as he is in Philo and the Targums, and more of a tragic figure unable to find satisfaction with his own possessions. It is this aspect of the Cain and Abel story that is the most consistent among interpreters; Cain as a greedy individual seeking to gain more. In the *tosefta* he is always looking to be free of his brother Abel while at the same time desiring Abel's possessions. Once he receives what he wants from Abel, he quickly realizes that this too is unsatisfactory. In the end, the desire to have Abel's wife prompts Cain to require Abel to do the impossible; leave the ground. This is similar to the demand in *Genesis Rabbah* that Abel "fly off." While Cain's demand sounds comical, asking a shepherd not to use the ground, it serves an important purpose. Cain has pushed Abel into a corner which makes it impossible for him to acquiesce to his brother's latest proposal as he had done the first two times. By setting the story line up this way the author could demonstrate that Abel died at the hands of an unreasonable individual who could never be satisfied in his drive for more possessions no matter how much one tried to accommodate him.

The gap left in the Hebrew version of Gen 4:8 presented more theological opportunities than problems. Some interpreters were satisfied with filling the gap with Cain inviting Abel to accompany him to the field. Others took seriously the presence of the Hebrew verb אָמַר which suggested that a conversation had taken place between the brothers. This "exegetical peg" provided them the occasion not only to provide the missing conversation, but to craft it in such a way that the speech of each of the brothers further revealed their character traits. Abel, given a voice in the story for the first time, is not only the prototype of correct sacrifice. He is now confessor of faith, the protector of correct doctrine, and his conversation with Cain represents his attempt to turn his brother away from his disastrous actions. Cain, on the other hand, rejects the doctrine of divine impartiality and recompense. His words to Abel, enhanced by the interpreter, reveal that just as God rejected his sacrifice, he has rejected God's involvement in the world. Through these elaborately constructed conversations ancient exegetes established the brothers as representatives of two opposing theological view points.

How did Cain kill Abel?

As the climax of the story, the first murder is told with amazingly brief detail. Even with the mention of Abel's blood in Gen 4:10–11, there is little indication of what measures Cain took to kill his brother. There is no mention of weaponry used or if a scuffle ensued. The only detail Genesis provides us is that Cain rose up and killed his brother Abel. The brief description can more than likely be attributed to the author wanting to keep the focus on the interchange between God and Cain rather than the particulars of the murder. It is enough for Genesis to recount the murder and then continue to concentrate on the story's main point which is the fate of Cain. But, as we might expect, later interpreters expanded the story to fill in the missing details and, it appears, to emphasize Cain's act of fratricide.

Although Genesis does not mention how Cain killed Abel, it does provide the location. Some ancient interpreters surmised that since Abel was killed in a field this might be a hint of the type of weapon Cain used. They suggested that since stones were an item commonly found in a field, this must have been the murder weapon.²¹

He killed Abel with a stone. (*Jub.* 4:31)

And Cain rose up against Abel his brother *and drove a stone into his forehead* and killed him. (*Tg. Ps.-J. Gen* 4:8)

He took the stone and embedded it in the forehead of Abel, and slew him, as it is said, "And Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him." (*Pirqe R. El.* 21)

Other interpreters noted that although no murder weapon is listed, the evidence of the murder, blood, is mentioned. One interpretive tradition expanded the description of the murder and the presence of Abel's blood in a way that made Cain's treachery that much more shocking.

After these things Adam and Eve were together and when they were lying down to sleep, Eve said to her lord Adam, "My lord, I saw in a dream this night the blood of my son Amilabes, called Abel, being thrust into the mouth of Cain his brother, and he drank it mercilessly. He begged him to allow him a little of it, but he did not listen to him, but swallowed all of it. And it did not stay in his stomach, but came out of his mouth." And Adam said to Eve, "Let us rise and go to see what has happened to

²¹ Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 152–53.

them. Perhaps the enemy is warring against them. And when they both had gone out they found Abel killed by the hand of Cain, his brother. (L.A.E. [Apoc.] 2:1–3:1)

The expansion in the Greek version of the *Life of Adam and Eve* creates a more gruesome scene than Genesis by making the brothers' mother a witness to the crime through her dream.²² Abel's cry for mercy and Cain's consumption of Abel's blood all contribute to a decidedly unpleasant picture that leaves no question in the reader's mind as to the seriousness of Cain's crime.

Another expansion which incorporates Abel's blood is found in the *tosefta* from the Cairo Genizah that was examined above. In this *tosefta* Cain's ineptitude was demonstrated by his inability to divide possessions between himself and Abel and to work the land and graze sheep. This picture of Cain as a clumsy character is extended to the murder scene. Although he is aware of his hatred towards his brother, Cain does not know how to act on it, nor what to do once he has killed Abel.

And he (Cain) did not know where to strike him. He looked about here and there, until, he saw two birds fighting; and one rose up against the other, and struck it on its mouth, and its blood spurted out until it died. Cain took a lesson from it and did the same to Abel [his] brother. (Oxford Bodleian Ms. Heb. C 74r, lines 18–26)

Genesis Rabbah provides three different possible scenarios of how Cain killed Abel.

With what did he kill him? R. Simeon said: He killed him with a staff: *And a young man for my bruising* (Gen 4:23) implies a weapon which inflicts a bruise. The Rabbis said: He killed him with a stone: *For I have slain a man for wounding me* (*ib.*) indicates a weapon which inflicts wounds. R. Azariah and R. Jonathon in R. Isaac's name said: Cain had closely observed where his father slew the bullock [which he sacrificed, as it is written], *And it shall please the Lord better than a bullock* (Ps 69:32), and there he killed him: by the throat and its organs. (*Gen. Rab.* 22:8)

²² The description of Eve's vision of Cain murdering Abel is even more grisly in the Georgian version which has Cain drinking Abel's blood to the point that it begins to exit his own body and stains him (Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone eds., *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* [2nd rev. ed.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999], 27E).

It is the third option that is of particular interest here. The comparison of the way that Cain killed Abel with how one would kill a bullock seems to suggest a highly developed interpretation of the murder. The description, to be sure, is chosen in such a way as to include Abel's blood which would have spilled from the cut throat.²³ The allusion to sacrifice seems to suggest that Abel's murder was sacrificial in nature. While there is no strong evidence in Jewish sources for such an interpretation of Abel's murder, it does occur in a few Christian sources. In 1 John 3 Cain's murder of Abel is contrasted with the self-sacrifice of Jesus. The result is a reading of Abel's murder that is pervaded with ritual overtones. The author of 1 John describes Abel's murder using terminology that is normally associated with ritual slayings. Even though Cain's rejected offering is not mentioned in 1 John, the idea of sacrifice has been incorporated into Cain's crime by the way it is described.²⁴

And why did he slaughter him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. (1 John 3:12)

The Syrian commentator Ephrem also associated the murder of Abel with Cain's rejected offering.

But instead of doing well so that the offering that had been rejected might be credited to Cain as acceptable, he then made an offering of murder to that One whom he had already made an offering of negligence. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3.4.3)

It is difficult to say with any certainty if *Genesis Rabbah* was aware of the tradition preserved in 1 John and Ephrem. What is clear, however, is that the rather underwhelming description of the murder in Genesis was often expanded in a way that emphasized the violent nature of Cain's crime. This in turn reinforced the negative portrait that many interpreters had of Cain. By expanding the story to include weapons, premeditation and even an attempted cover up, readers would not misconstrue what happened. An evil man had committed a very evil act.

²³ A similar tradition of Cain killing Abel like an animal is found in the Babylonian Talmud: Cain inflicted upon his brothers many blows and wounds, because he knew not whence the soul departs, until he reached the neck (*Sanhedrin* 37b).

²⁴ 1 John 3 will be looked at in more depth in a later chapter. For further discussion see: John Byron, "Slaughter, Fratricide and Sacrilege: Cain and Abel Traditions in 1 John 3," *Bib* (2007): 526–35.

What happened to Abel's body?

It is a curious omission by the narrative that we are never told what happened to the body of Abel. In Gen 4:8 we read that Cain killed Abel and then immediately in 4:9 we read about God's interrogation of Cain. Where is the body? In 4:10 God directs Cain's attention to Abel's blood, but whether the body is there too is never specified. Was the body lying in the blood? Had Cain hid the body? Did the body disappear and leave behind only the blood? And was Abel's body ever given a proper burial? All of these are questions that rise to the surface through the gap left in the narrative.

The absence of this detail about Abel would certainly have garnered the attention of interpreters. But a survey of Genesis reveals that Abel is not the only character whose burial is left unrecorded. The first mention of a burial is of Sarah, Abraham's wife, in Gen 23:4–20. There are numerous people between Abel and Sarah whose death is recorded without the details of their burial; Adam, Eve, Seth, Noah and Terah to name some. There is an allusion to burial in Gen 3:19 when Adam is told: "until you return to the ground for from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you shall return." But even with this allusion, the details of Adam's burial are missing. Thus while Cain and Abel may be a story of firsts, this is one area where that is not the case.

Ancient interpreters did notice the problem of the missing body and expanded the text to incorporate the details. There is evidence for two similar yet divergent approaches to the problem. Some interpreters were content to simply add the details of Abel's burial/concealment while others either glossed over it or delayed the burial.

Among those who added a burial is Josephus. In *Ant.* 1.55, Josephus inserts the claim that Cain "slew his brother and hid his corpse thinking to escape detection." The expansion details not a burial, as such, but does help answer a larger theological question that hangs over the Genesis narrative: Why does an omniscient God ask about the location of the murder victim? This question seems to have bothered Josephus and he solved it by having Cain hide the body. Furthermore, there is no mention of the blood crying out to God and readers are made to suffice with Josephus's claim that God knew what had happened. The lack of the blood, evidence of a crime, may have been one way of emphasizing God's omniscience. By portraying Cain as thinking he could fool God by hiding the body, Josephus fills in the missing

details from Genesis and solves the larger, theological question in one stroke.

The Syrian commentator Ephrem also includes details of the burial/concealment of the body. Ephrem suggests that Cain's invitation to Abel "let us go out to the field" was a way to lure the unsuspecting Abel off of the mountain on the outskirts of paradise.²⁵ The field, it turns out, is a better location for Cain to commit his crime.

It means either that they dwelt on a mountain on the outskirts of Paradise and that Cain led Abel to the field, or that Abel was grazing his flocks on a mountain and [Cain] went up and brought him down to the field, which was more suitable for him because of its standing grain and its soil. For in the standing grains Cain killed Abel and in the earth he easily hid him. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3.5)

As in Josephus, Cain's burial of Abel is part of his attempt to hide his crime. According to Ephrem's interpretation, the invitation for Abel to join Cain in the field is part of Cain's premeditation. Killing Abel in a field meant it was easier to hide the body in the tilled soil than someplace else. Later in the same section of the commentary Cain tells his parents that he saw Abel entering Paradise (3.5.2–6.2). This lie, along with the one he tells to God, is made more believable by Ephrem's adding the description of Cain hiding Abel's body.

A more detailed version of the burial tradition is found in the *tosefta* from the Cairo Genizah that was examined above. In that version Cain learned how to kill his brother from watching a bird. Here again, it is by watching nature that Cain learns how to dispose of Abel's body.

Then seeing he was dead, he feared that his father would demand [Abel] from him; and he did not know what to do. Looking up, he saw the bird that had killed its fellow putting its mouth to the ground; and it dug [a hole], and buried the other dead one, and covered it with earth. At that moment, Cain did the same to Abel, so that [his father] might not find him. (Oxford Bodleian Ms. Heb. C 74r, lines 18–26)

This time instead of fearing God, Cain is afraid that his father will find the body of Abel. The act of burying Abel, however, is, once again, an attempt to hide his crime. The *tosefta* demonstrates the popularity of this tradition and its continued development overtime.

²⁵ It is a common theme in Syriac literature that the first family lived on a mountain located not far from paradise.

A similar version of this story is also found in the Qu'ran. In *Sura* 5.27–32 Cain and Abel are not mentioned by name. They are merely called the sons of Adam. The one kills the other (the righteous one) and then learns how to bury the body from a raven sent by Allah. The version in the Qur'an demonstrates that the source for the tradition was not Genesis, but the haggadic and midrashic versions that were circulating.²⁶ An anomaly in the tradition may be found, however, in *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* 21. Here it is not Cain who buries Abel but Adam.²⁷ The man and his wife are mourning their dead son, who is guarded by his loyal dog, but since this is the first time they have encountered death they do not know what to do with the body. As in the *tosefta* above and the Qur'an, it is a raven that teaches Adam how to bury Abel.

Apart from literature, the burial of Abel was a popular motif in Christian and Islamic art. There are a number of illuminated manuscripts and sculptured reliefs in which Cain is depicted as burying Abel. Sometimes Cain is pictured with a hoe which would symbolize both his occupation as farmer as well as the tool he used to hide the body. These types of pictures are found as late as the fourteenth-century in two English manuscripts of *Queen Mary's Psalter*. In the Psalter there are two plates. The one depicts Cain killing Abel and the second depicts him placing Abel's body in the ground and covering it with leaves.²⁸

The other solution to the missing body was to either gloss over or delay its burial. The earliest example of this approach is found in *Jubilees*. The author of *Jubilees* follows Genesis in that it neglects to mention the burial of Abel, but there is an inconsistency. While Genesis also leaves out the details of Adam's burial, *Jubilees* includes it. In 4:30 Adam is buried by his children and the author adds the comment "he was the first to be buried in the earth." The addition to the narrative is probably an allusion to Gen 3:19: "until you return to the ground for from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you shall

²⁶ Norman A. Stillman, "The Story of Cain and Abel in the Qur'an and the Muslim Commentators: Some Observations," *JSS* 19 (1974): 233.

²⁷ The *Cave of Treasures* details how Adam buried Abel in the Cave of Treasures located on the Mountain near Paradise (E. A. W. Budge, trans., *The Cave of Treasures* [London: The Religious Tract Society, 1927], 70–71).

²⁸ Joseph Gutmann, "Cain's Burial of Abel: A Jewish Legendary Motif in Christian and Islamic Art," *Sacred Art Journal* 11 (1990): 152–57.

return.”²⁹ But the statement begs the question: What happened to the body of Abel? The author of *Jubilees* glosses over the fact that nothing had been mentioned about the fate of Abel.³⁰ While this may be an unintentional oversight, the careful reader will wonder if the body of Abel was either lying where it had fallen or had somehow, mysteriously, disappeared. While this may appear to be pushing the details of the narrative to the point of exaggeration, this is just what happened in another document.

The Greek version of the *Life of Adam and Eve* contains a peculiar series of events associated with the deaths of both Adam and Abel. Cain’s murder of Abel is not a central focus of this document. It is mentioned in 3:1 (23:5 *Vita*), but with far less detail than is found in Genesis. Eve has a vision of Cain attacking Abel. Adam and Eve rush to prevent the murder, but find that they are too late (2:1–3:1). Abel’s murder is stated more as an aside than as the climax of the story. The location of the murder, the crying blood and Cain’s encounter with God are all left out. But with the death of Adam, additional details surrounding Abel’s murder are also given. In 40:1–7 God sends angels to prepare the body of Adam for burial and along with him, that of his murdered son Abel.

When they finished preparing Adam, God said they should bear the body of Abel also. And they brought more linen and prepared him for burial. For he was unburied since the day when his brother slew him; for Cain took great pains to conceal (him), but could not, for the body sprang up from the earth and a voice went out of the earth saying: “No other body can be covered until—with respect to the first creature who was taken from me—the earth from which he was taken returned to me.” And the angels took at the moment and put him upon a rock until Adam, his father, was buried. (*L.A.E. [Apoc]* 40:3–5 [Stone and Anderson, 87E–88E])

The delay of Abel’s burial is connected to God’s words about Adam in Gen 3:19. Since Adam was condemned with words that foreshadowed his burial, the earth refused to receive anyone else until the one who

²⁹ J. T. A. G. M. Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Jubilees* (JSJSup 66; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 169–70.

³⁰ Christfried Böttrich notes: “Konstatierte noch schlicht dass Adam als erster im Lande seiner Erschaffung begraben worden sei ohne dabei über den Verbleib des zuvor erschlagen Abels reflektieren” (*Die Vogel des Himmels Haben ihn begraben. Überlieferungen zu Abels Bestattung und zur Ätiologie des Grabes* [Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1995], 16.

came from it was returned first.³¹ As in *Jubilees* Adam is the first to be buried in the earth. But in contrast to *Jubilees* the state of Abel's body is not a mystery. Aware that it could appear as if the body continued to lie where it fell, the Greek version of *Life of Adam and Eve* expands the narrative again to include the removal of Abel's body to wait until Adam has died. The description of Cain's repeated attempt to bury Abel demonstrates a possible awareness of traditions that attribute Abel's burial to Cain and his efforts to hide the crime. But the author/redactor may also have been aware of a tradition like that in *Jubilees* whereby the fulfillment of God's words in Gen 3:19 required that Adam be the first person buried in the earth. Aware of these divergent interpretations, the author/redactor of the *Life of Adam and Eve* found a way to include both traditions satisfactorily. Adam was the first to be buried and Abel's body was not left to lie where it had fallen.

Finally, some interpreters suggested that the reason Abel's body was missing is because it had been taken into heaven. A possible hint of this tradition is located in the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*. Here Isaiah is taken to the seventh heaven where he sees Adam, Abel and Enoch "stripped of their robes of flesh" and in "their robes of above" (9:7–10). This description suggests that they are part of a select group that has entered the heavenly presence and prefigures the post-millenarian destiny of the righteous who are to receive their robes after the descent of Christ from the seventh heaven (cf. 4:17).³² A common motif in Jewish and Christian literature depicted the just man being taken up to heaven after his death (e.g. *2 Enoch*). The presence of Adam, Abel and Enoch in the seventh heaven, prior to the descent of Christ and the general resurrection, may suggest a glorification after death that includes ascension.³³ Other possible allusions to Abel's ascension are found in *1 Enoch* 22 where Abel is depicted as crying out for vengeance in the place of the dead and the scene in the *Testament of Abraham* 13 in which Abel is portrayed as a judge sitting on a heavenly throne.³⁴

³¹ See Böttrich, 15–28 concerning the delay.

³² R. H. Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (London: A. & C. Black, 1900), 60; Jonathan Morshead Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One: A Study in the Ascension of Isaiah, Looking at Matters of Christology, Social Setting, and Relevance for New Testament Interpretation* (JSPSup 18; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 60.

³³ Jean Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 253–54.

³⁴ S. P. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *JJS* (1979): 227.

Among Christian interpreters, an “ascension of Abel” tradition surfaces infrequently. One such example is found in the Armenian catechism of Gregory the Illuminator called the *Teaching*:

Then another son was established for Adam by God instead of the murdered Abel, who was named Seth. But the murdered one, because of his righteousness, is living in the presence of God. For He who created him from nothing, the same gives him life whenever he wills. (Gregory the Illuminator, *Teaching* §290 [Thomson])

Gregory’s location of Abel in the presence of God is suggestive of ascension even though specific ascension language is not used. In the *Teaching*, the phrase “living in the presence of God” is usually reserved for the martyrs.³⁵ While resurrection is the hope of all believers, in the *Teaching* the martyrs do not wait for the resurrection.³⁶ This is emphasized at one point when Gregory says: “Although yesterday you killed them, yet they are God’s and now will live forever” (§572). This suggests that Gregory counted Abel among the martyrs, a common theme in Christian literature, and concluded, therefore, that Abel had ascended directly to God upon his death rather than waiting for the general resurrection to take place.³⁷

Jacob of Serugh, in a homily on Cain and Abel, connected Cain’s reply to God’s question “where is your brother” with Abel’s missing body and the crying blood.

Indeed, truly he did not know where Abel was, and all unawares the truth thundered from his lips; for he did not know that at his murder Abel had departed to the land of the watchers, and that he had ascended and cried out in heaven before the divine Majesty; no, he was not aware that Abel had been raised to the abode of the angels, and had battered (*lit.* stoned) the dwelling place of the heavenly being with his cries.³⁸

The mention of the “land of the watchers” suggests an association of Abel’s story with that of Enoch in Gen 5:24 who was said to have been taken by God. Just as later tradition would interpret Enoch’s disappearance as ascension, so too Abel’s mysterious disappearance was read as his removal to heaven. The suggestion that Abel bodily ascended to heaven is also possibly connected to later Christian typological

³⁵ Robert Thomson, *The Teaching of Saint Gregory: An Early Armenian Catechism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 53.

³⁶ Thomson, 134.

³⁷ For a discussion of Abel as martyr, see chapter six below.

³⁸ As quoted in Brock, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,” 227.

exegesis that interpreted Abel as a prototype of Christ. Since Christ's body was removed from the earth, so too God removed Abel. Another possible source for this tradition is the way that some exegetes interpreted Abel's crying blood as an indication that, although dead, he somehow continued to live.³⁹ Whatever the source, it seems that both Gregory the Illuminator and Jacob of Serugh knew of a tradition that Abel had ascended to heaven.

Why did God ask Cain about Abel?

Immediately following the murder scene we are introduced to the second dialogue between God and Cain. Unlike the first dialogue in 4:6–7, Cain is given the opportunity to answer God's questions. Since the Hebrew version of Gen 4:8 lacks what Cain said to Abel, this is the first time in the story that we have encountered the words of Cain. The dialogue between God and Cain takes up almost one third of the chapter which is indicative of the story ultimately being about Cain rather than Abel.

One difficulty that an ancient interpreter would encounter when reading Gen 4:9 is God's question to Cain: "Where is Abel your brother?" While modern commentators are content to label this as a rhetorical question, it was a potential stumbling block for the ancients.⁴⁰ The problem was the picture it created of a supposedly omniscient God who did not seem to know what had happened to Abel. This would be accentuated by God's statement in 4:10 asking: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground?" This second question makes it seem as if God had only discovered Abel's fate through the sound of the blood. Since this did not reflect the picture of divine knowledge found elsewhere in the Bible, some interpreters sought to explain why God asked Cain about Abel.⁴¹ For purposes of discussion, these explanations can be arranged into three different categories.

The first category could be designated the "confession sought" category. Since God's question to Cain—"Where is your brother"—resembles God's question to Adam after he had eaten the fruit—"Where

³⁹ For a discussion on Abel as a type of Christ as well as the exegetical developments attached to the crying blood, see chapter six.

⁴⁰ Wenham, 106.

⁴¹ Kugel, "Cain and Abel in Fact and Fable," 175–76.

are you?”, some interpreters thought that God was giving the same opportunity to Cain as he had Adam; God wanted Cain to confess what he did.⁴² Philo recognizes the potential contradiction between God’s status as an all-knowing deity and the questioning of Cain and responds by locating the problem with Cain rather than God.

Why does He who knows all ask the fratricide, “Where is Abel, thy brother?” He wishes that man himself of his own will shall confess, in order that he may not pretend that all things seem to come about through necessity. For he who killed through necessity would confess that he acted unwillingly; for that which is not in our power is not to be blamed. But he who sins of his own free will denies it, for sinners are obliged to repent. Accordingly, he (Moses) inserts in all parts of his legislation that the Deity is not the cause of evil. (Philo, QG 1.68)

Once again Philo emphasizes his belief that Cain represents the beginning of voluntary sin. The reason for God’s questioning of Cain, then, was not because God did not know what had happened, but rather was an attempt to reveal Cain for what he really was, a murderer. The fact that Cain does not confess to God is, for Philo, not only an indicator of his guilt, but also reveals that the murder was premeditated. Philo assumes that one who kills unintentionally would readily confess as opposed to the one who planned the murder and then sought to cover his tracks. The brief description of Abel’s murder in the Genesis account does not reveal whether or not Cain had planned it. But Philo’s picture of Cain has expanded to further depict him as one who willingly sins and attempts to hide the fact from God. As we will see below, this will reveal, what is for Philo, the true nature of Cain’s relationship with the God of the universe.

Christian exegetes followed the same interpretive trajectory as Philo, but they nuanced their interpretation of God’s question slightly. While Philo viewed God’s questioning of Cain as an attempt to gain a confession, there is no indication that Philo thought God was seeking to restore Cain. For Philo, the entire process was about a relentless defamation of Cain. Some Christian interpreters, however, understood God’s question as an opportunity for Cain to repent or to at least reduce his punishment.

⁴² Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (trans. John H. Marks; London: SCM Press, 1963), 106; Wenham, 106.

But God, being pitiful, and wishing to afford to Cain, as to Adam, an opportunity of repentance and confession, said, "Where is Abel thy brother?" But Cain answered God contumaciously, saying, "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?"—(Theophilus of Antioch, 2.29 [Grant])

But Cain was filled with wrath instead of compunction. To him who knows all, who asked him about his brother in order to win him back, Cain retorted angrily and to said "I do not know, am I my brothers keeper?"...What then would you say, Cain? Should justice take vengeance for the blood that cried out to it? Or not? Did it not delay so that you might repent? Did justice not distance itself from its own knowledge and ask you as if it did not know, so that you might confess? What it said to you did not please you, so came to that sin to which it had warned you beforehand not to come. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3.6.1; 3.7.1)

Now let us examine the reason why God, as if He were unaware that Abel was slain, asked Cain: "Where is your brother?" But we are shown God's knowledge, when Cain's attempt to deny guilt is offset by the statement: "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." A profounder meaning may be seen here in God's exhortation that sinners do penance, for confession of guilt leads to lessening of punishment. (Ambrose, *Cain* 9.27 [Savage])

We see, then, that some interpreters, uncomfortable with the idea that God did not know what Cain had done, read God's question as an opportunity to confess. The echo of God's words to Adam strengthened this conclusion and led them to believe that God was showing compassion to Cain rather than indicating divine ignorance over Abel's murder. Such an interpretation allowed for a reading that circumvented the apparent problem of a lapse in God's omniscience. Instead of reading the question rhetorically, as do modern commentators, Christian interpreters considered it God giving Cain a chance to repent.

The second category can be identified as the "ignorance about God" category. Some interpreters concluded that Cain must have been ignorant about God since he thought that Abel's murder would go unnoticed or could be hidden. Josephus's interpretation may be placed into this category. Apparently aware of the complexities of the Genesis story, Josephus tells his readers that God knew what Cain had done even before questioning him about it. Josephus's version of the Genesis story has a pathetic feel to it in the way that Cain acts like a guilty child caught in the act of stealing, but continues to deny it. The scene seems to present a Cain who thinks that he can outmaneuver God.

Thereupon Cain, incensed at God's preference for Abel, slew his brother and hid his corpse, thinking to escape detection. But God, aware of the deed, came to Cain, and asked him whither his brother had gone, since for many days he had not seen him, whom he had constantly before beheld Cain in his company. Cain, in embarrassment, having nothing to reply to God, at first declared that he too was perplexed at not seeing his brother, and then, enraged at the insistent pressure and strict inquiries of God, said that he was not his brother's guardian to keep watch over his person and actions. Upon that word God now accused Cain of being his brother's murderer, saying "I marvel that thou canst not tell what has become of a man whom thou thyself hast destroyed." (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.55–57)

How God knew Cain had killed Abel is not clear in Josephus. There is no mention of the blood crying out to God and readers are made to suffice with Josephus's claim that God knew what had happened. Josephus gives the impression of a longer dialogue between God and Cain than what the Genesis account said happened. The consistent questioning by God in Josephus's version is reminiscent of a trial scene. Cain's attempt to elude the questions and the earlier act of hiding the corpse all seem to signal that Cain was ignorant about God and thought he could escape prosecution.

A similar interpretive trajectory as that of Josephus is found in *Pirque R. Eliezer*. Here too Cain is portrayed as ignorant of God's omniscience as demonstrated by his attempt to hide the evidence of his crime.

Rabbi Jochanan said: Cain did not know that the secrets are revealed before the Holy One, blessed be He. He took the corpse of his brother Abel and hid it in the field. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Where is Abel thy brother?" He replied to Him: Sovereign of the world! A keeper of vineyard and field thou hast made me. A keeper of my brother Thou hast not made me; as it is said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Him: Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? (*Pirque R. El.* 21)

Cain's expanded response to God in *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* is similar to that of Josephus's characterization of Cain as perplexed by God's question. Cain's reminder to God what kind of a "keeper" he was seems to suggest that he was doing his job which would have prevented him from encountering Abel. As one who took care of vineyards and agricultural fields, there would be little chance of encountering a shepherd grazing his sheep. Thus we find again a Cain who, due to his ignorance, thinks he can deceive God.

The fourth or fifth century Christian document known as the *Syriac Life of Abel* also contains this motif of Cain's ignorance about God.⁴³ In the *Life of Abel* the story has been modified so that Cain's attempt to hide Abel's murder takes place over the course of several days. After killing Abel, Cain is not immediately confronted by God, as in Genesis, but instead returns home where he is confronted by his parents. Since he has come home late in the evening, without his brother, they fear the worst and begin to question him.

When his lateness grew, his parents asked their son Cain, saying: "Where is your brother Abel?" When they saw that he was hesitant to speak to them, his mother adjured him, saying: "By the life of Abel your brother, tell me where he is." (*Life of Abel* 10 [Brock])

Cain deceives his parents by claiming to have seen Abel being snatched from a mountaintop and taken to paradise.⁴⁴ Cain's story seems to satisfy his parents and they no longer question him. Having successfully deceived his parents, Cain next encounters God and attempts to elude the questions again, but this time with the expected results.

When his parents heard this, they were quiet and did not question him any more about him (Abel). But God, who brings what is hidden out in to the open, who proclaims what takes place in the depths on the rooftops, two days later, when Cain was serene and quiet, supposing that no one had noticed his murder, God revealed himself to Cain, not in anger and shouting, so that he should not make the matter known by disturbance, but speaking gently and kindly (saying): "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain saw that God was actually questioning him, and so he imagined that even He did not know what he had done. He answered and said to God: "Am I my brother's keeper?" God said to him: "How is it that you do not know? Tell me, then, what have you done?" When he heard these threatening words he was silent, not knowing what to say in reply for the secret of his murder had been uncovered. (*Life of Abel* 12–13)

The interpretive options in the second category do not attempt a rewrite of God's question into a request for a confession. Instead they retain the theme of ignorance, but shift it from God to Cain. God's question about Abel is not a sign of divine ignorance, but a demand that the murderer produce the victim. Cain's response demonstrates

⁴³ S. P. Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel," *Mus* 87 (1974): 467–92.

⁴⁴ In Syriac tradition Paradise is located on a mountain and Adam and Eve were exiled to the valley below.

that he is unaware of God's omniscience. Such a presentation would be consistent with Cain's lack of knowledge in the area of sacrifice. The one who does not know what to offer God also does not know how to respond to God.

The third and final category could be designated the "disregard for God" category. Some interpreters noticed that when Cain replied to God—"I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"—he had lied to God. Rather than interpret this as simple ignorance about God, they concluded that Cain had complete disregard for God. Philo goes so far as to declare Cain an atheist.

Why does he (Cain) reply as if to a man, saying, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" It is an atheistic belief not to hold that the divine eye penetrates all things and sees all things at one time, not only what is visible, but also what is in recesses, depths and abysses. (Philo, QG 1.69)

Philo's labeling Cain an atheist reverberates with the Targum traditions examined above.⁴⁵ In *Targum Neofiti*, Cain's rejection of divine mercy and justice was an implicit rejection of God. For Philo, to lie to God is tantamount to denying God's existence. The label of atheist helps to buttress those interpretations that viewed Cain and Abel as representatives of two different theological points of view. Abel loves God. Cain, through his actions, denies God's existence. That this was a popular interpretation is evidenced by its inclusion by some Christian interpreters.

And he was not softened even by this, nor did he stop short with that evil deed; but being asked where his brother was, he said, "I know not; Am I my brother's keeper?" extending and aggravating [his] wickedness by his answer. For if it is wicked to slay a brother, much worse is it thus insolently and irreverently to reply to the omniscient God as if he could battle Him. (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.24.4)

Consider the parricide's reply: "I do not know, Am I my brother's keeper?"...The existence of God is denied, as if He were unaware of Cain's act. (Ambrose, *Cain* 9.28)

The interpretations in category three allow God to retain the status of omniscient divinity while at the same time denigrating Cain. A simple reading of the Hebrew could suggest that God was ignorant of Abel's murder. But the exegetes skillfully moved the problem of ignorance

⁴⁵ Philo also labels Cain an atheist in *Worse* 119.

away from God and onto Cain who thought he could somehow outwit God. The act of lying to God, however, represented more than just ignorance about God. It was complete disregard for God and earned Cain the title of the first atheist.

How much blood was there?

This may seem like an odd question since Gen 4:10 does not focus on the amount of blood spilled, but on the fact that it is evidence of a crime committed. In English translations of Genesis, God's rejoinder to Cain's lie is another question followed by a statement: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." But such a translation glosses over some problematic aspects of Gen 4:10.

One minor issue is that the Hebrew version does not identify the speaker. The verse merely begins with the introductory formula "and he said." While there is little doubt that the speaker is God, the LXX translator decided to ensure readers understood that the speaker had changed and added God (ὁ θεός) to the introductory formula.⁴⁶ Since this is the only part of the interchange between Cain and Abel that does not clearly identify the speaker, it is plausible that the translator merely wanted 4:10 to conform to 4:9, 13, and 15, all of which identify either God or Cain as the speaker. English translations, like the NRSV, have chosen to follow the lead of the LXX by identifying the speaker in 4:10 as "the Lord."

A more significant challenge is the way that Abel's blood is described. In the Hebrew version of Gen 4:10 the term for "blood" (דם) is in the plural rather than singular construct. This results in a reading which, if literally translated, means the "voice of your brother's *bloods* are crying out" (קול דמי אחיך צעקים). How should this wrinkle in the text be understood? It is possible that the plural was meant to indicate streams of blood. The plural construct of the noun is sometimes used in the Hebrew Bible to describe spilt blood (1 Kgs 2:5, 31; Isa 1:15; 9:4).⁴⁷ Using the plural form of the noun would have left a powerful and

⁴⁶ Wevers, 57.

⁴⁷ Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah: Genesis 1–VI 8* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1961), 218; Wenham 94; Wevers, 57.

gruesome image on the imagination of the ancient reader.⁴⁸ Ancient translators, nevertheless, all agreed that the plural blood should be rendered as singular. The LXX, Peshitta and the Samaritan Pentateuch all adjust the Hebrew version and this has been the practice of English translators as well.

When interpreters in antiquity approached this passage, however, they were faced with an interpretive conundrum: why is the blood in the plural? Some simply chose not to contend with the problem. Josephus, for instance, completely avoids mentioning the talking blood by not including it in his version of the Cain and Abel story. Instead the reader is left to guess how God knew that Abel was dead (*Ant.* 1.55–56). As we noted above, this may be an attempt to gloss over the way Genesis seems to present God as ignorant of Abel's location and current condition. Rather than try to explain the situation Josephus simply expunges that aspect of the story.⁴⁹

Philo employs a similar approach when he overlooks the blood and only concerns himself with Abel's voice which he understands as God continuing to hear the prayers of the worthy even though they are dead (*QG* 1.70). Such an interpretive strategy may be behind Heb 11:4 where we are told that although Abel is dead he is still speaking (ἐτι λαλεῖ). The author of Hebrews does not mention Abel's blood and is only concerned with the ongoing effects of the voice which cries out.⁵⁰

Other interpreters were not satisfied to overlook the plural blood. For the compilers of the Mishnah, the fact that the blood was in the plural indicated that it was not only Abel who was murdered, but also any potential children that might have been born to him had he not died. Such a reading of the Cain and Abel story is part of an explanation of the ramifications of perjury by witnesses in capital cases.

Know ye, moreover, that capital cases are not as non-capital cases: in non-capital cases a man may pay money and so make atonement, but in capital cases the witness is answerable for the blood of him [that is wrongfully condemned] and the blood of his posterity [that should have been born to him] to the end of the world. For so have we found it with Cain that slew his brother, for it is written, *The bloods of thy brother cry*. It says not "The blood of thy brother," but *The bloods of thy brother*—

⁴⁸ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 45.

⁴⁹ Flavius Josephus, *Judean Antiquities 1–4* (translation and commentary by Louis H. Feldman; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 20 n. 119.

⁵⁰ Aspects of the ongoing cry of the blood will be further developed in chapter six.

his blood and the blood of his posterity. (Another saying is: *Bloods of thy brother*—because his blood was cast over the trees and the stones). Therefore but a single man was created in the world, to teach that if any man has caused a single soul to perish from Israel Scripture imputes it to him as though he had caused a whole world to perish; and if any man saves alive a single soul from Israel Scripture imputes it to him as though he had saved alive a whole world. (*m. Sanhedrin* 4:5)

The Mishnah contains little in the way of direct interpretation of scripture, but here we find two interpretations of the plural blood. The one is a Haggadah that highlights the brutality of Cain's crime. Cain killed Abel in such away that caused not only a pool of blood to form, but he did so in such a violent manner that it caused the blood to spatter everywhere.⁵¹ While this interpretation is not central to the warning against perjury, it does serve as an illustration of the violent nature of the kind of crimes that fit under the designation of "capital crimes".

The other use of the Cain and Abel story here and the interpretation of the plural blood teach that there is never just one victim. The crime of murder also destroys all of the potential generations that might have sprung forth from the victim.⁵² This interpretation magnifies the crime of murder. By using the Cain and Abel story as the basis for a legal understanding, the Mishnah also increases Cain's guilt. No longer is he the guilty party in a one time act of fratricide. He is guilty of mass murder, at least from a theological point of view. However, these are not merely potential children, but, as some ancient interpreters suggested, children who would have been righteous as Abel was righteous.⁵³ This is particularly evident in Midrash and Targums where God accuses Cain of killing Abel's descendants who are sometimes identified as a "great multitude of righteous."⁵⁴

R. Judan, R. Huna, and the Rabbis each commented. R. Judan said: It is not written, "Thy brother's blood," but "*Thy brother's bloods*": i.e. his blood and the blood of his descendants. (*Gen. Rab.* 22:9)

⁵¹ Kugel, "Cain and Abel in Fact and Fable," 181. This tradition can also be found in *Genesis Rabbah* 22:9: "It [the blood] could not ascend thither; nor could it go below, because no man had yet been buried there; hence the blood lay spattered in the trees and the stones."

⁵² *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵³ Judith Lieu, "What Was From The Beginning: Scripture and Tradition in the Johannine Epistles," *NTS* 39 (1993): 468–69.

⁵⁴ *Tg. Onq.* also accuses Cain of killing Abel's potential seed, but does not attribute any quality of righteousness to them. For a comparison of the Targumic Versions of this verse see Vermes, 92–126.

And he said: "What is this you have done? The voice of the blood *of the righteous multitudes that were to arise from Abel* your brother is crying out *against you before me from the earth.*" (Tg. Neof. Gen 4:10)

Whereupon he said, "What have you done? The voice of the blood *of the descendants who would have come forth from your brother* is crying out *before Me from the earth.*" (Tg. Onq. Gen 4:10)

And He said: What is this that you have done? The voice of youth blood *of the many righteous multitudes who were to eventually rise from Abel your brother, cry out against you, before me from the earth.* (St. Petersburg, Saltykov-Shchedrin MS Antonin Ebr. III B 739v)

The effects of this interpretive tradition are two-fold. It deals with the wrinkle in the text while at the same time expanding Cain's guilt. With only two male people of their generation in the world, Cain's murder of Abel means that Abel's potential descendants were denied life. Added to this is the designation of these unborn as "righteous" which is certainly a comment on Cain. As with the speeches some interpreters attributed to the two brothers, the anomaly of the plural blood transforms Cain's crime from an act of fratricide into a theological commentary on the murder. By killing Abel and his potential progeny, the presence of evil in the world is now able to grow unchallenged. There is no opposing viewpoint embodied by an individual. Abel dies and along with him his children. But Cain will live, marry and raise a family. And, as we will see below, it is Cain's progeny that continues to infect the world with evil.

Summary

The lack of detail and the gaps in the text describing the first violent crime were too tantalizing for ancient translators and exegetes to ignore. The missing words of Cain in 4:8, the way in which the murder was not described and the anomaly of the plural blood each provided an opportunity for interpreters to expand the story and theologize on the significance of the story. The result was a host of interpretations of the story that tend to agree on at least one thing. The story of Cain and Abel is not just about the correct way to offer a sacrifice. At its core, the story is about the confrontation between good and evil and how God is to be understood in the context of that struggle. As the story was translated, interpreted and expanded, Cain and Abel were viewed not so much as historical figures as they were representatives for two types of human beings in the world.

The gap in Gen 4:8 provided Abel the opportunity to speak. The only voice Abel had previously was from the pool of blood crying out to God. By inserting a conversation, interpreters were able to create speeches that readers could identify as orthodox and heterodox theology. Each brother came to embody a theological point of view that communicated to the reader aspects of God's role in the world. The voice given to Abel transformed him from a silent victim into a defender of correct doctrine and, as a result of his murder, the first martyr.

Cain's character develops in several ways. The speeches attributed to him portray him as denying the role of God in the world to such a degree that he earns the designation of atheist. The anomaly of the plural blood not only increases the violent nature of his crime; it magnifies it by accusing him of killing all of Abel's descendants.

From a theological perspective, the lacuna in Gen 4:8 provides the exegetes yet another way to demonstrate that God was not complicit in Abel's death. As noted in the previous chapter, readers of the Hebrew version could conclude that although Cain's murderous act was certainly wrong, it was God's unexplained rejection of his offering that created the intolerable situation for Cain. But the introduction of a debate between the brothers meant that the fault for the murder could not be traced back to God and the rejected offering. The problem was not with God, but Cain's opinion of God that led to the first act of murder. God was not at fault.

CHAPTER FOUR

FAR AS THE CURSE IS FOUND GENESIS 4:11–16

O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon it, a brother's
murder.

(Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.3.40)

If we were to consider the dialogue between God and Cain in Gen 4:9–10 as the “trial” scene, then 4:11–16 represents the sentencing phase. It is here that God declares Cain’s fate. But it can hardly be claimed that the sentence fits the crime. Abel was treacherously murdered, Cain lied to God about the murder, and still the resulting punishment seems less than just. Cain is not required to surrender his own life and, in spite of the curse, is allowed to marry, raise a family and establish a city. None of this suggests justice for innocent Abel’s blood. As the ancients began to grapple with Cain’s punishment they also were dissatisfied with Cain’s seeming impunity and began to find different ways to interpret the story. For some, the result was an interpretation that created a punishment more severe than what the canonical version envisioned.

Who was cursed more?

In Gen 4:11, God declares that Cain has been cursed as a result of his murderous act. While this may seem like an appropriate beginning to the “sentencing phase” of Cain’s judgment by God, there is an aspect of this that should be noted. The fact that Cain has been cursed represents an important development in the Genesis story. In spite of Adam’s act of disobedience and subsequent exile from the garden, he was not cursed. In Gen 3:14–19, Adam and Eve are told of the particular hardships that they will each have to endure as a result of eating the forbidden fruit, but it is the serpent (3:14) and the ground (3:17) that is cursed by God not humanity.¹ But Cain’s crime of fratricide alters

¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 306; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 107.

the state of affairs. A comparison of God's words in 3:14 with 4:11 reveals an important parallel. Language similar to that used to curse the serpent is used to curse Cain.

Cursed are you more than (from) all beasts (Gen 3:14).
(ארור אתה מכל-הבהמה)

Cursed are you from (more than) the ground (Gen 4:11).
(ארור אתה מן-האדמה)

Cain, it seems, has surpassed his father. His transgression is greater and he brings down the curse on himself.² Not only is he the first human to be associated with the notion of sin (4:7), he is also the first murderer and the first human being to fall under a curse. Chrysostom observed the parallelism and concludes that Cain, in many ways, represented the serpent in Gen 4.

You see, since Cain perpetrated practically the same evil as the serpent, which like an instrument served the devil's purposes, and as the serpent introduced mortality by means of deceit, in like manner Cain deceived his brother led him out into the open country, raised his hand in armed assault against him and committed murder. Hence, as God said to the serpent, "Cursed are you beyond all the wild animals of the earth," so to Cain when he committed the same evil as the serpent. (Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 19.11 [Hill])

Other interpreters noticed the parallelism between 3:14 and 4:11, but found that God's words in 4:11 were not entirely clear. One problem is that in Hebrew, Greek and English the notion of being cursed "from the earth" is a peculiar concept. Either Cain was cursed or the earth was cursed in regard to Cain, as it was for Adam in 3:17. Modern commentators usually suggest that Cain was cursed *away from* the land, i.e., banished from his home where he had originally cultivated the soil.³

The second problem with what God says to Cain is that many of the words in the dialogue have direct reference to the earth rather than Cain (Abel's blood on the earth, the earth not yielding to Cain, etc). If

² Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah: Genesis 1-VI 8* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 218.

³ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 45; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (trans. John H. Marks; London: SCM Press, 1963), 106; Wenham, 107.

Cain is the culprit here, then why is there so much discussion about the earth?⁴ Has God now cursed the earth for a second time?

The solution offered by some exegetes was located in how they interpreted 4:11 in light of the parallel statements in 3:14. In both 3:14 and 4:11 the serpent and Cain are cursed; the serpent from among the other animals and Cain from the earth. The key to interpreting the parallel statements is how an exegete understands the Hebrew word “from” (מִן), which can also be used as a comparative meaning “more than.” Since the latter was the way the term was understood in reference to the serpent in 3:14, it was cursed more than or above all of the other animals, some interpreters concluded that Cain was cursed more than the earth. This interpretation could have two equally possible meanings: (1) since the earth had already been cursed on Adam’s account in 3:17, Cain’s curse is even more severe; or (2) the earth has been cursed (again) along with Cain since it is complicit in his crime by drinking Abel’s blood and helping to hide Cain’s deed.⁵ Both of these interpretations find support among ancient exegetes.

[God said to Korah] “I commanded the earth and it gave me Adam, and two sons were born to him, and the older rose up and killed the younger, and the earth hastened to drink up his blood. And I expelled Cain and cursed the earth and spoke to Zion, saying, ‘You shall no more drink up blood.’” (Pseudo-Philo, *L.A.B.* 16:2 [Jacobson])

So now cursed are you more than the earth which opened its mouth and *received* the blood of your brother from your hand. (*Tg. Onq. Gen* 4:11)

Pseudo-Philo interprets Cain’s curse “from” (מִן) the earth as the earth being cursed in addition to Cain.⁶ *Targum Onqelos*, on the other hand, reads the same phrase as meaning that Cain is cursed “more than” (מִן) the earth. Both consider the earth to be complicit in Cain’s crime since

⁴ James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 163.

⁵ Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 163; Bruce N. Fisk, “Gaps in the Story, Cracks in the Earth: The Exile of Cain and the Destruction of Korah in Pseudo-Philo (*Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 16),” in *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture* (vol. 2 ed. Craig A. Evans; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 25–28.

⁶ Howard Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum: with Latin Text and English Translation* (AGJUC 31; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 556.

it willingly drank the blood of Abel and therefore was cursed along with, if not more than, Cain.⁷

Philo's interpretive strategy offers yet another possibility. When commenting on Gen 4:11, Philo makes a small but significant change. While the LXX version has translated the Hebrew literally by using ἀπό for מן, Philo instead used either the preposition ἐν or ἐπί.⁸ The result is a reading of 4:11 that has Cain being cursed "upon the earth" rather than "from the earth." Through this reading Philo has removed the earth as an object of God's curse.

Why does he (Cain) become accursed upon the earth? The earth is the last of the parts of the universe. Accordingly, if this curses him it is understandable that appropriate curses will be laid upon him by the other elements as well, namely by springs, rivers, sea, air, winds, fire, light, the sun, the moon the stars and the whole heaven together. For if inanimate and terrestrial nature opposes and revolts against wrongdoing will not purer natures do still more? But he with whom the parts of the universe wage war—what hope of salvation will he any longer have? I do not know. (Philo, QG 1.71)

By having Cain "cursed on the earth" rather than "from the earth," Philo has reconfigured the sentence in such a way that the earth is also cursing Cain. Rather than sharing in Cain's guilt and punishment, the earth is now in active opposition to Cain and the ramifications are such that all of creation is against him. Philo elaborates on this further when he comments on Cain's fear of being killed. Philo attributes this to Cain's fear of being attacked by wild animals, a tradition which is also found in Josephus and *Genesis Rabbah*.

What is the meaning of the words, "Every one who finds me will kill me," inasmuch as there were no other people but his parents? First of all, he was likely to suffer harm from the parts of the world, which were made for the use and participation of good men, but none the less exact punishment from the wicked. Second, because he feared the attacks of the beasts and reptiles, for nature produced them for the punishment of unjust men. Third, perhaps one may think of his parents, to who he first brought new grief and their first misfortune, as they had not known what death is. (Philo, QG 1.74)

⁷ The Babylonian Talmud has a similar midrash in which Rabbi Judah says: "Since the day the earth opened her mouth to receive the blood of Abel, she has never opened it again" (*b. Sanh.* 37b).

⁸ A similar strategy is found in *Jub.* 4:5 where the preposition is changed as well (J. T. A. G. M. Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Jubilees* [JJSup 66; Leiden: Brill, 2000], 146).

But, when Cain feared that in his wandering he would fall prey to wild beasts and perish thus, God bade him have no melancholy foreboding from such cause: he would be in no danger from beasts, and might fare unafraid through every land. (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.59)

R. Judah said: The cattle, beasts, and birds assembled to demand justice for Abel. (*Gen. Rab.* 22:12)

The effect of these interpretations is the portrayal of creation in opposition to Cain. Rather than the earth being cursed as a result of Cain's crime, it plays an active part in the curse placed on Cain.⁹ The spilling of innocent blood on the ground set off a chain reaction that caused not only the plant life to resist Cain's agricultural endeavors, but even the animals sought to kill him as revenge for his murder of Abel. Consequently, although the earth is cursed as a result of Adam's disobedience, Cain is cursed more than the earth since he is the first human being to be cursed.

Was Cain a mover or a shaker?

Genesis 4:12 introduces the specific curse put on Cain which has two parts. The first is Cain's inability to successfully perform his occupation as a farmer since the ground is cursed and will no longer yield to him. This aspect of the curse is a progression from 3:17–19 where Adam was warned only that he would toil to make a living. Cain's curse, however, is more than just toil. The earth, as noted above, is in active resistance to Cain. This may imply why Cain goes on to be a builder of cities rather than continue as a farmer.¹⁰

The second part of the curse directly affects Cain by making him a "fugitive and wanderer on the earth" (NRSV). In the Hebrew version, there is a combination of two participles that occurs in 4:12 and again in 4:14 (נָע וָנָד). Both occurrences of this combination are used to describe Cain's curse as a "fugitive and wanderer" and is unique in the Hebrew Bible. Modern scholarship has at times favored a translation/interpretation of these participles in a way that condemns Cain to a nomadic lifestyle moving around from place to place. More recently there has been a shift towards interpreting the curse as exclusion from the tribal and family unit. Cain's killing of Abel meant separation from

⁹ Susan Brayford, *Genesis* (Septuagint Commentary Series; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 253.

¹⁰ Wenham, 108.

his family which is reflective of Abel's fate as the murder victim.¹¹ Neither of them is permitted to enjoy the security and satisfaction of their family unit.

But when Gen 4:12 was translated by the LXX, Cain's curse underwent a transformation. While the first part of the curse remained intact, the second part was altered in such a way that Cain's curse as a fugitive and wanderer disappeared. Rather than translate the **נָחַם וְנָדַח** participle combination in a way that reflected the Hebrew version, the LXX instead used a combination of participles (στένων καὶ τρέμων) that condemn Cain to a life of "groaning and shaking upon the earth."¹² The result is a dramatic change in emphasis. The Hebrew version stresses exclusion and homelessness whereas the LXX stresses a vocal groaning accompanied by a bodily tremor.¹³ What to make of this translation is unclear, but there are two equally possible suggestions.¹⁴ First, the translator may have been attempting to correct a perceived incongruity between Cain's curse to be a fugitive and wanderer with his role as the builder of the first city. The emphasis on exclusion and homelessness in the Hebrew version does not concur with the way Cain was allowed to settle down, build a home and raise a family. Such a reading only seems to accentuate the lack of justice in connection with the crime, and the LXX reading attempts to rectify it. At the same time, the translation has the added effect of handing Cain a physical affliction as a punishment that would be easily observable. Anyone who met Cain would know who he was and what he had done just by looking at the way he was groaning and shaking. Cain was punished in the LXX in a way that was more agreeable than what the Hebrew version seemed to suggest.

¹¹ Ibid.; Westermann, 308.

¹² Brayford, 254.

¹³ John William Wevers, *LXX: Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies 35; Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1993), 58.

¹⁴ This translation is curious since nowhere else in the LXX is **נָחַם** or **נָדַח** translated by στένω or τρέμω. The picture of Cain "shaking" is easily deduced from either **נָחַם** or **נָדַח** since they are both used to describe the shaking of reeds in water, trees in the wind and the staggering of drunks (1 Kgs 14:15; Ps 107:27; Isa 7:2, 24:20). But the description of Cain "groaning" and the use of στένω for either **נָחַם** or **נָדַח** is without precedent. The translator seems to have noticed the alliterative nature of the Hebrew participles and attempted to imitate it with his choice of Greek terms. It maybe that his choice of τρέμω led him to chose στένω which not only retained the alliteration but also served to emphasize the seriousness of Cain's punishment. It is also possible that Cain has inherited his mothers "groaning" from LXX Gen 3:16 (Brayford, 253).

Other translations of Gen 4:12 yielded mixed results. Symmachus rendered the participles as “an exile and unstable” which agrees with the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Targums. Theodotion and the Peshitta, however, each have a variant of the LXX’s “groaning and trembling.”¹⁵ Those who were heirs to the “groaning and shaking” translation developed this tradition in ways that helped them to describe the kind of punishment Cain sustained.

Philo refers to Cain’s curse a number of times and concludes that it was fear of what might happen to him that made Cain groan and shake. This is a more allegorical reading of the curse rather than a belief that Cain actually was groaning and shaking from a physical ailment, but it does depend on the changes made by the LXX.

To the godless Cain, on the other hand, the earth affords nothing that contributes to healthy vigor, in spite of his being occupied with nothing beyond the concerns of the earth. It is a natural consequence of this that he is found “groaning and trembling upon the earth,” that is to say, a victim to fear and grief. Such is the sorry life of the wicked man, a life to which have been allotted the more grievous of the four passions, fear and grief, the one identical with groaning, the other with trembling. (Philo, *Worse* 119)

Well, then, let goodly men, having obtained joy and hope as their happy portion, either enjoy or at all events expect good things: but let the worthless men, of whose company Cain is a member, living in constant pain and terror, gather in a most grievous harvest, in experience or expectation of evils, groaning over the painful case in which they are already, and trembling and shuddering at the fearful things they expect. (Philo, *Worse* 140)

There are four passions in the soul, two concerned with the good, either at the time or in the future, that is pleasure and desire, and two concerned with evil present and expected, that is grief and fear. The pair on the good side God tore out of him [Cain] by the root so that never by any chance he should have any pleasant sensations or desire anything pleasant, and engrafted in him only the pair on the bad side, producing grief unmixed with cheerfulness and fear unrelieved. For he says that he laid a curse upon the fratricide that he should ever “groan and tremble.” (Philo, *Rewards* 72)

What is the meaning of the words, “Groaning and trembling shall thou be upon the earth”? This too is a universal principle. For every evil-doer has something which immediately awaits him and is to come. For

¹⁵ Alison Salvesen, *Symmachus in the Pentateuch* (JSSM 15; University of Manchester, 1991), 22–23.

things to come already bring fears, and that which is immediately present causes grief. (Philo, QG 1.72)

Rather than view Cain's shaking and trembling as an actual physical ailment, Philo allegorically connects it to Cain's fear of approaching evil. The punishment, it seems, is far greater than a mere physical disability, but one that torments the soul of the evil doer. God, Philo tells us, ripped out the positive passions of the soul and only left those which would drive Cain to a life of unpleasantness. The groaning and trembling, then, is an outward manifestation of Cain's inner lack of satisfaction. Such a punishment is a paradox for Cain. Since Philo consistently interprets Cain's name and character as a greedy lover-of-self, the inability to find pleasure would mean constant torment.

In Syriac tradition the groaning and shaking were not interpreted allegorically, but as a very real and visible physical ailment.¹⁶

He was troubled and trembled all the days of his life. (*Cave of Treasures* 5:31)

When Cain arrived home, his parents lifted up their eyes and saw him, and they imagined that he was staggering from excess of wine. But when his mother saw his shaking and trembling and the terrible sign on his forehead, she laid her hands on her head, and from her mouth there poured forth incessant wails. She opened her mouth and uttered in a grief-stricken voice a lament over her two sons... "My youngest son is no longer, while the one who is left is staggering while still a youth, and before his youth is up his limbs are seized by shaking and trembling!" (*Life of Abel* 16–17)

By taking the description of trembling and groaning seriously, the drama is heightened so that Cain's punishment is quick and observable. Rather than becoming an anonymous exile, his ailment marks him off as one who has been cursed by God. Moreover, the need for God's protective mark on Cain is more pronounced. In Genesis it is not clear how those who Cain fears will recognize him. But among those interpreters who adopted the "shaking and trembling" tradition, the mark is needed since anyone who sees the body of Cain will immediately detect his identity. Any attempt to kill the quaking man will be deterred by God's protective sign.

¹⁶ For a catalog of the images of Cain's trembling see the list in Johannes Bartholdy Glenthøj, *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4th–6th Centuries)* (CSCO; Lovanii: Peeters, 1997), 180–83.

Still others, like John Chrysostom, incorporated an allegorical reading along with a very real physical disability. This interpretation emphasizes the constant fear in which Cain lived as well as an embellished description of Cain's physical maladies. For Chrysostom, the physical tremor was both a punishment as well as a guarantee against any repeat offences.

If God had immediately destroyed him, Cain would have disappeared and he would have remained unknown to men of later times. But as it is, God let him live a long time with the bodily tremor of his. The sight of Cain's palsied limbs was a lesson for all he met. It served to teach all men and exhort them never to dare do what he had done, so that they might not suffer the same punishment. And Cain himself became a better man again. His trembling, his fear, the mental torment that never left him, his physical paralysis kept him, as it were, shackled. They kept him from leaping again to any other like deed of bold folly. They constantly reminded him of his former crime. (Chrysostom, *Adv. Jud.* 8.2.10)¹⁷

Some authors carried the groaning and shaking interpretation over to Gen 4:16 when they commented on Cain's dwelling place. In the Hebrew version we read that Cain lived in the land of Nod. The name Nod is related to the participle נָדַד in 4:12 which the LXX translated as τρέμων (trembling).¹⁸ This led some interpreters to understand the Land of Nod as the "land of shaking."

Now Cain dwelt in the land of trembling, in keeping with what God had appointed for him after he had killed Abel his brother. (Pseudo-Philo, *L.A.B.* 2:1)

The land of Nod is so called because it was the land in which Cain wandered about in fear and trembling. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3:11)

Cain left God's presence and went to live in the land of Nod, opposite Eden, Nod means disturbance. (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.51.4–5)

Jon Levenson has commented: "That Abel should have died a tragic death neither avenged nor reversed stuck in the craw of the ongoing Jewish and Christian traditions. How could the God of justice have failed to counteract an injustice of such magnitude?"¹⁹ This dissonance

¹⁷ Chrysostom repeats his description of Cain's crippled body in his homily on the paralytic let down through the roof (*Paralyt.* 5).

¹⁸ Wevers, 61.

¹⁹ Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 76.

described by Levenson often led to a retelling of the story crafted in such a way so that vengeance was demanded from God. The above interpretations demonstrate one facet of how the Cain and Abel story was retold with a more vengeful outcome. As we will see in later chapters, some interpreters did not stop their embellishments of the story with the curse. Cain's shaking and groaning is what eventually led to his death in some traditions.

Did Cain receive forgiveness?

In Gen 4:13, Cain laments his punishment in a way that resembles a plea for mercy: "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (NRSV). This is followed up in 4:14 with a recital of the curse that is coupled with the claim that anyone who found Cain would kill him. The thrust of the lament is that Cain considers the consequences for his iniquity intolerable. This interpretation is predicated on how one understands the Hebrew phrase **עוֹן עָוִן**. In its literal sense, it means "to carry iniquity or punishment." If one were to interpret it metaphorically, then, the sentence might read, "My iniquity is too great to be forgiven."²⁰ While most translators and commentators favor the literal reading there are some that choose the metaphorical meaning.²¹

The LXX adopts a metaphorical reading of Gen 4:13 which at the same time is inconsistent with its earlier translation of 4:7. In 4:7, the translator of Greek Genesis did not understand **סָוִן** as meaning forgiveness or acceptance as it commonly is in English translations. Rather God's words to Cain in 4:7 were reconfigured in way that translated **סָוִן** literally to mean "lifting up an offering" (*προσενέγκης*) which was part of the LXX's cultic interpretation of the verse.²² In 4:13, however, **סָוִן** is translated metaphorically as *ἀφεθῆναι*, "to be forgiven," rendering a translation that reads: "My guilt is too great to be forgiven."²³ Such a translation once again shifts the emphasis of the verse. While the Hebrew version of 4:13 depicts Cain's complaint against an overly burdensome punishment, the LXX has shifted the focus to a moral interpretation that raises the question of whether or

²⁰ Wenham, 108.

²¹ Cassuto, 222.

²² See the discussion of 4:7 in chapter two.

²³ This translation strategy is also used by the Vulgate.

not there is forgiveness for Cain.²⁴ This question was answered in a number of ways by interpreters.

Philo, although an heir of the LXX, suggests an interpretation that is representative of neither the Hebrew nor the LXX. Rather than understand ἀφεθῆναι in the LXX as “forgiveness,” Philo chose another possible meaning which conveys the idea of “leaving” or “being abandoned.”

Let us investigate the words that follow. They are these: “And Cain said to the Lord, ‘The charge to which abandonment exposes me is too great’” The character of this cry will appear from a comparison of like cases. If the helmsman should abandon a ship at sea, must not all arrangements for sailing the ship go wrong? Again, if a charioteer quits a horse-chariot during a race, does it not necessarily follow that the chariot’s course will lose all order and direction?...Now if each presence that I have named becomes an occasion of loss and damage to those abandoned by it, how great a disaster must we infer that those will experience who have been forsaken by God; men whom he rejects as deserters, false to the most sacred ordinances, and sends into banishment, having tested them and found them unworthy of His rule and governance? (Philo, *Worse* 141–142)

What is the meaning of the words, “Too great is my guilt to let me go”? Indeed there is no misfortune of greater hopelessness than God’s leaving and abandoning one. For the lack of a ruler is terrible and difficult for depraved men. But to be overlooked by a great king and to be cast out and rejected by the chief authority is an indescribable misfortune. (Philo, *QG* 1.73)

Philo understands Cain’s lament not as a plea for forgiveness and not even a claim that he cannot be forgiven. Rather, he interprets the lament in the context of Cain’s expulsion from the land which is understood by Philo as God abandoning Cain. This coincides with Philo’s claims examined in the previous chapter that Cain was an atheist due to the way that he thought he could outwit God. Those who do not need or reverence God are abandoned by God. The result, then, is that Philo has muddled the verse even more by not focusing on the Hebrew or LXX tradition and instead offering a third possible reading. But even by reading the verse as God abandoning Cain, Philo does seem to suggest that he was not forgiven.

In his retelling of the story, Josephus does not include the Gen 4:11–14 dialogue between God and Cain, which may be an indicator

²⁴ Wevers, 59.

of his appreciation for the complexity of the verse. Rather he ends the dialogue with God accusing Cain of murder which is then followed by a narration explaining Cain's punishment.

God, however, exempted him from the penalty merited for murder, Cain having offered sacrifice and therewith supplicated Him not to visit him too severely in His wrath; but He made him accursed and threatened to punish his posterity in the seventh generation, and expelled him from that land with his wife. (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.58)

It is striking that Josephus not only expanded the story by adding that Cain offered a sacrifice, apparently this time correctly, but that he does so in a way that suggests Cain repented of his sin.²⁵ Moreover, the cursing of Cain is introduced only *after* Cain has offered his sacrifice of repentance. While there is no direct claim that Cain received forgiveness, the exemption from the death penalty and the mitigated punishment (delayed until the seventh generation) goes some way towards demonstrating that Cain did receive forgiveness. The key to all of this seems to be that Josephus understood Cain's lament to God as an act of repentance. Rather than transcribe Cain's words from Gen 4:13–14, Josephus added the sacrifice which was more indicative of a repentant act.²⁶

Although Josephus is the only one to add the sacrifice scene, there were a number of interpreters who also understood Cain's lament as an act of repentance that warranted forgiveness. Some traditions recast Cain's lament to God as more of a complaining accusation that seeks forgiveness.

“Thou bearest the heavenly and the earthly, yet thou canst not bear my transgression!” (*Gen. Rab.* 22:11)

Our Rabbis taught: Three came with a circuitous plea, Cain, Esau and Manasseh. Cain—for it is written [and Cain said to the Lord] *Is my sin too great to be forgiven?* He pleaded thus before Him: “Sovereign of the Universe! Is my sin greater than that of the six hundred thousand [Israelites] who are destined to sin before Thee, yet wilt Thou pardon them!” (*B. Sanhedrin* 101a)

In the Targums, the Hebrew is translated so that Cain is still declaring that his guilt or punishment is too much to bear. Following this,

²⁵ Flavius Josephus, *Judean Antiquities* 1–4 (translation and commentary by Louis H. Feldman; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 21.

²⁶ Tessel M. Jonquière, *Prayer in Josephus* (AJEC 70; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 244.

however, is an explanation of God's ability to forgive Cain. The result is that Cain's lament is not a demand for forgiveness, but a humble prayer that acknowledges God's ability to forgive Cain's offense.²⁷ Along with these is a version of the tradition found in *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* and a fragment from the Cairo Genizah.

And Cain said to the Lord; "My *debts* are too numerous to bear; *before you, however, there is power to remit and pardon.*" (Tg. Neof. Gen 4:13)

Cain said *before* the Lord, "My *rebellion* is *much* too great to bear, *but you are able to forgive it.*" (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 4:13)

If for Cain *who sinned and repented*... (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 4:24)

Cain spake before the Holy One, bless be He: Sovereign of all the worlds! "My sin is too great to be borne, for it has no atonement. This utterance was reckoned to him as repentance, as it is said, "And Cain said unto the Lord, My sin is too great to be borne." (*Pirqe R. El.* 21)

And Cain said before the Lord: "My Sins are too great to bear, *but there is much ability before you to pardon and remit.*" (St. Petersburg, Saltykov-Shchedrin' MS Antonin Ebr. III B 739v)

The only Targum that does not add to Cain's lament is *Onqelos*. This is probably from a desire to keep as close to the Hebrew as possible, but at the same time emphasize Cain's guilt rather than mitigate, it. Such a reading reflects Cain's despair at God while also being careful not to portray him as repentant.²⁸ Along with *Onqelos*, John Chrysostom also denied that Cain ever repented, insisting that, like his offering, Cain was too late.

Someone may say: "Behold he has confessed, and confessed with great precision"—but all to no avail, dearly beloved: the confession comes too late. You see, he should have done this at the right time when he was in a position to find mercy from the judge. (Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 19.3)

We saw in the previous chapter, that some ancient interpreters, who were fond of preaching the merits of repentance, understood God's questioning of Cain as giving him an opportunity to repent. These sentiments were carried over to Cain himself. Not only was Cain the first murderer, he was, at least according to some exegetes, the first to be overcome with remorse for his guilt and to cry out to God for

²⁷ Geza Vermes, "The Targumic Versions of Genesis 4:3–16," in *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (SJLA 8; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 118.

²⁸ Vermes, 118.

mercy.²⁹ This is a quality not even attributed to his father Adam in Genesis 3. Whether or not Cain's act of compunction did earn him forgiveness depends on the exegete. Many witnesses seem to favor at least a mitigation of punishment if not forgiveness. As we will see, however, Cain's reputation for evil deeds did not end with the cry of remorse. Even if Cain did receive forgiveness, traditions shrouding his subsequent life demonstrate that any lessons learned were quickly forgotten by him and his descendants.

Who was the recipient of the sevenfold vengeance?

Genesis 4:15 brings to a close the first scene of this two part drama. In 4:14, Cain voiced his distress at being driven away from both the land and the face of God. This was coupled with the fear that anyone who found him would kill him. Whom Cain feared has long perplexed commentators since, according to Genesis, the only people left in the world were Cain's parents Adam and Eve. It may be that Cain feared the descendants of Adam yet to be born would attempt to avenge Abel's blood, but this too is unclear. Nonetheless, the heart of Cain's complaint to God is that he fears acts of retribution against him which would then result in his premature death.³⁰ What is unnerving about God's response to Cain is that it seems to amount to a promise of divine protection. Readers of Gen 4:15 would have been struck by the contradictory way in which Cain received protection from God while justice was denied to the murdered Abel.

In the Hebrew version, God's response to Cain seems intended to ease Cain's fear. The punishment is not mitigated, but a premature death is negated by God's promise of a sevenfold vengeance that will result from the act of slaying Cain. It is here that the difficulties begin, however. Almost every word in the Hebrew version of Gen 4:15a could be taken in at least two different ways and often has been. While there are several ambiguities that make translation/interpretation difficult, there are two that are particularly relevant to the current discussion.³¹

²⁹ Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 155.

³⁰ Wenham, 109.

³¹ For an overview of the difficulties associated with the translation and interpretation of Gen 4:15 see Salvesen, 24–26 and David K. Delaney, "The Sevenfold Vengeance of Cain: Genesis 4 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1996), 18–21.

Part of the ambiguity lies in the confusion over how to understand the number of vengeance or punishments promised by God. The Hebrew **שבעתים** can be read several ways. It can be translated as “sevenfold,” as a shorthand for “at the seventh generation” or as an adverb meaning “completely.”³² These three different translations, consequently, yield three very different interpretations.³³

1. The “sevenfold” translation could mean that Cain’s killer and six of his relatives would die.
2. The “at the seventh generation” translation could mean that the person who stands seventh in the line of Cain or Adam would be killed.
3. The “completely” translation could be interpreted as poetic speech meant to imply full divine retribution.

Although each of the above represents a very different interpretation each is an equally possible translation. And, as we will see below, each of these found a place in the interpretive strategies used by ancient exegetes.

The second ambiguity lies in identifying the subject of the vengeance. The Hebrew verb **יקם** is usually understood as meaning he will be “avenged” or “punished.” The problem, however, is the unclear identity of the person receiving the vengeance since the verb is ambiguous in both its voice and its referent. Was Cain the recipient of the seven vengeance or was it the killer who unlocked the vengeance upon killing Cain? Modern translations attempt to clear up the ambiguity in a way that suggests that it is Cain’s killer who receives the vengeance. But translators and exegetes were not always in agreement in their interpretation of this verse, and the result was the development of well established traditions that attempted to identify the subject of the vengeance in 4:15.

For some ancient interpreters, the key to unraveling the puzzling language of 4:15 was found in 4:23–24. This short section known as “Lamech’s song” is a declaration by one of Cain’s descendants that he had killed a man.³⁴ As part of this declaration, there is a reference back

³² Salvesen, 24; Delaney, 20.

³³ Wenham, 109.

³⁴ While many commentators understand the reference to Lamech killing a man and a boy as an example of Hebrew parallelism rather than a double murder (Cassuto,

to the Cain and Abel incident that contains language parallel to God's statement in 4:15a. In 4:24 Lamech's song implies that the sevenfold vengeance guarantee against premature death given to Cain by God was multiplied to seventy-sevenfold for Lamech. The problem, however, is the apparent contradiction that exists between 4:15 and 4:24. In both verses, the very same verb form יָקַם is used, as is the same adverb שִׁבְעָתִים. The difference lies in the subjects in both verses. In 4:15, the subject is "all who kill Cain" (כָּל־הַרֹג קַיִן שִׁבְעָתִים יָקַם), while in 4:24, the subject is Cain himself (שִׁבְעָתִים יָקַם־קַיִן). If a translator were to adopt the same translation for both verses, the result would be a contradiction of who was the recipient of the vengeance.³⁵ Most English translations solve this problem by allowing יָקַם to have two meanings. In 4:15 it is the killers of Cain who "suffer vengeance" while in 4:24 Cain is the one who is "avenged" (NRSV). English translators seem satisfied with not reconciling the contradictory verses.

The LXX version, on the other hand, betrays evidence that translators *were* troubled by the possible contradiction between 4:15 and 4:24. In Greek Genesis the Hebrew phrase יָקַם שִׁבְעָתִים in 4:15 is rendered as ἐπὶ τὰ ἐκδικούμενα παραλύσει so that the sentence no longer reads "everyone who kills Cain will suffer sevenfold vengeance," but now reads "everyone who kills Cain will loose seven penalties." The upshot of this translation is that it now appears that it is Cain who is the recipient of the seven vengeancees and not his killer. To further understand what has happened we must examine what the LXX has done with 4:24.

In LXX Gen 4:24 we read ὅτι ἐπτάκις ἐκδεδίκηται ἐκ Καὶν or "because vengeance has been extracted seven times from Cain."³⁶ The translator seems to have decided that the controlling center of the chapter was 4:24 and not 4:15. Since 4:24 reflects the translator's belief that it was Cain, not his potential killers, that was the recipient of the

239–44; Wenham, 114), others have suggested that Lamech killed both a man and a boy and thus the reason for the more drastic punishment (Patrick D. Miller, "YELED in the Song of Lamech," *JBL* 85 [1966]: 477–78).

³⁵ Delaney, 34.

³⁶ This translation is more accurate than that of C. L. Brenton who translated it "because vengeance has been exacted seven times on Cain's behalf." The problem with Brenton's translation is that it relies on the received English translation of this verse which translates ἐκ Καὶν as "on behalf of Cain" rather than "from Cain" as above. Brenton's translation overlooks other places in the LXX where ἐκ is used to indicate punishment being extracted from someone (Deut 18:19; 1 Kgs 24:13; Jer 11:20, 20:10) as well as the traditions that attributed the seven-fold vengeance to Cain.

seven vengeance, 4:15 had to be brought into congruity with 4:24.³⁷ The shift in how the vengeance were understood represented a further heightening of Cain's punishment. No longer were God's word's in 4:15a only a guarantee for Cain that he would not experience a premature death. Instead what the LXX has done is reconfigure 4:15 and 4:24 so that the seven vengeance are now part of Cain's punishment, and God's promise to Cain is not to bring vengeance on his killer, but is rather a guarantee that Cain will not die before he has suffered all seven of those vengeance.

Such a reading is lent further support by the LXX translation of לכן in 4:15. Rather than render it as "therefore," as it is in the Targums and the Samaritan Pentateuch, the LXX translator read לכן as לא כן, which translates into Greek as οὐχ οὕτως, "not so."³⁸ The change is subtle but significant. Rather than introduce God's words to Cain as a promise of divine protection (therefore!) in response to Cain's fear of a premature death, the "not so" reading changes the thrust of the sentence so that God is now contradicting Cain's claim.³⁹ In other words, Cain's fear of a premature death is contradicted by God with a pledge that Cain will not die until vengeance has been exacted from him seven times.

Without the adjustments made by the LXX, Gen 4:15 could be read as an act of mercy upon Cain whereby anyone seeking to kill Cain would actually have incurred a punishment even more severe than did the first murderer himself. Such an interpretation would certainly have stuck in the craw of readers in antiquity. Cain appears to receive more justice than murdered Abel. The process of emendation that 4:15 and 4:24 underwent in the LXX, however, would have resolved the problem. No longer was Cain perceived as receiving a divine promise of protection. Rather his punishment had been lengthened and the only promise he received was that he would not die until he suffered all of his punishment.

With the exception of Aquila, the changes made to 4:15 by the LXX were reflected in the translations of Symmachus, Theodotion, the Peshitta and the Vulgate.⁴⁰ All of these reflect the interpretation that it was Cain who was the recipient of the seven vengeance and not his

³⁷ Delaney, 35.

³⁸ Wevers, 61.

³⁹ Salvesen, 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

killer. This translation led to a number of traditions explaining how Cain, not his killer, suffered a sevenfold justice.

In his comments on Gen 4:15, Philo acknowledges that the verse's interpretation is unclear and, therefore, must be understood figuratively (*Worse* 167). Philo may have also been aware of the Hebrew tradition that attributed the seven punishments to Cain's killer (c.f. *QG* 1.75). Yet as an heir of the LXX, he also understood Cain as the recipient of the seven punishments which he associates with seven parts of either the soul or the body (*QG* 1.76–77). Philo's comments here are in the context of answering why Lamech was condemned to more punishment than Cain.

For according to the law, sevenfold punishment is given (to Cain). First, upon the eyes, because they saw what was not fitting; second upon the ears, because they heard what was not proper; third upon the nose, which was deceived by smoke and steam; fourth upon the [organ of] taste, which was a servant of the belly's pleasure; fifth upon the [organs of] touch, to which by the collaboration of the former senses in overcoming the soul are also brought in addition to other separate acts, such as the seizure of cities and the capture of men and the demolition of the citadel of the city where the council resides; sixth, upon the tongue and the organs of speech. For being silent about things that should be said and for saying things that should be kept silent; seventh upon the lower belly which with lawless licentiousness set the senses on fire. This is what is said [in scripture], that a sevenfold vengeance is taken on Cain. (Philo, *QG* 1.77)

What is interesting here is Philo's connection of Cain's sevenfold punishment to a requirement of the law. Which law he has in mind here is not clear, but there does seem to be a traditional connection between the number seven and themes of vengeance. For instance, in Lev 26:18, 21 and 24, the penalties for disobeying God come in sevens. God promises to punish Israel sevenfold (v. 18), to plague them sevenfold (v. 21) and to strike them sevenfold (v. 24) for their ongoing sin. In 1 Sam 12:6 (LXX), in response to Nathan's parable, David declares that the one who stole the poor man's sheep must repay it sevenfold.⁴¹ In Prov 6:31 thieves are also said to repay their victims sevenfold. In the Dead Sea Scrolls God's judgment of vengeance to exterminate wickedness is described as being refined seven times (4Q511 2, frag. 35). Since Philo does not specify which law requires the sevenfold pun-

⁴¹ In the Hebrew version the repayment is only fourfold which reflects the requirements found in Exod 22:1. But most Greek manuscripts of this passage contain a sevenfold demand.

ishment its possible that he was reflecting on Lev 26:18–24 with the wider connection between vengeance and the number seven. What is significant about this is that Philo has reconfigured Cain's punishment into a halakhic interpretation. Rather than reading Gen 4:15 and 24 as God's promise to *protect* Cain from vengeance, Philo, through the LXX version of these verses, has ensured that Cain is *punished* in a way that fulfills the law.

Other interpreters followed a similar interpretative trajectory as that of Philo by reading Gen 4:15 as referring to seven different punishments. The *Testament of Benjamin* expanded the verse so that Cain suffered a new plague every one hundred years of his life.

So I tell you, my children, flee from Beliar, because he offers a sword to those who obey him. And the sword is the mother of seven evils; it receives them through Beliar: The first is moral corruption, the second is destruction, the third is oppression, the fourth is captivity, the fifth is want, the sixth is turmoil, the seventh is desolation. It is for this reason that Cain was handed over by God for seven punishments, for in every hundredth year the Lord brought upon him one plague. When he was two hundred years old suffering began and in his nine hundredth year he was deprived of life. For he was condemned on account of Abel his brother as a result of all his evil deeds, but Lamech was condemned by seventy times seven. Until eternity those who are like Cain in their moral corruption and hatred of brother shall be punished with a similar judgment. (*T. Benj.* 7:1–5 [Kee])

It is clear that the author of *Testament of Benjamin* is following the tradition that Cain was the recipient of the vengeance. The seven different punishments may reflect the traditional connection between the number seven and themes of vengeance. As with the LXX, the Lamech song is the center of this interpretation which results in Lamech also being punished, but eleven more times than that of Cain. By presenting the punishment of Cain in this way, the author has increased the severity of Cain's punishment as well as the length of time in which he suffered it. Although Genesis records no details of Cain's death, the author of the *Testament of Benjamin* has taken the liberty of filling in those details in order to make it clear that Cain did not escape justice nor experience a premature death that might have freed him from his torment.⁴² Cain lived a long life of suffering.⁴³

⁴² The topic of when and how Cain died will be covered in chapter five.

⁴³ The Armenian "Abel and Cain" also recounts how Cain received seven different punishments that included, among other things, a horn on his head, the shaking of his limbs, and an inability to die. Cain lived 860 years until he was killed by Lamech

The Targums also reconfigure Cain's words in Gen 4:15. *Targum Onqelos*, although probably the most literal of the Targums, follows the interpretive trajectory that it was Cain who was the recipient of the vengeance and not his killer. But rather than understand **שבעתים** as meaning seven different plagues or punishments as did Philo and *Testament of Benjamin*, *Targum Onqelos* adopts the "at seven generations" interpretation. As with the exegetes examined above, the interpretation is predicated on an understanding of both God's words in 4:15 and Lamech's words in 4:24.

So the Lord said to him "Therefore, whoever slays Cain...*after seven generations punishment shall be extracted of him.*" (Tg. Onq. Gen 4:15)

If for seven generations judgment was suspended for Cain, will there not be for his son Lamech seventy-seven? (Tg. Onq. Gen 4:24)

Targum Onqelos seems to reflect a conflict between the desires to render a literal translation of the Hebrew while including interpretive translations that obviously held some appeal for the translator. With this in mind, there are two possible ways to interpret these vengeance passages in *Onqelos*.

If one were to only read God's words in 4:15 without giving consideration to Lamech's song in 4:24, it would be possible to assume that the Targum has remained as close to the Hebrew version as possible and that it is Cain's killer who receives the punishment rather than Cain. The passage was slightly expanded, however, so that the killer was not punished immediately but *after* seven generations. The verse would be better read, then, in a vocative sense: "Therefore, all [you] killers, of Cain," with a suspended protasis that suggests some type of punishment for the killer.⁴⁴ Such an interpretation may have represented an attempt to shift the perception that Cain's killer received a worse punishment than that of Cain. Although the killer would be eventually punished, it was not immediately or with a seven-fold vengeance, but rather after a length of seven generations.

The other possibility is that it was Cain who was the recipient of the punishment after seven generations had passed, at which time

(W. Lowndes Lipscomb, *The Armenian Apocryphal Adam Literature* [Armenian Texts and Studies, 8; University of Pennsylvania, 1990], 151–52; 166–67).

⁴⁴ Bernard Grossfeld, trans., *Targum Onqelos to Genesis* (ArBib 6; Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1990), 49 n. 10.

Cain died.⁴⁵ It is the latter interpretation that seems more plausible in light of how *Targum Onqelos* rendered 4:24. Lamech's claim that Cain's punishment was suspended for seven-generations once again provides the key to interpreting 4:15. Although *Targum Onqelos* often reflects a more literal version of the Hebrew, the tradition that attributed an extended punishment without any hope of a premature death was more desirable. The result is a reading which understands Cain's punishment as not being completed until the seventh generation. The choice of this interpretation by *Onqelos* may betray the translator's knowledge of a tradition that Cain did not die until the flood after having lived for seven generations (a topic that will be examined more closely in the following chapter).

Targums *Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathon* also seem to understand 4:15 as referring as an address to the killer. But once again, when 4:15 is read in conjunction with 4:24, it becomes clear that it is Cain who is the recipient of the punishment at the seventh generation.

And the Lord swore to him: "Anyone who kills Cain, *judgment will be suspended for him for seven generations.*" (Tg. Neof. Gen 4:15)

If Cain, who killed Abel, had (judgment) suspended for him for seven generations, it is but right that for Lamech, his grandson, who did not kill (judgment) be suspended: for seventy-seven generations it will be suspended for him." (Tg. Neof. Gen 4:24)

And the Lord said to him, "Behold therefore, whoever kills Cain, revenge shall be taken on him for seven generations." (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 4:15)

If for Cain who sinned and repented judgment was suspended for seven generations, it is surely right that for Lamech, his grandson, who did not sin, (judgment) should be suspended for seventy-seven. (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 4:24)

Pseudo-Jonathon also adds an interesting interpretive twist to the Lamech song that was already touched on above. By attributing Cain's protest to God in 4:13 as an act of repentance, *Pseudo-Jonathon* has added one more layer to the explanation of why Cain was allowed to continue living after he murdered Abel. Not only was Cain's long life a part of God's guarantee that Cain would not escape punishment through a premature death, it was also a response to Cain's act of

⁴⁵ Delaney, 43.

contrition. Cain's repentance forestalled the punishment, but did not eradicate it.⁴⁶

While there were a number of variations of this interpretation of Gen 4:15, the finest extant example is found among the letters of Jerome. In 384 CE Jerome wrote a letter to Pope Damasus in response to an enquiry the pontiff had made specifically about the meaning of Gen 4:15. Jerome's response begins by providing the reader with five versions of the verse (Hebrew, Aquila, Symmachus, LXX and Theodotion) all translated into Latin.⁴⁷ This is then followed by an interpretive retelling of the verse that is apparently based on versions other than the Hebrew.

But God not wishing to do away with him by a quick torturous death, nor handing down a punishment like the same act for [which] Cain was condemned, said "Not so!" That is, "It is not as you think, that you will die and receive death as a relief, but instead, you will live until the seventh generation and your conscience will torment you with fire, so that whenever someone does kill you (according to the double interpretation), either at the seventh generation or by seven means he will free you from torture" not because the one who murders Cain has been subjected to seven vengeance, but because the murderer who kills him releases seven punishments which would converge on Cain at such a time as he had become forsaken of life as his punishment. (Jerome, *Letter to Damasus* #36)⁴⁸

Jerome's interpretation is the most comprehensive explanation of the traditions associated with Cain in Gen 4:15. He is apparently aware of the two possible interpretations of שבעתים as either death at the seventh generation or by seven means, and it is plausible that he has accepted both as being equally valid. Cain's punishment may take seven different forms, but his death does not come about until the seventh generation. Regardless of how exactly Jerome understood the problem of the "seven," it is clear that the focus is on delayed punishment. Cain, not his killer, suffered a long and torturous punishment

⁴⁶ The theme of Cain's contrition and forestalled or mitigated punishment is also found in *Gen. Rab.* 97 and *Deut. Rab.* 8:1 both of which suggest that God, witnessing Cain's repentance, removed half of Cain's punishment leaving him to wander in the land of Nod.

⁴⁷ Jerome, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae* (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum; Vindobonae: Tempsky, 1910), 269–70.

⁴⁸ Translation taken from Delaney, 206–208. Latin may be found in Jerome, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, 270–71.

that was intended to prevent a premature death that would have mitigated that punishment.⁴⁹

While this interpretation seems to have had many adherents, there were others who did not conclude that Cain was the object of the seven-fold punishment in Gen 4:15. For some, the obvious recipient of the punishment was not Cain or his killer but rather Cain's descendants. As with the above interpretations this depends on how 4:15 and 4:24 are understood as well as the meaning of שבעתים.

The earliest example of this interpretation is found in Josephus who, as would the Targums and Jerome after him, understood שבעתים to mean "at the seventh generation" rather than as seven punishments. As with *Pseudo-Jonathon*, the inclusion of a repentance element in the story (Cain's second sacrifice) serves as a trigger to delay Cain's punishment. In Josephus, however, it is not just a delay; Cain escapes punishment which is deferred to his descendants.

God, however, exempted him from the penalty merited by the murder, Cain having offered a sacrifice and therewith supplicated Him not to visit him too severely in His wrath; but He made him accursed and threatened to punish his posterity in the seventh generation. (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.58)

Rather than attempt a restatement of God's words in Gen 4:15, Josephus chose to narrate the curse Cain received without translating the actual words for the reader. To be sure, Josephus is aware of interpretations that understood someone else other than Cain's killer as the recipient of the seven-fold vengeance. The fact that he understood שבעתים as meaning "at the seventh generation," also demonstrates his awareness that 4:15 and 4:24 should not contradict one another. Josephus conclusion, then, was that the only logical recipient of Cain's curse was Lamech.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Later in the letter Jerome acknowledges that there are other possible interpretations, but he does not appear to be offering them as a viable alternative to his own. It is curious, however, that his Latin translation of Gen 4:15 does not support his interpretation but rather says: "And the Lord God said to him, 'May this in no way happen! On the contrary, every one who kills Cain will be punished seven times.'" This translation reverses the interpretive retelling in *Letter to Damascus* #36 quoted above. It is possible that Jerome changed his mind about the interpretation as he became more familiar with the Hebrew version. While this is a plausible explanation, *Letter to Damascus* #36 demonstrates the ongoing engagement of interpreters with Gen 4:15 and the oft stated conclusion that Cain was the recipient of a long and painful punishment (Delaney, 219–20).

⁵⁰ Thomas W. Franxman, *Genesis and the "Jewish Antiquities" of Flavius Josephus* (BeO 35; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 69–70.

And because of his clear knowledge of divine things he (Lamech) saw that he was to pay the price for Cain's murder of his brother, he made this known to his wives. (Josephus, *Ant.*1.65)

Josephus uses the same strategy with Lamech as he did with Cain. Rather than attempt a translation of Gen 4:24, Josephus provides the reader with a narrative gloss that eliminates the possibility of contradictions arising between 4:15 and 4:24. Instead of reproducing the song in Gen 4:23–24, Josephus tells readers that Lamech was “aware of divine things.” This may be an attempt to acknowledge the existence of the song in Genesis without rehearsing it. But it has the added bonus of attributing a positive quality to Lamech. He is now portrayed as a seer or at least one who was in contact with the divine. This is potentially significant since the subsidiary result of not including the song is the lack of any statements or allusions to Lamech's own act of murder. In the Hebrew version, Lamech tells his wives that he has killed a man which is why his punishment is associated with that of Cain. In *Antiquities*, however, it appears as if Lamech is an innocent man.⁵¹

It seems clear that Josephus has reconfigured the story so that Lamech is the one to suffer for Cain's crime. The calculating of seven generations probably begins with Adam since Lamech is only the sixth in line from Cain. Such a calculation would explain Josephus's choice to interpret שבעתים as “at the seventh generation.” What is missing, however, is any reference to the seventy-seven fold punishment that Gen 4:24 attributes to Lamech. At first glance it appears that this is one more detail to fall victim to Josephus's editing process. On the other hand, it may be further evidence of Josephus creatively dealing with the problems that exist between 4:15 and 4:24.

Prior to the narrative gloss that is Lamech's speech, Josephus makes an interesting addition to the Genesis story. In Gen 4:19–22, we read that Lamech married two wives, Adah and Zillah, with whom he produced four children. In 5:28–30, we read that Lamech had another son, Noah, and that before Lamech died, 595 years after the birth of Noah, Lamech had additional unspecified number of sons and daughters. What Josephus has done is conflate the references to Lamech's other

⁵¹ Possibly compounding Josephus's portrayal of Lamech as a vicarious sufferer is a textual variant. Some manuscripts include the comparative adjective “greater” (μείζονα) which helps to further bring Cain and Lamech into congruity by acknowledging that Cain was also punished, but Lamech's punishment was greater yet (Fraxman, 74).

unnamed children with the curse formula in 4:24 so that Lamech is said to have had seventy-seven children by his two wives (*Ant.* 1.63).⁵²

Understanding Lamech's penalty in 4:24 as referring to seventy-seven children or generations rather than as the possible number of punishments or plagues fits in well with Josephus's portrayal of Lamech as a vicarious sufferer. According to Josephus's reading of Gen 5:30, Lamech died when Noah was 595 years old.⁵³ In Gen 7:6 we read that five years after Lamech's death Noah was 600 years old when he went into the Ark and the flood began. Josephus's calculations of the Genesis generations led him to conclude that although Lamech died five years before the flood, seventy-seven of his children were destroyed in the flood.⁵⁴ This, then, is the penalty that Lamech must pay for Cain. Not that he personally suffer, but that seventy-seven of his children were killed in the flood because of Cain's sin.⁵⁵

Josephus's reworking of Gen 4:15 and 4:24, although very different, accomplishes the same end sought by other exegetes. Rather than interpret God's statement in 4:15 as a warning to those who might kill Cain, Josephus has turned the promise of a seven-fold vengeance back onto Cain. By interpreting שבעתים as "generations," Josephus has extended Cain's punishment in a way that would seem more fitting to the crime. Cain killed Abel and along with him any of his potential children. Cain suffered a similar fate when he in turn lost a number of his own descendants in the flood. Lamech is portrayed as an innocent who must pay the price for Cain's sin. The price is extracted vicariously, however. Lamech's knowledge of divine things, according to Josephus, led him to inform his wives that, beginning with him, the seventh generation from Adam, Cain's punishment was about to be enforced.

The innocence of Lamech was a common motif. Though we did not comment on it above, Targums *Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathon* both reconfigured Lamech's song in to a rhetorical question so that he is seen protesting his innocence of murder rather than boasting of it as seems to be the case in the Hebrew version. Other exegetes used this motif and the belief that Lamech's children were the target of the

⁵² Ibid., 72.

⁵³ Josephus has conflated the two Lamechs of Genesis into one by combining the genealogy of Cain in Gen 4 with the genealogy of Seth in Gen 5.

⁵⁴ Feldman, *Josephus*, 22.

⁵⁵ Fraxman, 84–85. In *Letter to Damascus* #36 Jerome mentions that seventy-seven of Lamech's children were destroyed in the flood (Delaney, 213).

curse to expand the story. Sometimes Lamech's song is portrayed as a response to his wives' refusal to bear children for him. In *Genesis Rabbah* Adah and Zillah, Lamech's two wives, feared the flood and thought that the only purpose their bearing children would serve was to add to the curse.⁵⁶

And Lamech said unto his wives, etc (Gen 4:23 ff.) R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: He summoned them to their marital duties. Said they to him: "Tomorrow a flood will come—are we to bear children for a curse? He answered, "For have I slain a man for my wounding—that wounds should come to me on his account! And a young man child for my bruising—that bruises should come upon me! Cain slew yet judgment was suspended for him seven generations; for me, who did not slay, surely judgment will wait seventy-seven generations." (*Gen. Rab.* 23:4)

The expansion in *Genesis Rabbah* corresponds to Josephus's portrayal of the flood and the destruction of Lamech's children as part of the curse put on Cain. Both Josephus and *Genesis Rabbah* understand שבעתים as meaning "generations." The lament of Adah and Zillah reflect the tradition that Lamech and his children paid the price for Cain's sin by dying in the flood. Lamech's song depicts his belief that he will be spared the flood since he is innocent.

Among Syrian interpreters the tradition also found a home. Although Ephrem did not portray Lamech as an innocent man he was aware that some exegetes interpreted שבעתים to mean "generations" and interpreted the flood as part of the curse connected to Cain's crime. Ephrem provides this interpretation in his *Genesis* commentary as part of a list of possible readings of Gen 4:24.

Others, because they think that Cain was avenged for seven generations, say that Lamech was evil, because God said, "All flesh has corrupted its path," and also because the wives of Lamech saw that the line of their generation would be cut off. They were giving birth not to males but females only, for Moses said that it was "when men multiplied on the earth and daughters were born to them." When these wives saw the plight of their generation, they became fearful and knew that the judgment decreed against Cain and his seven generations had come upon their generation. Lamech, then, in his cleverness, comforted them, saying, "I have killed a man for wounding me and a youth for striking me.

⁵⁶ There is a tosefta from the Cairo Genizah that is similar to *Midrash Rabbah*, but it is too fragmentary to be of much use (*Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* 2 vols. [trans. Michael L. Klein; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986], 14).

Just as God caused Cain to remain so that seven generations would perish with him, so God will cause me to remain, because I have killed two, so that seventy-seven generations should die with me. Before the seventy-seven generations come, however, we will die, and through the cup of death that we taste we will escape from punishment which, because of me, will extend to seventy-seven generations.” (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 4.2.2–3)

Ephrem does not accept this interpretation. Earlier in his commentary he repudiates it since he charges that those who hold to this interpretation cannot demonstrate that the flood occurred in the seventh generation.⁵⁷ But the fact that Ephrem was compelled to include this interpretation among the options he offers demonstrates the level of familiarity it enjoyed.

The ambiguities of Gen 4:15 and 4:24 provided interpreters the opportunity to correct what they viewed as an injustice. The promise of divine protection for the first murderer and retribution against his killer seemed contradictory to the God of the Bible. By ensuring that 4:15 and 4:24 were congruent with one another, interpreters were able to strip Cain of his divine protection while at the same time expanding his punishment. In the end, whether it was Cain or his descendants that paid the penalty, Abel had received a more equitable form of justice.

What kind of mark did God give to Cain?

The final aspect of the “sentencing phase” to be examined is the mark of Cain in Gen 4:15b. As part of God’s apparent promise of divine protection against a premature death, Cain is given a mark from God. The stated purpose of the mark was to prevent anyone from killing Cain. It is not known what the mark was and all that can be said is that it was probably something visible.⁵⁸ The LXX adds nothing to our

⁵⁷ Edward G. Matthews, Joseph Amar. trans., and Kathleen McVey ed., *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America Press, 1994), 129.

⁵⁸ Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981). Those who do not think a visible mark is in the mind of the author include Wenham who follows P. A. H. deBoers (*NedTT* 31 [1942]: 210) in suggesting that the “sign” is Cain’s name which sounds like “shall be punished.” “His very name hints at the promise of divine retribution on his attackers” (Wenham, 109). R. W. L. Moberly (“The Mark of Cain—Revealed at Last,” *HTR* 100 [2007]: 11–28) offers that God’s promise to Cain, “Whoever kills Cain will suffer vengeance,” is “the non-corporeal

understanding when it translates the mark as a “sign,” and there is nothing strikingly different among the other extant translations.⁵⁹ And exegetes, for the most part, did not comment extensively on the Mark of Cain. For instance, in his *Questions and Answers in Genesis*, Philo does address God’s giving of the mark, but the focus of the question and subsequent commentary is on why the mark was given, and no speculation over the nature of the mark is provided.⁶⁰ Josephus, too, avoids the topic by failing to even acknowledge that part of the story. The avoidance of the topic by interpreters may be symptomatic of their preoccupation with the seven-fold punishment in 4:15a and 4:24. Or it could be that they simply chose to ignore the mark since very little information is provided, and it does not really support the overwhelming urge to rewrite 4:15 so that Cain’s punishment is magnified.

In spite of a reticence, or lack of interest, on the part of many exegetes to comment on the nature of Cain’s mark, there were some who could not resist speculating on it. Some interpreted it as a letter from the Hebrew alphabet placed on either the face or the arm.

Then the Lord *traced on Cain’s face a letter of the great and glorious name*, so that anyone who would find him, *upon seeing it on him*, would not kill him. (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 4:15)

What did the holy One, blessed be He do? He took one letter from the twenty-two letters, and put (it) upon Cain’s arm that he should not be killed, as it is said, “And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain.” (*Pirqe R. El.* 21)

Both of these traditions are more supportive of the divine protection interpretation of Gen 4:15 and Cain’s mark. Others were not so generous. They tended to interpret the mark in a fearsome way that reflected the common desire among exegetes to magnify Cain’s punishment. Others understood the mark as sign to others not to commit a similar crime.

And the Lord set a sign for Cain. R. Judah said: He caused the orb of the sun to shine on his account. Said R. Nehemiah to him: For that wretch

sign and thus, the sign and the promise are not two different things, however closely related” (15).

⁵⁹ Wevers, 61.

⁶⁰ Philo does interpret the mark as a “symbol of wickedness” but this is related more to the mystery surrounding Cain’s death than it is to determining the nature of the mark (*Worse* 177; *Flight* 60–64). See the section examining Cain’s death in chapter five.

he would cause the orb of the sun to shine! Rather, He caused leprosy to break out on him, as you read, *And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe and hearken to the voice of the first sign*, etc. (Ex. 4:8). Rab said: He gave him a dog. Abba Jose said: He made a horn grow out of him. Rab said: He made him an example to murderers. R. Hanin said: He made him an example to penitents. (*Gen. Rab.* 22:12)

Whatever the sign may have been, the lack of description encouraged exegetes to speculate. But even with such disparate views as those just reviewed, there is a common thread. Cain's mark is to serve as a warning of what happens to those who commit similar crimes.⁶¹ As we will see in the next chapter, some understood the sign to be an indicator that Cain never died. This interpretation once again revives the questions surrounding the nature of God's words to Cain.

Summary

The sentence God passed over Cain for the murder of Abel struck many interpreters in antiquity as unjust. How could Cain commit the first murder, lie to God about it and then receive a punishment that supposedly required him to live in exile while at the same time marrying, raising a family and founding a city? Adding insult to injury is the apparent promise of a divine protection that would bring severe retribution upon anyone who killed Cain. How was this justice? The response from translators and exegetes alike was a process that resulted in producing the kind of justice that seemed to fit the crime.

The Hebrew version of the story has Cain cursed "from the earth" that drank up Abel's blood. No longer would Cain be able to farm the land. Translators and exegetes, however, took advantage of the parallels between Gen 3:11 and 4:11 to portray Cain as being cursed *more than* the earth. The subtle shift in language allowed Cain's plight to be greater than that of his father Adam and aligned the curse he received to reflect the same as that laid upon the serpent. Moreover, Cain was punished not only through the loss of his agricultural abilities, even the whole creation was in active opposition against him. Cain feared for his life because the wild animals, aware of his crime, were likely to kill him if given the chance.

⁶¹ Augustine interpreted Cain's mark as the Jewish law that kept the Jews a separate people from the Christians (*Contra Faustum* 12.13). See chapter seven for a discussion of Augustine's interpretation of the Cain and Abel story.

Apart from the external aspects of punishment, Cain received in himself the due penalty for his actions. No longer was he simply a fugitive and wanderer. Now, with the help of some creative translation and exegesis, Cain suffered from a bodily tremor that caused him to groan. Rather than being able to walk around in freedom and anonymity, Cain was forever identifiable by this trembling body.

The punishment did not stop with Cain however. Even his descendants were affected by the curse so that Lamech and seventy seven of his children died in the flood all as a result of Cain's actions. The result of this interpretation was to wipe out Cain's children just as Cain had wiped out Abel's potential offspring. Cain's punishment was, in the minds of ancient exegetes, more fitting in light of the crime.

In the midst of all this exegetical vindictiveness there were some who understood Cain's objection to the punishment as an act of repentance. They concluded that Cain asked for and received a pardon from God. But this may not be the happy ending of a sad story. As we will see in the next chapter, many interpreters sketched a final picture of Cain and his descendants that left no doubt that he had not learned anything from his misdeeds and instead continued to build upon his evil career.

CHAPTER FIVE

RAISING CAIN GENESIS 4:17–26

Thou livest—and must live for ever. Think not
The Earth, which is thine outward cov'ring, is
Existence—it will cease—and thou wilt be—No less
than thou art now.
(Lord Byron, *Cain* 1.1)

The closing scene in this story of firsts describes Cain's life following his murder of Abel and the confrontation with God. The impious fratricide leaves the presence of the Lord, takes a wife, begets children and builds a city. But as we noted in the previous chapter, Cain's subsequent life hardly seems just in light of his violent crime. The institutor of murder is allowed not only to escape capital punishment; he goes on to live a prosperous life that is marked by a monumental building project and a line of progeny that extends into the future. The innocent Abel, on the other hand, has had his life prematurely cutoff and along with it the possibility of living on through his descendants. Adding insult to injury is the observation that we are never told when or how Cain died. Surely the first murderer would have received some comeuppance if not the appropriate ghastly death! While it is possible to understand this peculiar oversight as a shift in the narrative's focus from Cain to Seth, this missing detail struck ancient interpreters as yet another problem to be solved. The result was a set of traditions that explain the meaning of Cain's building projects, the time and type of death he suffered and the ongoing effect of his sin as it was multiplied through his progeny.

Why did Cain build a city?

In Gen 4:17 we read: "Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch." This verse presents the interpreter with at least three challenges. The first is the introduction of the unnamed woman who becomes Cain's

wife and bears his children. The traditions surrounding the source and identification of Cain's wife have already been discussed in chapter one.

The second problem focuses on the identity of Cain's descendants and their various occupations. This will be dealt with in a subsequent section of this chapter.

The third problem centers on Cain's activity as a builder. Readers of the story will frequently notice that the origins of the city are connected to the one who introduced violence into the world and conclude that this is a commentary on the negative aspects of urban dwelling. Furthermore, Cain's activity as builder sits rather uncomfortably with his previous occupation as a farmer and contradicts his sentence of wandering exile. Modern commentators usually are attracted to the ambiguity of the Hebrew. While it is commonly understood that Cain was the one who built the first city and named it after Enoch, some have suggested that it was Enoch who was the city builder rather than Cain. The challenge lies in the phrase "and he was a city builder" (וַיְהִי בִנָּה עִיר). The subject of the phrase is by no means clear. Usually the subject would be expected to come from the nearest noun or pronoun, which in the case of Gen 4:17 is the name Enoch not Cain. But the appearance of Enoch's name for a second time at the end of the verse makes it clear that Cain is the builder and the city was named after Enoch. Nonetheless, some modern commentators have suggested that the second occurrence of Enoch's name is a scribal gloss intended to correct the ambiguity, even though no support can be offered in favor of this conjecture.¹ They note that in the parallel verse of Gen 4:2 Abel's occupation is mentioned immediately after his birth and name and that the same pattern is being followed in Gen 4:17.² The name of the city, then, is not "Enoch" but "Irada," which sounds very similar to "Eridu." Eridu is held by Mesopotamian tradition to be the oldest city in the world.³ These commentators then read Gen 4:17 as: "and he (Enoch) was a builder of a city and he named the city after his son

¹ Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (YNER 7; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 139–40.

² Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah: Genesis 1–VI 8* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 229–30; Wilson, 140.

³ Wilson, 140.

(Irad).” In spite of the attractiveness of this emendation, it has been adopted by only a few.⁴

Rather than focus on the ambiguous subject of the phrase, ancient interpreters were attracted to the more troubling questions of why Cain would have built a city in the first place and for whom did he build it?⁵ After all, with a population in the world of only five people (Adam, Eve, Cain, Cain’s wife, Enoch), why would there be a need for a city and from whom or what would he need protection?

Josephus agrees with Genesis that Cain was a builder of a city, but adds that Cain’s building activity commenced only after a long period of wandering (*Ant.* 1.60). By presenting the story this way Josephus has cleared up the apparent contradiction between Cain’s punishment of wandering exile and his role as the first urbanite. But Josephus also expands the description of Cain’s building activity. While he agrees with Genesis that Cain built a city and named it after his son, Josephus gives the story a more sinister twist.

He was the first to fix boundaries of land and to build a city, fortifying it with walls and constraining his clan to congregate in one place. This city he called Anocha after his eldest son. (Josephus *Ant.* 1.62)

This comment is preceded by a list of vices and crimes that Cain not only committed, but encouraged and taught others to imitate. Cain’s post-settlement life includes forced robbery by which he satisfies his bodily pleasures and increases his personal possessions. Josephus goes on to blame Cain for destroying the “simple life” (*Ant.* 1.61). These accusations are connected to Josephus’s etymology of Cain’s name meaning “acquisition” (*Ant.* 1.52) as manifested in his invention of plowing the earth and forcing it to yield fruit to him (*Ant.* 1.53–54). Consequently, Cain’s activity as a builder serves two purposes in Josephus. First, it demonstrates that Cain has not learned the lessons of his previous crime and his greed has developed to the point that he now marks off property that he has obtained so that it might not be stolen back from him.⁶ Second, the founding of a fortified city not only

⁴ Jack M. Sasson, “Genealogical ‘Convention’ in Biblical Chronography,” *ZAW* 90 (1978): 174; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 111.

⁵ This is evidenced by the LXX translator’s acceptance of Cain as the builder rather than Enoch by retaining the double occurrence of Enoch’s name (John William Wevers, *LXX: Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* [Septuagint and Cognate Studies 35; Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1993], 62).

⁶ Steven D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation* (SBLMS 30; Chico, Calif: Scholars Press, 1984), 207 n. 83.

adds to the protection of his property it also concentrates his power by causing his family to live in one place. In the end, Josephus's Cain is still a greedy grasper who, rather than repenting from his original crimes, has actually managed to perfect them. Thus, the building of a city becomes a lasting monument to Cain's ongoing evil activity.⁷

In Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* we find Gen 4:17 expanded in several ways. First, in addition to providing the name of Cain's wife, Pseudo-Philo also tells us that Cain was fifteen years old when his oldest son, Enoch, was born and Cain began to build the first city.⁸ Second, Pseudo-Philo tells us that Cain built not just one city but seven!⁹

And Cain knew Themech his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. Now Cain was fifteen years old when he did theses things, and from that time he began to build cities until he had founded seven cities. And these are the names of the cities; the name of the first city, corresponding to the name of his son, Enoch; and the name of the second city Maui, and of the third Leed, and the name of the fourth Teze, and the name of the fifth Iesca, and the name of the sixth Celeth, and the name of the seventh Iebbat. (Pseudo-Philo, *L.A.B.* 2:2–3)

It is possible that this enhancement from one to seven cities is related to a similar tradition that accuses Cain of being guilty of seven sins (*T. Ben* 7:2). It could also be a Midrash on Cain's sevenfold judgment in Gen 4:24.¹⁰ But the more likely explanation is that Pseudo-Philo, like Josephus, has used the description of Cain's city building as a way to emphasize Cain's wickedness. The list of cities provided by Pseudo-Philo is connected to the description of Noah's son Ham in Gen 10:6–14.¹¹ In *L.A.B.* 4:8 we find included with the description of Ham's descendants the phrase "they also began to build cities." This is only the second time that city building appears in *Biblical Antiquities* and it seems to be a deliberate attempt to connect the actions of Cain with Ham. Furthermore, added to the list of cities built by Ham's progeny

⁷ Flavius Josephus, *Judean Antiquities* 1–4 (translation and commentary by Louis H. Feldman; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 22.

⁸ For an overview of the various traditions surrounding the source and identification of Cain's wife see chapter one.

⁹ Feldman notes that *civitates* usually implies "states" rather than "cities," but there is no reason to assume that the author of *Biblical Antiquities* was attempting to credit Cain with building seven states ("Prolegomenon" to M. R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* [New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971], LXXXIV).

¹⁰ Howard Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum: With Latin Text and English Translation* (AGJUC 31; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 296.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

are the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which do not appear in the list in Gen 10:6–14. As a result, Pseudo-Philo has hinted that city building was tainted from the start since the first two major builders, Cain and Ham (via his progeny), were well known for their wickedness;¹² Cain for murdering Abel and Ham for revealing his father's nakedness (Gen 9:20–29).¹³ In the case of Cain, his wickedness is enhanced by crediting him with building seven cities rather than just one. Ham, on the other hand, is held responsible for building the infamous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis Rabbah follows a trajectory similar to Josephus and Pseudo-Philo. Here Gen 4:17 is interpreted with the assistance of Ps 49:10–13 which rehearse the folly of human beings who surmise that by naming lands after themselves they will have an enduring name.

And Cain knew his wife (4:17). It is written, *Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever*, (Psalm 49:12). R. Judan and R. Phinehas discussed this. R. Judan explained it: what do the wicked think? *That within their houses [they shall live] for ever, and their dwelling-places [shall exist] to all generations, and they will call their lands after their own names*, i.e. Tiberias after the name Tiberius, Alexandria after Alexander, Antioch after Antiochus? R. Phinehas interpreted it: “*Kirbam is their houses forever*,” i.e. tomorrow their houses become sepulchers. “*Their dwelling-places to all generations*,” i.e. they will neither live [i.e. be resurrected] nor be judged. Moreover, “*They have called their lands after their own names*”: thus it is written, *And he built a city and called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch*. (Gen. Rab. 23:1)

While Josephus and Pseudo-Philo interpret Cain's city building as a symbol of his ongoing wickedness, *Genesis Rabbah* understands it as a futile attempt by Cain to build a lasting memorial to himself. The comparison to Tiberius, Alexander and Antiochus suggest this is Cain's true intention even though he names the city after his son, Enoch, rather than himself. The result, however, is a monument that is more reminiscent of a grave stone rather than a tribute to a great leader.

As we would expect, it is Philo of Alexandria who shifts away from understanding Cain as the builder of a literal city. Philo points out the ridiculousness of building a city for three people (Adam, Eve, Cain),

¹² Fredrick James Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo: Rewriting the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31.

¹³ Although *Biblical Antiquities* does not record the incident between Noah and Ham, the story is certainly in the background of Pseudo-Philo's harsh critique of Ham's descendants.

but notes that since his parents would not tolerate living with the murderer of their son, the city would really be for only one.¹⁴ With this in mind, Philo uses *reductio ad absurdum* to demonstrate that Cain could not have built a literal city.

How is such a thing possible? Why, he could not have built even the most insignificant part of a house without employing others to work under him. Could the same man at the same moment do a stone-mason's work, hew timber, work iron and brass; surround the city with a great circuit of walls, construct great gateways and fortifications, temples and sacred enclosures, porticoes, arsenals, houses, and all other public enclosures and private buildings that are customary? Could he in addition to these construct drains, open up streets, provide conduits and all else that a city needs? (Philo, *Posterity* 50)

Philo concludes, then, that the story should be treated as an allegory and that what Cain was seeking to build was not a city but a philosophy.¹⁵ In this "city" the buildings are the arguments Cain uses to combat his opponents and from this "city" he can combat truth (*Posterity* 51).¹⁶ Living in this "city" is a variety of impious denizens who are ignorant of real wisdom, lovers of self, arrogant, indulgent in pleasures and unnatural lusts. The inhabitants of this "city" continue to build their opinions one upon the other like towers reaching toward heaven (Gen 11:4). By allegorizing the city into a philosophy, Philo sidesteps the more difficult questions surrounding the building of a literal city, but he maintains a similar interpretive trajectory as his fellow exegetes. Cain's city is a monument to himself. Although Philo views it as a philosophy, Cain's "city" has lasting influence on the world.

The modern reader cannot be faulted for understanding Cain's city building as merely providing a place of protection for himself and his family. Such a conclusion would be reasonable in light of Cain's fear of being killed by someone who might recognize him as the first mur-

¹⁴ Philo ignores the fact that in Gen 4:17 Cain names the city after his son Enoch, which means there would have been potentially five people in the city.

¹⁵ Augustine also addresses the peculiarity of Cain's building a city for so few people. He notes that although Genesis only mentions between three to five people there is no reason to suppose that more were not in existence. In an allegorical interpretation similar to Philo, he suggests that Cain's city is representative of the line of Cain (*City of God* 15.8). Later he argues that the reason Cain built a city was due to humanity's prolonged life span prior to the flood, which would mean more people living together for longer periods of time (15.9).

¹⁶ Maarten J. Paul, "Genesis 4:17–24: A Case Study in Eisegesis," *TynBul* 47 (1996): 145–46.

derer.¹⁷ But ancient exegetes perceived something more nefarious at work. They expanded and interpreted Gen 4:17 so that Cain's city (or cities as in *Biblical Antiquities*) was constructed to perpetuate his name and his wickedness. What could be viewed as a harmless project in Genesis takes on a more sinister element in the hands of the interpreters who, as we have continually witnessed, want to ensure that Cain is portrayed as wholly wicked from beginning to the end. Nothing about this man's life can be said to have had any redeeming value.

When and how did Cain die?

One of the more peculiar oversights in the narrative is the failure to mention when and how Cain died. We are told how Abel died and the deaths of Adam and Seth are both recorded in Gen 5:3–8, yet we are never told about Cain's death. While there are many people in the Bible whose deaths are not mentioned, the silence over Cain's death creates yet another theological problem. If Cain never dies, or merely suffers a natural death, then the murder of Abel is left unpunished by God with only the wandering exile as the final sentence.¹⁸ Allowing Cain to escape from capital punishment would seem to be a direct contradiction of Gen 9:6 and Exod 21:12–14, 24 both of which stipulate the execution of those who commit premeditated murder.¹⁹ Some ancient exegetes, unsatisfied with the gap in the narrative, concluded that it was necessary for Cain to die for his crime.

Josephus does not seem to be troubled by the absence of Cain's death and, like Genesis, shifts the focus away from Cain without mentioning his demise. Philo, on the other hand, notices the problem and allegorizes it. His interpretation is based on two things: (1) the absence of Cain's death being mentioned and (2) the mark that God put on Cain's head.

It goes on to say "the Lord God set a sign upon Cain, that everyone that found him might not kill him" (Gen 4:15) . . . It would seem then that just this is the sign regarding Cain that he should not be killed, namely that

¹⁷ It could also be a result of his fear that he would be attacked by wild beasts (see chapter four above).

¹⁸ James L. Kugel, "Why Was Lamech Blind," in *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 161–62.

¹⁹ David K. Delaney, "The Sevenfold Vengeance of Cain: Genesis 4 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1996), 97.

on no occasion did he meet with death. For nowhere in the Book of the Law has his death been mentioned. (Philo, *Worse* 177–178)

The absence of a description of Cain's death in Genesis leads Philo to the conclusion that Cain never died. He assumes that the protective mark and the absence of a narrated death means that Cain continued to go on living. But this is not a continuation of mere physical life. As Philo makes clear elsewhere, Cain represents a concept that wickedness is immortal yet at the same time undergoing a perpetual process of dying.²⁰ This interpretation is found as part of Philo's critique of those who sought to build the tower up into heaven in Gen 11.

But all these are descended from the depravity which is ever dying and never dead, whose name is Cain. (Philo, *Confusion* 122)

In another place we find Philo interpreting Cain's sign as a symbol of wickedness that cannot and will not die.

On the other hand, of Cain the accursed fratricide's death no mention is found anywhere in the Books of the Law—nay there is an oracle uttered concerning him which says, "The Lord set a sign on Cain, even this, that no man that found him should kill him" (Gen 4:15). Why so? Because, I suppose, impiety is an evil that cannot come to an end, being ever set alight and never able to be quenched... Naturally, therefore, Cain will not die, being the symbol of wickedness, which must of necessity ever live among men in the race that is mortal. (Philo, *Flight* 60–61, 64)

Genesis's oversight of Cain's death plays into Philo's interpretative program. By noting that Cain never died and making him a symbol for the ongoing existence of evil in the world, Philo is able to lay the blame for the problem of evil on Cain. Consequently, the picture of Cain painted by Philo is not only of a greedy worshipper who delays his offering and murders his brother. He is the perpetuator of evil in the world.

Other exegetes chose neither to ignore nor allegorize the problem and instead included descriptions of Cain's death that also indicated how long he lived. Pseudo-Philo, for instance, states that Cain lived 730 years and then died (*LAB* 2:4). Since we are not told how he died it is assumed that it was of natural causes. Mysterious is the inclusion of Cain's age at the time of his death for which Pseudo-Philo provides no explanation. One possible implication of the number 730 could

²⁰ F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Philo The Confusion of Tongues* (LCL 261; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), 76.

be an attempt to demonstrate that Cain suffered a premature death. In *Biblical Antiquities* 1 Pseudo-Philo provides a reworked version of the genealogies found in Genesis 5. In his reworking of these genealogies Pseudo-Philo adopts the LXX readings so that while Gen 5:4 says Adam fathered more children 800 years after the birth of Seth, the LXX and *Biblical Antiquities* say Adam was 700. This is also the case with Seth of whom Gen 5:7 says was 807 when he had more children, but the LXX and *Biblical Antiquities* both say Seth was 707 (*L.A.B.* 1:5). In fact, many of the individuals listed in the genealogies of *Biblical Antiquities* 1 are said to have lived about 700–800 years when they became parents either for the first or second time. But there is not one instance in the genealogy when their death or total length of life is recorded. Pseudo-Philo has expunged all references to the patriarchs' death from the Gen 5 genealogy. Consequently, the reworked genealogy in *Biblical Antiquities* is not only about the length of an individual's life, it also reflects their strength and ability to still father children at 700–800 years of age. With this in mind the description of Cain's death becomes all the more curious. Why mention it at all? It is possible that by describing Cain's death at age 730 Pseudo-Philo was attempting to communicate that Cain suffered a premature death during the same time that others his age were still producing children. Such an explanation may explain the addition of Cain's death with the removal of everyone else's death. Since Cain's death is the only one described, it provides an appearance that he suffered the consequence for his murder of Abel while his siblings and other relatives continued to live on. While the exact form of death is not included, the cut off at 730 years, in the context of the genealogies, suggests a premature death.

Sometimes the timing of Cain's death was coupled with a description that emphasized the theme of retribution. For instance, the author of *Jubilees* places Cain's death as a result of a cave-in one year after that of Adam.

At the end of that jubilee Cain was killed one year after him [Adam]. And his house fell upon him, and he died in the midst of the house. And he was killed by its stones because he killed Abel with a stone, and with a stone he was killed by righteous judgment. Therefore it is ordained in the heavenly tablets: "With the weapons with which a man kills his fellow he shall be killed just as he wounded him thus shall they do to him." (*Jub.* 4:31–32)

The addition of Cain's death to the Genesis story is part of a larger interpretive program in *Jubilees* in which the author attempts to

redefine biblical events within the sphere of biblical law. Earlier in *Jub.* 4:4–5 the author emended God’s punishment of Cain as it appears in Genesis. Both Genesis and *Jubilees* declare Cain to be a fugitive, but while Gen 4:11 curses Cain *from* the earth *Jubilees* curses Cain *upon* the earth.²¹ The change of prepositions means that rather than being cursed from a life of agriculture, as in Gen 4:11, Cain’s entire existence on the earth is cursed.²² Following this emendation is a quote from the heavenly tablets part of which says: “Cursed is one who strikes his fellow with malice.” With this declaration the author reconciles Cain’s punishment with biblical law. In Genesis God’s curse of Cain seems to shield him from capital punishment. But in *Jubilees* the curse serves as way of delaying the real punishment.²³ By having Cain killed by a stone, the author of *Jubilees* has solved the theological problem. Not only are the missing details of Cain’s death included, but the type of death he suffered fulfills the requirements found in Gen 9:6 and Exod 21:12–14, 24.²⁴ Cain receives the kind of death he deserves in response to his killing of Abel.

A similar solution to the problem is found in the tenth century Midrash/homily *Aggadat Bereshit*. As part of a commentary on Gideon’s son Abimelech, who committed fratricide on a massive scale in Judg 9:5, Cain’s death is interpreted through Prov 26:27:

“Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling” (Prov 26:27). Anyone who killed his brother was smitten by the same thing... Cain killed his brother Abel with a stone, as is stated: “Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him (Gen 4:8). How did he kill him? He took a stone and hit him on all his limbs until he died from his many wounds... Also Cain was killed with a stone, as is stated: “Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod east of Eden” [Gen 4:16]. And there a

²¹ J. T. A. G. M. Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted: The Rewriting of Genesis 1–11 in the Book of Jubilees* (JSJSup 66; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 146.

²² This is supported by the fact that *Jubilees* does not indicate that Cain was a farmer nor are the sacrifices of Cain and Abel detailed. By omitting any details to agriculture *Jubilees* directs the references to the earth as part of the curse that haunts Cain as long as he lives.

²³ *Jubilees* includes the description of Cain’s death immediately after Adam’s death and in the midst of a genealogical list, which is the seventh generation after Cain and the generation of Lamech. This might further suggest that punishment was withheld until the seventh generation. This was a popular interpretation that sometimes attributed Cain’s death to Lamech (see below) (Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted*, 121, 157, 173).

²⁴ Van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Interpreted*, 145.

stone fell on him and he died. Why? A stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling" (Prov. 26:27). (*Ag. Ber.* 53–54 [Teugels])

The connection between the Cain and Abimelech stories is the act of fratricide with a stone. In Judg 9:5 Abimelech kills seventy of his brothers on one stone. Abimelech is then himself killed by a millstone that falls on his head (Judg 9:53). The interpretation of both of these stories through Prov 26:27 addresses the need for divine retribution against impious fratricides. Here, as in *Jubilees*, Cain's death is by a stone since some traditions identified the murder weapon as a stone.²⁵ In both cases, the requirement of "an eye for an eye" (Exod 21:24) is fulfilled and God is no longer seen as a negligent judge.

Other exegetes preferred not to allow Cain to live a long prosperous life and then suddenly die even if in recompense for the murder. After warning readers to flee from Beliar, the author of the *Testament of Benjamin* presents Cain as an example of one who suffered seven evils.

It is for this reason that Cain was handed over by God for seven punishments, for in every hundredth year the Lord brought upon him one plague. When he was two hundred years old suffering began and in his nine hundredth year he was deprived of life. For he was condemned on account of Abel his brother as a result of all his evil deeds, but Lamech was condemned by seventy times seven. Until eternity those who are like Cain in their moral corruption and hatred of brother shall be punished with a similar judgment. (*T. Benj.* 7:4–5)

Rather than merely fulfill the "eye for an eye" injunction, *Testament of Benjamin* ensures that Cain suffers a life time of punishment. Cain's prolonged death becomes a warning to others not to follow his example.

While some ancient interpreters were describing Cain's death in terms of divine retribution, others provided a more logical, although no less dramatic end to the life of the first murderer. They concluded that Cain's wickedness was responsible for God's flooding of the world and that Cain died in the flood. This is a long held tradition that finds its earliest expression in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (250 BCE to 150 CE) and is preserved several times in rabbinic literature as well.

You have heard, my son Seth, that a flood is coming and will wash the whole earth because of the daughters of Cain, your brother, who killed your brother Abel out of passion for your sister Lebuda. (*T. Adam* 3:5)

²⁵ For a review of the traditions how Cain killed Abel see chapter three.

Some say that the seven generations were those of his tribe who died with him. This [interpretation], however, cannot be maintained. For, even, if the flood overtook them, it overtook that seventh generation. And if that one generation perished with [Cain], how can they say that seven generations perished with Cain when they cannot even show that the flood occurred in the seventh generation of Cain's descendants. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3.9)²⁶

What, I say, was the need of this, seeing that the whole of Cain's posterity were destroyed in the deluge? (Augustine, *City of God* 15.20)

R. Levi said in the name of R. Simeon b. Lakish: He suspended his judgment until the Flood came and swept him away, as it is written, *And he blotted out every living thing, etc.* (Gen. 7:23) (*Gen. Rab.* 22:12)²⁷

If a man begets a hundred children (Eccl 6:3): this alludes to Cain who begat a hundred children, *And live many years*: he lived many years, *So that the days of his years are many, but his soul be not satisfied* with his money and he was not satisfied with [what he possessed of] the world's good things. *And moreover he has no burial*: because he was kept in suspense [as to his fate] until the Flood came and swept him away, as it is written, *He blotted out every living substance* (Gen 7:23). (*Eccl. Rab.* 6:2)

Were not all the sons of Cain cut off by the waters of the Flood? (*Pirqe R. El.* 30)

Since the Bible fails to mention Cain's death, these interpreters agree that Cain did in fact continue to live for a very long time. But they also seem to have noticed that the list of those who would later enter and leave the ark with Noah in Gen 8:18 and 9:18 does not mention Cain. This led to the conclusion that Cain must have lived until the time of the flood and then died with the rest of the wicked people in the world.

A less well-known tradition relating to Cain's death is that he committed some form of suicide. This interpretation is found both in the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo. English translations of Wis 10:3–4 are typically rendered as follows:

But when an unrighteous man departed from her in his anger, he perished (συναπώλετο) because in rage he killed his brother. When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous by a paltry piece of wood. (Wis 10:3–4 [NRSV])

²⁶ Although Ephrem does not hold to the view that Cain died in the flood, his comments demonstrate that it was a well-known tradition.

²⁷ The context of this is a discussion over the mark God gave to Cain. It is interesting that the rabbis, like Philo, saw some connection between the mark and Cain's apparent longevity.

As it stands, the English translation could be read as stating that Cain died in the flood. Cain perished because he killed his brother. The earth was flooded because of Cain. Thus Cain died in the flood, a tradition that, as we saw above, had significant support in antiquity.²⁸ The problem with this interpretation is how the middle voice verb συναπώλετο is translated. Most translations render the verb actively, but if the verb is rendered in the middle, the thrust of the sentence changes. When read in the middle sense it could mean that Cain “killed himself along with” Abel. Since Cain’s death is explicated neither here nor in Genesis, it is possible that the author of Wisdom was referring not to Cain’s literal death but a spiritual death.²⁹ While the type of death Cain suffered is described somewhat ambiguously in Wisdom, it does reflect a similar interpretation found in Philo.

Philo, as noted above, comments on the absence of Cain’s death in Genesis and uses it as an explanation for the ongoing existence of evil in the world (*Worse* 177–178). But Philo is not always the most consistent exegete. Prior to this he comments on the murder of Abel and suggests that it was a murder/suicide. Cain killed Abel and destroyed his own soul.

So the words that follow “Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him (αὐτόν)” suggest, so far as superficial appearance goes, that Abel has been done away with, but when examined more carefully, that Cain has been done away with by himself. It must be read in this way: “Cain rose up and slew himself (ἑαυτόν),” not someone else. And this is just what we should expect to befall him. For the soul that has extirpated from itself the love of virtue and the love of God, has died to the life of virtue. (Philo, *Worse* 47)

Philo’s reading of Gen 4:8 is the result of a simple change in pronouns. While 4:8 reads Cain killed him (αὐτόν), Philo has changed the breathing so that it now reads Cain killed himself (ἑαυτόν).³⁰ The result is that instead of committing murder, Cain actually committed suicide. Philo’s exegesis can be partly attributed to his love for paradox inherited

²⁸ Kugel suggests that Wisdom may reflect this tradition (*Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998], 166).

²⁹ J. A. F. Gregg, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 97; David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (AB 43; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 213; Karina Martin, Hogan, “The Exegetical Background of the ‘Ambiguity of Death’ in the Wisdom of Solomon,” *JSJ* 30 (1999): 22.

³⁰ D. Zeller, “The Life and Death of the Soul in Philo of Alexandria: The Use and Origin of a Metaphor,” *SPhA* 7(1995): 27.

from the Stoics. He is committed to the idea that some people are dead while living (*Flight* 55; *Spec* 1.345).³¹ This is an idea that he applies to Abel's crying blood when he suggests that, although dead, Abel still lives (*Worse* 48; *QG* 1.70).³² This exegetical move allows Philo to deal with the appearance that Abel died and Cain somehow survived. At the same time, it helps Philo to answer an irksome question lurking behind the text: "How can a just God allow a murderer to escape death after killing an innocent man?" Spiritual suicide was one way of answering the question even if it meant turning the meaning of the text up-side-down. Since Philo allegorically interprets the brothers as opposing philosophical viewpoints, Cain's murder of Abel was a form of suicide.

While the above traditions concerning Cain's death are well supported in antiquity, there is one other tradition that seems to have been very popular, if not the most creative. This tradition attributed Cain's death to Lamech. The source for this interpretation is found in Lamech's Song in Gen 4:23–24.³³ In the song Lamech says: "For I have killed a man for my wound and a boy for wounding me." The mention of a "man" in 4:23 followed by the mention of Cain in 4:24 led exegetes to conclude that there was some connection between Cain and Lamech's own murderous act. The answer to this puzzle lies in Eve's statement in Gen 4:1 where she claims to have "gotten a man." The relationship between 4:1 and 4:23 is the Hebrew term **אִישׁ** ("man"). Since this term only appears twice in Genesis 4 exegetes considered it significant. The first instance is in relation to Eve's declaration about Cain. The second occurrence is in Lamech's song. When Lamech says: "I have killed an **אִישׁ**" ("man") in 4:23, exegetes concluded that he must have been identifying the victim as Cain. Adding support to this conclusion is the fact that Cain is mentioned in the very next line of Lamech's song.³⁴ The earliest extant attestation for this interpretation is found among Syrian interpreters.

³¹ Alan Mendelson, "Philo's Dialectic of Reward and Punishment," *SPhA* 9(1997): 118–19.

³² For a discussion of Philo's depiction of Abel's blood see chapter six.

³³ See chapter four for further comments on Lamech's Song and its association with Cain.

³⁴ Kugel, "Why was Lamech Blind?" 162.

It is said in the Book of the Testament that Cain was killed by Lamech by accident: Lamech was building a wall and upset the wall when Cain was [standing] behind it. (Didymus the Blind, *On Genesis* 4:25)³⁵

Didymus's interpretation combines the tradition that Cain was killed by a stone with the claim in *Jubilees* that the stone hit Cain when his house caved-in. It also brings in an element of retribution since many interpreters concluded that Cain killed Abel with a stone. Lamech is innocent, at least of premeditated murder, and guilty only of accidentally killing Cain. But this story takes on yet another interpretive twist.

Modern commentators view Lamech's declaration that he killed an אִישׁ ("man") and a יֶלֶד ("boy") as an example of Hebrew parallelism rather than a claim by Lamech to have killed two separate people.³⁶ But ancient interpreters sometimes understood the verse differently. They concluded that Lamech killed Cain *and* a younger son as witnessed in the work of Ephrem.

Still others say that Lamech, who was cunning and crafty, saw the plight of his generation: that the Sethites refused to intermingle with them because of the reproach of their father Cain, who was still alive, and that the lands would become uncultivated from lack of ploughmen and their generation would thus come to an end. Lamech, therefore, moved by zeal, killed Cain together with his one son whom he had begotten and who resembled him lest, through this one son who resembled him, the memory his shame continue through their generations. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 4.3)

Ephrem's comments are at variance with Didymus the Blind in three ways. First, Lamech's killing of Cain is premeditated rather than accidental. Second, there is no mention of a murder weapon. Third, Lamech also kills a "son," but it is not entirely clear whose son is murdered. If it was Cain's son, then the murder may be an attempt to stop an act of vengeance against Lamech. If it was Lamech's son (an apparent witness), his act of filicide is an effort to cutoff the perpetual shame upon his own family. The result, however, is still the same. Lamech is Cain's murderer.

Not everyone subscribed to this interpretation however. Basil the Great rejected the notion that Lamech somehow killed Cain. While he did agree with the interpretations like that of Ephrem which

³⁵ Translation is from Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 167.

³⁶ Patrick D. Miller, "YELED in the Song of Lamech," *JBL* 85 (1966): 477–78; Wenham, 114.

attributed two murders to Lamech, Basil instead followed an interpretation of punishment similar to the *Testament of Benjamin* in which Cain suffered seven punishments. Based on Lamech's claim to seventy-seven fold vengeance, Basil, in a letter to Bishop Optimus, understands this as a multiplication of Lamech's to as much as four hundred and ninety times.

And some think that Cain was destroyed by Lamech on the ground that he lived until that generation that he might pay a more protracted punishment. But this is not true. For Lamech seems to have committed two murders to judge by what he himself relates: "I have killed a man and a youth"—the man for wounding and the youth for bruising. Now a wound is one thing and a bruise another. And a man is one thing and a youth another. "For Cain sevenfold vengeance shall be taken, but for Lamech seventy times sevenfold." It is just that I undergo four hundred and ninety punishments, if indeed God's judgment against Cain is just, that he should undergo seven punishments. (Basil, *Letters* 260)

Still others like Theodoret of Cyr rejected the charge that Lamech killed Cain as well as the attribution of two murders.

Some interpreters understand this not of two men or, as others fantasize, of Cain, but of one and the same young man: "a man I have killed for wounding me and a young man for bruising me." That is, a young man approaching maturity. He escapes vengeance through confession of sin, and pronouncing judgment on himself he prevents divine judgment. (Theodoret of Cyr, *Questions on Genesis* 44)³⁷

But in spite of those who rejected the interpretation with charges of "fantasizing" about Cain's death, the tradition continued to be handed down and continually enhanced.

One highly developed example of this line of interpretation is found in another Syrian work. The *Cave of Treasures* expands the details of the story to a greater degree than that of Ephrem.

And in the days of Anosh, in his eight hundred and twentieth year, Lamech, the blind man, killed Cain, the murderer, in the forest of Nodh. Now this killing took place in the following manner, as Lamech was leaning on the youth, his son [Tubal-Cain], and the youth was setting straight his father's arm in the direction in which he saw the quarry, he heard the sound of Cain moving about, backwards and forwards, in the forest. Now Cain was unable to stand still in one place and to hold his

³⁷ Translation taken from Andrew Louth, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 114.

peace. And Lamech thinking that it was a wild beast that was making the movement in the forest, raised his arm, and, having made ready, drew his bow and shot an arrow towards the spot, and the arrow smote Cain between his eyes, and he fell down and died. And Lamech, thinking that he had shot game, spake to the youth saying, "Make haste and let us see what game we have shot." And when they went to the spot, and the boy on whom Lamech leaned had looked, he said unto him, "O my Lord, thou hast killed Cain." And Lamech moved his hands to smite them together, and as he did so he smote the youth and killed him also. (*Cave of Treasures* [Budge, 78–79])

Although *Cave of Treasures* is usually dated to the Middle Ages, some scholars speculate that an early form of it may have been composed in the third century CE.³⁸ In spite of its status as a late composition, it is clear that the document contains some very early traditions including details surrounding Cain's death. For instance, as we saw above, Didymus the Blind was aware of a tradition linking Lamech to Cain's accidental death and Ephrem knew a tradition that described how Lamech murdered Cain. In *Cave of Treasures*, however, the identity of the murdered "son" is now clearly stated as Lamech's son Tubal-Cain.

Another point of convergence is the way *Cave of Treasures* describes Cain as "unable to stand still in one place and to hold his peace." This is certainly an allusion to the LXX tradition that Cain went about the earth "trembling and shaking," an interpretation that finds support in a number of sources.³⁹ Similar to Didymus the Blind, the story portrays Lamech as innocent of premeditated murder, this time by making him a blind hunter.⁴⁰

Adding support to the popularity of this story is a number of Jewish and Christian sources that hold variants of the tradition. Some not only incorporate the description of Cain shaking, but also add that he had a horn on his head (the mark put on him by God) that led to Lamech's confusing Cain for wild game.⁴¹

³⁸ Serge Ruzer, "The Cave of Treasures on Swearing Abel's Blood and Expulsion from Paradise: Two Exegetical Motifs in Context," *J ECS* 9 (2001): 252.

³⁹ See chapter four.

⁴⁰ Kugel, "Why was Lamech Blind?" 163.

⁴¹ See Louis H. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946–47), 1:116–17; 5:145–47; "Jewish Folklore East and West," in *On Jewish Law and Lore* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 61–73; V. Aptowitzer, *Kain und Abel in der Agada: den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen, christlichen und muhammedanischen Literatur* (Vieann: R. Löewitt Verlag, 1922), 59–68; S. C. Malan, trans., *The Book of Adam and Eve: Also Called the Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*

Outside of literary sources, the popularity of this tradition is demonstrated by its preservation in church architecture. In the twelfth century, Saint-Lazare Cathedral in Autun, France, there is the remnant of a pillar capital that depicts Lamech shooting Cain with Tubal-Cain guiding Lamech's arm. Such evidence demonstrates that this tradition was more than a scholarly obsession; its presence in the cathedral is an indicator that it was known among the non-literate class as well.

The absence of Cain's death in the Genesis narrative created a theological problem. If Cain was allowed to live, what kind of judge was the almighty? Ancient exegetes solved the problem by detailing Cain's death as well as adding elements of divine retribution for his murder of Abel. While some merely noted that Cain died in the flood, others created elaborate expansions of the story. Some said he committed suicide others that he was killed by Lamech. In spite of the various descriptions of his death, they all served one main purpose. They fill in the lacuna in the text and guarantee that Cain is justly punished for Abel's death.

Who were Cain's descendants?

There is one final twist in the narrative that warrants consideration. In our story of firsts we also find the first recorded genealogy in the Bible. Although removed from his former life, Cain is the subject of the first genealogy.⁴² Gen 4:17–22 lists the descendants of Cain up to Lamech and his children. But this is as far as the genealogy goes. When we turn to Genesis 5 we notice that nowhere is Cain or his progeny mentioned. The only son associated with Adam is Seth. Neither Cain nor Abel is listed among Adam's descendants. The absence of Abel is somewhat understandable in light of his having been murdered and unable to carry on a line of descendants. But the absence of Cain is conspicuous. Cain was the eldest son, and thus the legitimate heir, but the line is traced through Seth and Cain appears to fall out of the picture. What happened to the descendants of Cain?⁴³

(London: Williams & Norgate, 1882), 121–23; See also the version found in *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Genesis and Exodus* (trans. Samuel A. Berman; NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1996), 32.

⁴² Susan Brayford, *Genesis* (Septuagint Commentary Series; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 254.

⁴³ This gap was noticed by Augustine who comments: "But though eight generations, including Adam, are registered before the flood, no man of Cain's line has his age

Philo of Alexandria notes this gloss in his comments on Genesis and concludes that Cain's absence from Adam's genealogy is a sign that Seth, not Cain, is Adam's true successor.

Scripture does not associate the foul and violent homicide with the order of either reason or number, for he is to be thrown out like ordure, as someone has said, considering him to be such. Wherefore (Scripture) does not show him to be either the successor of his earthly father or the beginning of later generations, but distinguishing Seth in both respects as guiltless, being a drinker of water, for he is watered by his father and begetting hope by his growth and progress. Wherefore not casually and idly does (Scripture) say that he was made according to his father's appearance and form, in reprobation of the elder (brother) who because of his foul homicide bears within himself nothing of his father either in body or in soul. (Philo, QG 1.81)

Philo's interpretation is based on two things: (1) Cain's status as a murderer and (2) the difference in the way that Cain's birth is described from that of Seth. In Gen 5:3 we read that, "Adam begot a son in his own likeness, his own image, and called him Seth." But no similar statement is attached to the description of Cain and his birth in 4:1. Cain's birth seems to be substantively and qualitatively different than that of Seth. Philo understands this difference to have been fundamentally effected by Cain's murderous act. Therefore, Cain is not a true son of Adam. Philo later comments that it is for this reason Cain is separated from his family while Seth is given a position of honor.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathon follows this trajectory, but with an important expansion. The detail about Seth being in Adam's image is emphasized, but so also is the fact the Cain is *not* Adam's biological son.

When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he begot *Seth*, who resembled his image and likeness. *For before that, Eve had borne Cain, who was not from him and who did not resemble him. Abel was killed by Cain, and Cain was banished, and his descendants are not recorded in the book of the genealogy of Adam. But afterward he begot one who resembled him and he called his name Seth.* (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 5:3)

Pseudo-Jonathon's interpretation is based on an earlier expansion the Targumist made in 4:1. There we read that Cain was not the son of

recorded at which the son who succeeded him was begotten. For the Spirit of God refused to mark the times before the flood in the generations of the earthly city, but preferred to do so in the heavenly line, as if it were more worthy of being remembered" (*City of God* 15.15).

Adam, but the result of an encounter between Eve and Sammael. That theme is picked up again in 5:3 to explain why Cain was left out of Adam's genealogy.⁴⁴ It is not only because he murdered Abel and did not resemble Adam as did Seth. Cain is left out because he has no legitimate place in the genealogy. He is *not* the son of Adam. That status belongs to the murdered Abel and Seth.

Other ancient interpreters did not focus on Cain's missing name in the genealogy. Instead they commented on the activities of Cain's progeny. Having already noticed that Cain was the first sinner as well as the first to commit violence, some exegetes expanded the story in ways that reflected the ongoing effects of Cain's depravity on the family. Josephus provides an example of one such expansion.

Thus, within Adam's lifetime, the descendants of Cain went to the depths of depravity, and inheriting and imitating one another's vices, each one ended worse than the last. They rushed incontinently into battle and plunged into brigandage; or if anyone was too timid for slaughter, he would display other forms of mad recklessness by insolence and greed. (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.66)

Josephus's comments are preceded by his recital of the Lamech story. This is noteworthy since it is often with Lamech and his descendants that many interpreters begin to unpack their critique of Cain and his progeny. This is probably the result of a number of details in the Lamech story that attracted the attention of the interpreters.

First, Lamech stands in the seventh generation from Adam.⁴⁵ As we saw in the previous chapter, this had already attracted the attention of exegetes as they attempted to untangle the relationship between God's promise to Cain in 4:15 and Lamech's song in 4:24.⁴⁶

Second, in addition to his being in the seventh generation from Adam, we are given the name of Lamech's children and the occupations they chose. This must have seemed significant to interpreters since the only other time information regarding birth and occupation is coupled together in this chapter is with Cain and Abel in 4:2. These

⁴⁴ For a discussion on the identity of Cain's father see chapter one.

⁴⁵ "Here terminate all the generations of Cain, being eight in number, including Adam—to wit, seven from Adam to Lamech, who married two wives, and whose children, among whom a woman also is named, form the eighth generation" (Augustine, *City of God* 15.17).

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the relationship seven-fold vengeance of Cain in 4:15 and the seventy-seven fold vengeance of Lamech in 4:24, see chapter four above.

additional details signaled interpreters that something important was being stated about Lamech and his children.

Third, Lamech is the first to take more than one woman as a wife. Thus, he becomes the first polygamist, which may also hint at a break with the created order as illustrated by the monogamous relationship between Adam and Eve. While Genesis does not critique Lamech's polygamy, *Gen. Rab.* 23:2 uses Lamech as an example of those who, prior to the flood, retained one wife for procreation and another for sexual gratification.⁴⁷ Lamech's polygamy seems to signal the beginning of the demise of monogamy.⁴⁸

Fourth, apart from Eve, this is the only other time thus far in Genesis that we are told the name of an individual's wife (or wives in the case of Lamech). Genesis does not disclose this information for either Cain or Seth.⁴⁹ In fact, with the exception of Naamah, Tubal-Cain's sister, it is not until we read the name of Sari, Abraham's wife, in 11:29 that we learn the name of any women in Genesis.⁵⁰ Once again, such detail would seem to indicate the significance of the Lamech story.⁵¹

Finally, only Lamech mentions the founder of the family line and fathers a child, Tubal-Cain, whose name includes the name of Cain.⁵² Consequently, Lamech ends the old line of Cain and begins a new one.

⁴⁷ *And Lamech took unto him two wives* (Gen 4:19) Azariah said in R. Judah's name: The men of the generation of the Flood used to act thus: each took two wives, one for procreation and the other for sexual gratification. The former would stay like a widow throughout her life, while the latter was given to drink a potion of roots so that she should not bear, and then she sat before him like a harlot, as it is written, *He devoureth the barren that beareth not, and doeth not good to the widow* (Job 34:21). The proof of this is that the best of them, who was Lamech, took two wives, Adah, [so called] because he kept her away (*ya'ade*) from himself; and Zillah, to sit in his shadow (*zillo*). (*Gen. Rab.* 23:2)

⁴⁸ This was the opinion of Jerome as well: "Yet Adam even after he was expelled from paradise had but one wife. The accursed and blood-stained Lamech, descended from the stock of Cain, was the first to make out of one rib two wives; and the seedling of bigamy then planted was altogether destroyed by the doom of the deluge" (*Letter* 79.10 To Salvina).

⁴⁹ For an overview of the names that tradition has given to these women see chapter one.

⁵⁰ In Jewish tradition, Naamah became the wife of Noah (c.f. *Gen. Rab.* 23:3). But the identity of Naamah's husband is not found in the Bible and she is the last woman to be named in Genesis until Sari in 11:29.

⁵¹ John Chrysostom notes this point as well and comments: "What is the meaning of this strange and surprising statement? Well, now for the first time it refers to females, making mention of one by name. This was not done idly or to no purpose; instead, the blessed author has done this to draw our attention to something lying hidden" (*Hom. Gen.* 20.5 [Hill, 38]).

⁵² Richard S. Hess, "Lamech in the Genealogies of Genesis," *BBR* 1 (1991): 22.

All of these details would have compelled interpreters to conclude that Lamech's story represented an important shift in the direction of the narrative. What attracted their attention in particular were the names and occupations of Lamech's children. For instance, that Lamech would give a name to his son that included the name of the infamous fratricide must have meant that Tubal-Cain somehow reflected the life of his ancestor. Thus we read in Josephus his comments on the children:

Of these children Jobel, son of Ada, erected tents and devoted himself to a pastoral life; Jubal born of the same mother, studied music and invented harps and lutes; Jubel, one of the sons of the other wife, surpassing all men in strength, distinguished himself in the art of war, procuring also thereby the means for satisfying the pleasure of the body, and first invented the forging of metal. (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.64)

Although Josephus provides Tubal-Cain with the name Jubel, different from that which is found in the Hebrew and LXX versions,⁵³ the connection to Cain is clear by the way Josephus describes Jubel's activities. A few lines earlier in *Ant* 1.61 Josephus describes Cain as one who increased his property by robbery and force to fulfill bodily pleasures (ἡδονὴν μὲν πάσαν ἐκπορίζων αὐτοῦ τῷ σώματι) while teaching others to imitate his example. Similar to Cain, Josephus portrays Jubel as one who also excels in violence, but to such an extent that he is credited with being the inventor of war. This designation is connected to his status as the inventor of metallurgy.⁵⁴ In Gen 4:22 Tubal-Cain is credited with forging instruments of bronze and iron without indicating how these instruments were used. But Josephus concludes that Jubel was creating weapons for war which makes the descendant of the first murderer the inventor of mass murder.⁵⁵ The outcome of this war making is also connected to Cain since both Cain and Jubel use violence as a means for feeding their bodily pleasures (ἡδονὴν τοῦ

⁵³ In the Hebrew version, Zillah bears Lamech a son named Tubal-Cain (4:22) which is a clear allusion to the boy's ancestor. But the LXX translator dropped the second half of the name so that name of Zillah's first born now reads Tubal (Θοβελ). Why the translator would drop the second-half is difficult to say. It is possible it was omitted to avoid confusion with ancestral Cain (Wevers, 64).

⁵⁴ Thomas W. Franxman, *Genesis and the "Jewish Antiquities" of Flavius Josephus* (BeO 35; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 73.

⁵⁵ Feldman, *Josephus: Judean Antiquities*, 23.

σώματος ἐκπορίζων). Thus when Josephus says Jubel surpassed all men in strength, he was referring not only to his physical abilities, but the degree to which he had perfected the crimes of his ancestor Cain.

Philo too focuses on Tubal-Cain by reading moral dimensions into his use of the hammer and anvil. Like Josephus, he understands Tubal-Cain to be obsessed with bodily pleasures and attributes his preoccupation with metallurgy as the source for war.

Accurately characterizing each one of these he goes on to say: "This man was a wielder of the hammer, a smith in brass and iron work." For the soul that is vehemently concerned about bodily pleasures (σωματικὰς ἡδονὰς) or the materials of outward things, is being ever hammered on an anvil, beaten out by the blows of his desires with their long swoop and reach... They draw to them the produce of every region of the globe, using their unlimited lusts as nets for the purpose, until at last the violence of their excessive effort makes them give way, and the counter pull throws down headlong those who are tugging. All these people are war-makers, and that is why they are said to be workers of iron and bronze, and these are the instruments with which wars are waged. (Philo, *Posterity* 116–117)

A similar treatment is also found in *Genesis Rabbah* where, as in Josephus and Philo, Tubal-Cain's metallurgy is interpreted as his perfecting Cain's crime.

And Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron, etc (Gen 4:22). R. Joshua said in R. Levi's name: This man perfected Cain's sin: Cain slew, yet lacked the weapons for slaying, whereas he was the forger of every cutting instrument. (Gen. Rab. 23:3)

All three of the above sources describe Tubal-Cain as the one who perfected Cain's violence. Josephus and Philo identify the motivation for this violence as bodily pleasure, a trait he inherited from his ancestor Cain. The traditions attached to Tubal-Cain and his metallurgy eventually led later interpreters to claim that all of the wicked generations had descended from Cain (*Pirke R. El.* 22). But there is one more treatment of Tubal-Cain that needs to be considered.

In his *Biblical Antiquities*, Pseudo-Philo provides a description of Tubal-Cain that, as with other exegetes, focuses on his work in metallurgy. But unlike his fellow interpreters, Pseudo-Philo does not accuse Tubal-Cain of being the inventor of war. Instead, he understands the metallurgy of Tubal-Cain, coupled with the music making of his brother, as that point in history when evil began to increase in the world at an exponential rate.

Then Enoch took a wife from the daughters of Seth, and she bore him Ciram and Cuut and Madab. Now Ciram became the father of Methushael and Methushael became the father of Lamech. Now Lamech took for himself two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. And Adah bore Jobab; he was the father of all those dwelling in tents and feeding cattle. And again, she bore him Jobal, who was the first to teach all kinds of musical instruments. In that time, when those inhabiting the earth began to do evil deeds (each one with his neighbor's wife) and they defiled them, God was angry. And he began to play the lyre and the lute and every instrument of sweet song and to corrupt the earth. Now Zillah bore Tubal and Miza and Theffa. And this is the Tubal who showed men techniques in using lead and tin and iron and bronze and silver and gold. And then those inhabiting the earth began to make statues to adore them. Now Lamech said to both his wives, Adah and Zillah, "Hear my voice, wives of Lamech, and pay attention to my remark, for I have destroyed men on my own account and snatched sucklings from the breast, in order to show my sons and those inhabiting the earth how to do evil deeds. And now Cain will be avenged seven times, but Lamech seventy-seven times." (Pseudo-Philo, *L.A.B.* 2: 5–10)

There are a number of pieces of this expansion that require our attention. First, Pseudo-Philo, has written the account so that the descendants of Cain intermarry with the descendants of Seth. As we will see, although there is no hint of this relationship in Genesis, this becomes an important part of the Cain traditions. Second, the description of Jubal expands the Genesis narrative beyond crediting him with the invention of music by accusing him of using his instruments to corrupt the earth. More specifically, this corruption is manifested in sexually immoral practices. Third, Tubal's metallurgy is expanded to include more than just iron and bronze, and includes lead and tin and gold and silver. These metals were used in the fashioning of idols and Tubal is held responsible for teaching human beings the art of forging and worshipping idols. Fourth, while Lamech's song retains the details about his murderous actions, it has been reconfigured so that Lamech has killed multiple men and children all with the purpose of being a teacher of evil deeds. The result of these expansions is a reading that offers commentary on the exponential growth of evil in the world that begins with Lamech's generation. Lamech, the first person to take two wives, became a habitual murderer who taught his sons how to commit evil. Two of his sons, Jobal and Tubal, used their respective occupations to teach others how to commit acts of evil through sexual debauchery and idolatry. The result, then, is the full blossoming of evil

in the world with the direct responsibility falling upon those who were descendant from Cain.

The enhancements to the Genesis narrative in *Biblical Antiquities* provides a launching point for understanding one of the more intriguing aspects of the Cain traditions of which Pseudo-Philo is an early witness. There is a variety of interpretive traditions that attributed the increasing presence of evil in the world to the descendants of Cain. The source for these traditions is the statement immediately following the birth of Seth's son Enosh in Gen 4:26.⁵⁶

In Gen 4:26 we read "To Seth also was born a son and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke the name of the Lord" (NRSV). But there are some difficulties with this translation. First, how should we understand the Hebrew adverb **אז** which is usually rendered as "then" by English translations? Does it refer to the time of Enosh or to a time after him? Second, how should we understand the passive verb **הוּחַל** which is usually rendered as "they began"? Since the subject is ambiguous, does it refer to Seth or Enosh as the one who began to call on the name of the Lord or to human beings in general?⁵⁷ The answer to these questions depends upon which version of the verse is being used (Hebrew or Greek) and who is doing the exegesis. This verse was the focus of both Jewish and Christian exegetes and while there were some intersections between the two groups, the interpretive track taken by each ultimately lead in divergent directions.

In Jewish interpretation, this verse was sometimes understood to refer not to Enosh, but to the contemporaries of his generation.⁵⁸ Instead

⁵⁶ In his article examining the history of the verse's interpretation, Samuel Sandmel suggests that it might be subtitled: "a history of reading difficulties into a text" ("Genesis 4:26b," *HUCA* 32 [1961]: 19).

⁵⁷ Since **הוּחַל** is being used here impersonally (i.e. there is no noun subject in the sentence), translators normally translate it as "people began" rather than "he began" (Wenham, *Genesis*, 96). Cassuto understands **הוּחַל** not as a reference to the first time people began to call on the name of the Lord nor the beginning of idolatry. Instead, he understands it in the context of Cain's murder of Abel and Cain's banishment from the face of God. Adam and Eve were, according to Cassuto, unable to call on the name of the Lord until the birth of Seth by which they were comforted in their mourning. With the birth of Seth, they were able to call on the name of the Lord *again*, that is, resume the practice they had previously abandon (*Genesis*, 246–48).

⁵⁸ Some exceptions to this interpretation which understands Genesis 4:26 as referring to Enosh include Sir 49:16; *Jub.* 4:12 and Philo QG 1.79. However, in *Abraham* 47 Philo shifts his interpretation to identify Enosh as the one who "hoped to call upon the name of the Lord." The latter interpretation is based on the LXX reading about which see below.

of seeing this as the time when people began to call on the name of the Lord exegetes interpreted it as the time when idolatry began. This interpretation was based first of all on reading *אז* as meaning “during the time of Enosh.” Second, since the passive *הוּחַל* is ambiguous the sentence’s subject is indefinite. Who was it that initiated that action of calling on the name of the Lord? Was it Seth, Enosh or someone else? A common approach in ancient translations was to render an indefinite passive verb in the active form. When this practice was used to remove the ambiguity of the passive *הוּחַל* in Gen 4:26b, the active form resulted in a translation of “they began to profane.”⁵⁹ The shift in meaning from “they began” to “they profaned” is predicated on the more common usage of the root *חלל*. The original meaning of *חלל* was “to untie,” “loosen” with the sense of “to begin” (c.f. Gen 6:1). But its predominant meaning in the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls and post-biblical Hebrew is to profane or desecrate.⁶⁰ Thus the verse began to be read as, “At that time people profaned the name of the Lord.”⁶¹

According to this interpretation of Gen 4:26 it was during the generation of Enosh that people ceased from worshiping God and began to apply God’s name to the idols that they worshipped.⁶² Thus the practice of idolatry commenced during the life time of Enosh even though he was not the one responsible for this shift in worship. The prominence of this interpretation in antiquity is illustrated by the choices made by the Targumists.

⁵⁹ Fraade, 7 n. 4; 109.

⁶⁰ Dommershaue, *חלל*, TDOT: 409–17.

⁶¹ In *Gen. Rab.* 23:7 it is commented that *הוּחַל* describes rebellion against God three times. R. Simeon said: “In three places this term is used in the sense of rebellion [against God]: *Then they rebelled to call upon the name of the Lord* (Gen 4:26); *and it came to pass, when man rebelled in multiplying on the face of earth* (Gen 6:1); *He [Nimrod] rebelled when he was a mighty one in the earth*” (Gen 11:6).

⁶² Fraade notes that this brief verse about Enosh “is consistently interpreted by the rabbis as a negative statement about his contemporaries (eventually including him) as the originators of idolatry. In fact, *not once* in all of Rabbinic literature is this verse cited to refer positively to the beginnings of divine worship” (110). Alison Salvesen suggests that the fragmentary remains of Symmachus’s translation are compatible with rabbinic interpretation that during the time of Enosh humans began to worship idols (*Symmachus in the Pentateuch* [JSSM 15; University of Manchester, 1991], 29). Jerome was aware of this interpretation among Jewish exegetes as evidenced by his comments in his *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* 4:26 (35).

And to Seth also to him, a son was born, and he named him Enosh; in his days, then, men began worshipping foreign cults, and calling them by the name of the *memra* of the Lord. (*Fragmentary Targum* [Klein, 2.9])⁶³

And to Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. *That was the generation in which they began to go astray, making Idols for themselves and calling their Idols by the name of the memra of the Lord.* (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 4:26)

And to Seth there was also born a son and he called his name Enosh. Then the sons of man began to make idols for themselves and to surname them by the name of the *memra* of the Lord. (Tg. Neof. Gen 4:26)

And likewise, to Seth a son was born and he called his name Enosh. Then, in his days, the sons of man were lax from praying in the name of the Lord. (Tg. Onq. Gen 4:26)

Each of these Targums subscribe to the common practice that **אז** should be interpreted as referring to the generation of Enosh and **הוולח** as when humanity's worship of God began to become corrupted.⁶⁴ The *Fragmentary Targum* understands a general turn to foreign gods who were called by the name of the Lord. Targums *Pseudo-Jonathon* and *Neofiti*, on the other hand, offer a more specific charge by accusing Enosh's generation of making idols. *Targum Onqelos* does not mention idolatry, but instead refers to the practice of divine prayer being abandoned. While none of the above mention Cain or his descendants there is an important thematic connection between the Targums and Pseudo-Philo.

In all of these documents the demise of divine worship is somehow connected to the time period of Seth's descendants. In the Targums the pursuit of foreign gods or the practice of idolatry begins during the generation of Enosh. In *Biblical Antiquities* the same process begins when Cain's son Enoch takes a wife from the daughters of Seth (2:5). Enoch and the female Sethite become the parents of Lamech. Lamech in turn has children, two of which follow his example by teaching human beings evil practices, of which idolatry and sexual immorality are the two named specifically. Thus, although Enosh is not mentioned in *Biblical Antiquities* 2,⁶⁵ we find the common theme that idolatry somehow began in the time period of Seth's descendants even though

⁶³ Michael L. Klein, trans., *Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch: According to their extant sources* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 2.9.

⁶⁴ Fraade, 113.

⁶⁵ He is mentioned as part of Seth's lineage in 1:7, but not in the context of the corruption of humanity in 2:1–10.

it is not connected to Enosh specifically.⁶⁶ In *Biblical Antiquities*, however, it is the descendant of Cain, Tubal, who initiates the practice of idolatry through his metallurgy. Thus we find a set of traditions that interprets Gen 4:26b as the demise of divine worship during Enosh's lifetime. But we also find that within that set of traditions an interpretation that identifies the Cainites as the ones who introduced idolatry into the world.

To complete the picture of how Jewish interpreters handled Gen 4:26 we need to consider one more facet of the Cain traditions. While some held that it was during the time of Enosh that idolatry began, at the instigation of the Cainites, others connected the Cainites with the fall of the sons of God in Gen 6:2. In early Jewish exegesis it was common to understand the בני אלהים ("sons of God") as angels who left their place in heaven and interfered sexually with the daughters of men (1 *En.* 6:2; *Jub.* 5:1; Philo, *Giants* 2).⁶⁷ This interpretation prevailed for approximately three hundred years until Jewish exegetes began to reject it in the second century CE.⁶⁸ In spite of this shift in opinions about the identity of the sons of God as angels, elements associated with the old view continued to appear.⁶⁹ What attracts our attention here is the way that it was sometimes connected to the Cain traditions.

One place this interpretive tradition surfaces is Josephus. In *Ant.* 1.66, before turning his attention to the line of Seth, Josephus provides a closing appraisal of the Cainite line describing how their violence and corruption increased.⁷⁰ But Josephus is careful to note that all of this happened during the lifetime of Adam, who, consequently, would have witnessed the continuing degeneration of Cain's progeny. It is immediately following these comments about Adam and Cain that Josephus describes the birth of Seth whom he focuses on for

⁶⁶ Jacobson, *Commentary on Pseudo-Philo*, 297.

⁶⁷ Cassuto, 291–94; Wenham, 139; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "The Origins of Evil in Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition: The Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 in the Second and Third Centuries B.C.E.," in *The Fall of the Angels* (ed. Christopher Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 87–118; Archie T. Wright, "Some Observations of Philo's *De Gigantibus* and Evil Spirits in Second Temple Judaism," *JSJ* 36 (2005): 471–88.

⁶⁸ Philip Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6," *JJS* 23 (1972): 60–71.

⁶⁹ David L. Everson, "A Brief Comparison of Targumic and Midrashic Angelological Traditions," *Journal of Aramaic Studies* 5 (2007): 75–91.

⁷⁰ See the quote of *Ant.* 1.66 above in this chapter.

the next few lines. In this section we learn that Seth is the antithesis of his brother Cain and that the Sethites were virtuous, lived free from conflict with one another and made great strides in the area of astronomy (*Ant.* 1.67–71). But alas, even the Sethites succumb to the workings of evil in the world.

For seven generations these people continued to believe in God as Lord of the universe and in everything to take virtue as their guide; then in the course of time they abandoned the customs of their fathers for a life of depravity. They no longer rendered to God his due honors, nor took account of justice towards men, but displayed by their actions a zeal for vice twofold greater than they had formerly shown for virtue, and thereby drew upon themselves the enmity of God. For many angels of God now consorted with women and begat sons who were overbearing and disdainful of every virtue, such confidence had they in their strength; in fact the deeds that tradition ascribes to them resemble the audacious exploits told by the Greeks of the giants. (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.72–73)

According to Josephus, the Sethites remained loyal to God until the seventh generation. But why include this specific chronological marker? What is its significance? The answer, it seems, is that Josephus wanted to connect the downfall of Seth's progeny with the activities of Cain's progeny. Josephus accomplishes this in three steps. First, in 1.59 we saw how Josephus reworks God's promise of sevenfold vengeance against Cain's killer to now read that Cain's progeny would be punished *at* the seventh generation.⁷¹ Next, in 1.64–65 we read about Lamech's children (including Tubal the inventor of war) and how Lamech knew that he (the seventh generation from Adam) would pay the price for Cain's fratricide. The very next line relates how it was during Adam's lifetime that the children of Cain became utterly depraved by perfecting their ancestor's violence. The note about Seth's progeny abandoning God in the seventh generation, then, suggests that it was during the time of Lamech and his offspring, the seventh generation, that the children of Seth began to abandon God. This reflects the same situation found in Pseudo-Philo where it is the Cainites that cause the world to pursue evil.⁷² Although Josephus does not connect the metallurgy of Tubal to the Sethite fall, he does note the corruption of sexuality. In *Biblical*

⁷¹ See chapter four for a review of Josephus's reworking of God's words to Cain Gen 4:15 and Lamech's song in Gen 4:24.

⁷² This is the view also taken by Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo*, 305 and Feldman, *Judean Antiquities*, 26. Franksman, on the other hand, does not mention any possible connections to *L.A.B.* (80–81).

Antiquities it is the music of Jobal that is associated with people committing sexually immoral acts. In *Ant.* 1.73, however, Josephus notes how the fall of the Sethites coincides with the time when the angels of God began to consort with women and begat overbearing sons who were disdainful of virtue. Josephus appears to be aware of the tradition that the Cainites extended evil in the world and has incorporated it into his interpretation of Gen 6:2. Although he does not specifically link the Sethites with those who had intercourse with the angels of God, Josephus has configured his narrative to present the clear convergence of evil, perpetuated by the Cainites and imitated by the Sethites, at the time when the angels of God came to earth.

The Animal Apocalypse in *1 Enoch* reveals another possible concurrence with this interpretation. In *1 Enoch* 85–86, Enoch relates to his son a vision he had about cows. In the dream the cows are of different colors and it is clear that what is being related is the story of the world's first family. In the vision there is a white bull (Adam), and a heifer (Eve) that gives birth to a dark bull calf (Cain) and a red bull calf (Abel). The dark calf gores the red calf. The red calf disappears from the vision, but the dark calf continues to grow, takes a young heifer and produces numerous dark calves.⁷³ The first heifer (Eve), not finding the red bull calf, grieves over its disappearance until she is comforted by the white bull (Adam) and bears another bull calf colored snow-white (Seth). In the vision the new snow-white bull (Seth) continues to grow, becomes wise and produces more snow-white calves.

The colors of the cows are symbolic. Adam's whiteness represents his purity. Abel's redness his own spilled blood or the blood from his sacrifice.⁷⁴ Cain's darkness foreshadows his murder of Abel as well as differentiating him from the Sethite line. Seth is white in order to reflect the statement in Gen 5:3 that Seth was in the image and likeness of Adam.⁷⁵ Thus, this portion of the vision is arranged to contrast the growing progeny from the lines of Cain and Seth.⁷⁶ In the second portion of the vision we discover the fate of these cows.

⁷³ G. W. E. Nickelsburg notes that the expression "could not see" is used elsewhere in the vision to indicate extinction (*1 Enoch* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001], 371).

⁷⁴ Patrick A. Tiller, *A Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch* (SBLEJL 4; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 225–26.

⁷⁵ R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 227–28.

⁷⁶ Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 371.

And again I saw a vision with my own eyes as I was sleeping, and saw the lofty heaven; and as I looked, behold a star fell down from heaven, but (managed) to rise and eat and to be pastured among those cows. Then I saw these big and dark cows, and behold they changed their cattle sheds, their pastures, and their calves; and they began to lament with each other. Once again I saw a vision, and I observed the sky and behold, I saw many stars descending and casting themselves down from the sky upon the first star; and they became bulls among those calves and were pastured with them, in their midst. I kept observing, and behold, I saw all of them extending their sexual organs like horses and commencing to mount upon the heifers, the bulls; and they all became pregnant and bore elephants, camels, and donkeys. So (the cattle) became fearful and frightened of them and began to bite with their teeth and swallow and to gore with their horns. Then they began to eat those bulls. And behold, all the children of the earth began to tremble and to shake before them and to flee from them. (*1 Enoch* 86)

This portion of the vision continues the story of the first family by connecting it with the “sons of God” story in Gen 6:1–4. The vision reflects the traditions about the angels in *1 Enoch* 6–8, although some elements in the vision may be earlier.⁷⁷ The use of stars as symbols for the watchers is in keeping with Jewish and Pagan association of stars with angels and heavenly beings. And the description of their “falling from heaven” in 86:1 may reflect the *Nephilim* of Gen 6:4.⁷⁸ The cattle are certainly connected to those of the first half of the vision in 85.1–10, but mention is only made of dark cattle while the white cattle are conspicuous by their absence. This may be an echo of the tradition already found in Pseudo-Philo that described the intermarriage of the Sethites with the Cainites. The reference to exchanging “sheds,” “pastures” and “calves” suggests two groups intermingling with one another.⁷⁹ The failure to mention the white cattle may suggest that they have been subsumed by the dark cattle.⁸⁰ The subsequent intermingling with the falling stars, the producing of giant animals and the fear upon the children of the earth all suggest a close affinity with other interpretations we have examined. The Sethites have been corrupted by their intermarriage with the Cainites, which took place at the same

⁷⁷ Stuckenbruck, “The Origins of Evil,” 109–10.

⁷⁸ Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 372.

⁷⁹ Charles, 229; Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 259; Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 372. Tiller, on the other hand, understands the absence of the white cows (Sethites) to mean that Asael only corrupted the Cainites at first (237–38).

⁸⁰ Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 372.

time as when evil began increasing in the world and the “angels of God” descended to the earth. The Cainites are those who cause the corruption of the Sethites and eventually become implicated with the fall of the angels of God.

There are two more places that this interpretation of Cain and his progeny surfaces. Both are later compositions than Josephus and *1 Enoch*. Although the identification of the sons of God as angels began to be rejected in Judaism in the second century CE, there is a version of this tradition preserved in the closely related works of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon* and *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer*. Together they bring together many of the elements examined above.

When *the children of men* began to multiply on the face of the earth and *beautiful* daughters were born to them, the sons of the *great ones* saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, *that they painted their eyes and put on rouge, and walked about with naked flesh. They conceived lustful thoughts* and they took wives to themselves from among all who pleased them. The Lord said in his Memra, “None of the Evil generations that are to arise (in the future) will be judged according to the order of judgment applied to the generation of the Flood, (that is) to be destroyed and wiped out from the world. Did I not put my holy spirit in them that they might perform good deeds? But behold, their deeds are evil. Behold I gave them an extension of a hundred and twenty years that they might repent, but they have not done so.” Shamahazai and Azael fell from heaven and were on earth in those days, and also after the sons of the *great ones* had gone in to the daughters of men, who bore them children; *these are called* the heroes of old, the men of renown. (Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 6:1–4)

Although a later composition, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon* reflects the tradition that it is angels who consort with women in Genesis 6. Instead of depicting a large number of fallen angels as in *1 En.* 6–7; 69.2; 86.3 and *Jub.* 5:1–6, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathon* only has two angels identified as Shamahazai and Azael.⁸¹ The description of the women painting their eyes and walking about naked is suggestive of wanton sexual immorality, and fits Pseudo-Philo’s description of the situation prior to the flood. But there is nothing here that identifies any of this with the Cainites. When we turn to *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer*, however, we find a very similar interpretation of Gen 6:1–4, but with some important enhancements. After commenting about how the generations of the

⁸¹ Everson notes that the names of these two angels do not appear in any pseudepigraphic or rabbinic literature until the eleventh century *Midrash Avkir* and Rashi (76).

righteous were descended from Seth and the generations of the wicked from Cain, we read:

Rabbi Meir said: The generations of Cain went about stark naked, men and women, just like the beasts, and they defiled themselves with all kinds of immorality, a man with his mother or his daughter, or the wife of his brother, or the wife of his neighbor, in public and in the streets, with evil inclination which is in the thought of their heart, as it is said, "And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth" (Gen 6:5). Rabbi said: The angels who fell from their holy place in heaven saw the daughters of the generations of Cain walking about naked, with their eyes painted like harlots, and they went astray after them, and took wives from amongst them, as it is said, "And the sons of Elohim saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all that they chose." (*Pirque R. El.* 22)

Once again the descendants of Cain are accused of increasing evil in the world. *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* includes the same details about the women walking about naked with painted eyes, but narrows the focus. Rather than accuse all of the generation of the flood of acting in this way, *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* has shifted the accusation to encompass one specific group, the Cainites. As depicted in Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, the Cainites are those who commit sexually immoral acts. There is no mention of their influence over the Sethites and indeed the introductory statements about the righteous generations of Seth seems to separate the two groups. But the fall of the angels is incorporated again into the interpretation. The sexually perverse practices of the Cainites are what attract the attention of the angels.⁸² Rather than recording the fall of the angels as occurring at the same time as the Cainites spread of evil, as in Josephus, *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* singles out the Cainites as responsible for the demise of the angels. The result, then, is the full responsibility of the Cainites for the presence of evil

⁸² There is a variant version of this tradition in Aggadat Bereshit as it is found in Ms. Oxford 2340. There the sons of God are not described as angels or Sethites but the sons of Cain. This interpretation is based on Eve's cryptic statement in Gen 4:1 where she claims to have acquired a man from God. Her statement was interpreted to mean that Cain was a "son of God." In a further twist, it is now the sons of God (Cainites) that are handsome and the women they marry are those who were attracted to them and "left their husbands and fled from them because of their beauty." In spite of the variation, the same elements found in *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* and *Biblical Antiquities* are found here. The Cainites introduce sexual immortality to the world and lead astray the rest of the population in creation (Lieve M. Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit* [Jewish and Christian Perspective Series, 4; Leiden, Brill, 2001], 254–55).

in the world to the extent that even the members of the heavenly host succumbed to their evil ways.

Among Jewish interpreters we may observe the tendency to extend the critique of Cain and his progeny to the exegesis of Gen 4:26 and 6:1–4. Cain's descendants were linked to either the idolatry that began during the generation of Enosh or implicated in the fall of the sons of God. Sometimes this critique suggested that the Cainites were also responsible for the demise of Seth's progeny. The traditions are certainly polyvalent, but all with the same results. The Cainites are responsible for the increasing level of evil in the world. The extended appeal of this opinion is reflected in the fact that in spite of broad rejection of the interpretation of the Sons of God as angels, *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* preserves a version that is consistent with early traditions that sometimes linked Cain with the generation of Enosh and the fall of the angels.

Christian interpreters followed a similar yet somewhat distinct trajectory than their Jewish counterparts. As noted above, Gen 4:26b is usually translated from the Hebrew as: "At that time people began to invoke the name of the Lord" (NRSV). But this reading is not supported by the LXX. Rather than translating אז as "then" or "at that time," the translator(s) read אז as זה ("this") which was rendered in Greek as οὗτος ("this one") referring back to Enosh. This marks the first major distinction between Jewish and Christian interpreters of this verse. Jewish exegetes typically understood Gen 4:26b as referring to the generation of Enosh, but not necessarily to him specifically.⁸³ As heirs of the LXX tradition, however, Christians *did* read this verse as referring to Enosh. Thus Gen 4:26b did not refer to the actions of the general population during the time of Enosh but specifically to the actions of Enosh.

Once אז had been misread, then הוֹחַל was read in an active rather than passive sense and vocalized as הוֹחִיל which means "he hoped." Thus the LXX renders it ἡλπισεν ("he hoped") referring to Enosh with a resulting translation of "This one hoped to call on the name of the Lord God."⁸⁴ The shift in meaning is subtle but significant. Rather than being a statement about how humankind began to seek God, it

⁸³ Fraade, 109.

⁸⁴ Sandmel, 21; Fraade, 5–11; Wevers, 66; Brayford, 257. The LXX also renders יהוה as κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ but this is of no consequence to our study of the Cain traditions.

becomes particularized to Seth's eldest son. Enosh is the first one who desires to call on the name of the Lord.⁸⁵

The third shift in meaning engendered by the LXX depends on how the infinitive ἐπικαλεῖσθαι ("to call upon or name") is understood. In the Hebrew Bible the phrase קרא בשם יהוה occurs approximately thirty times and the LXX uses the middle voice of the verb ἐπικαλέω to translate קרא. In those cases where either the active or middle voice of ἐπικαλέω is used the context clearly suggests some type of divine worship. Moreover, the passive voice of ἐπικαλέω is never used to translate the phrase קרא בשם יהוה.⁸⁶ The problem, however, is that the infinitive form in LXX Gen 4:26 can be either middle or passive. The two forms are identical. As a result it can be read in the middle voice as, "he hoped to call (for himself) on the name of the Lord God" or in the passive voice as: "he hoped to be called the name of the Lord God." Although the translation strategy of the LXX would suggest reading the verb in the middle voice, both readings are evidenced in the history of Christian interpretation of this verse.

Among those who understood ἐπικαλεῖσθαι to be in the middle voice, there arose a set of traditions which positioned Enosh as a link in a chain of righteous individuals that extended from Seth to Jesus. This righteous line is found in Luke's genealogy of Jesus that stretches from Adam, the son of God, to Jesus, the son of God, and includes both Seth and Enosh (LK 3:23–38).⁸⁷ Since Enosh was one who hoped to call on the name of the Lord God, some Christian exegetes interpreted this as his desire to name the name of Jesus. Hence Enosh is among those in the Old Testament who bear witness to coming of Jesus Christ and the Christian Church.⁸⁸

In the fourth century, however, some Christian interpreters began to read ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in the passive voice. The earliest extant witness of this interpretation of Gen 4:26b is in Eusebius of Emesa's *Commentary on Genesis* where he comments on the LXX translation of the verse.

⁸⁵ Wenham, 115–16.

⁸⁶ Fraade, 10–11.

⁸⁷ George Synkellos connects the song of Lamech to the genealogy in Luke by noting that Jesus is seventy-seventh from Adam (*Chronographia* [trans. William Adler and Paul Tuffin; Oxford University Press, 2002], 12).

⁸⁸ Fraade, 47, 48–62. See, for instance, Origen, *Commentary to Romans*, 8.3 (PG 14.1165–66).

This one hoped to call upon the name of God. In the Hebrew it does not say thus, but “this one hoped to be called by the name of the Lord God,” that is, to be named son of God and God. For the (descendants) of Seth have become righteous ones, whence scripture, consistent with itself, says after these things: *And the sons of God saw the daughters of men*; this refers to the righteous ones, for there had been no intermingling of the sons of Seth with those of Cain. (Eusebius of Emesa, *Commentary on Genesis Fragment 16 Ad Gen 4:26*)⁸⁹

Eusebius of Emesa seems to have preferred an alternative reading of 4:26 in which he draws attention to the fact that the Hebrew version resembles more the dative form (τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου θεοῦ) than the accusative (τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου θεοῦ) found in the LXX.⁹⁰ The difference, though seemingly small, makes it easier for Eusebius to read the verb “to call” (ἐπικαλεῖσθαι) in the passive voice. Thus, Enosh was called “by” or “with” the name of the Lord God. According to Eusebius, Enosh hoped to be called the “son of God” and “God.” The expression “son of God” may be connected to an understanding of κυρίως as a synonym for “son of God” since both are titles of Jesus in the New Testament. Or, more likely, it could be he considers the expression “son of God” to be a synonym for righteous individuals (c.f. Wis 2:18).⁹¹ Whatever the source of the epithet, Eusebius probably includes it in his translation because of its subsequent occurrence in Gen 6:2. He understands the “sons of God” in 6:2 not as angels who came down to interfere sexually with women, but as Sethites descended from the first “son of God,” Enosh. Eusebius understands these verses as referring to the intermingling of the progeny of Seth and Cain.⁹² What we discover, then, is that reading ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in the passive voice allows Eusebius to blame the Cainites for the corruption of the Sethites. The sons of God (Sethites) were corrupted by their intermingling with the daughters of men (Cainites). While Eusebius is not following the interpretations of Josephus and the Animal Apocalypse which understand the sons of God as angels, he is in agreement with them that it is the Cainites who are responsible for the demise of the sons of God whether they be angels or Sethites.

⁸⁹ Translation from R. B. Ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress: The Use of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis* (Traditio Exegetica Graeca 6; Lovanii, Aedibus Peeters, 1997), 243.

⁹⁰ Fraade, 63; Romeny, 244.

⁹¹ Alexander, 66; Fraade, 64.

⁹² Fraade, 65; Romeny, 244.

This is not the first time this line of interpretation surfaced. As noted above, in the second century Jewish exegetes began to reject the identification of the sons of God as angels. Christian exegetes too became uncomfortable with this interpretation.⁹³ They began to “naturalize” Gen 6:2 by understanding the verse not as the interference of divine beings with human women, but the intermingling of the Cainites with the Sethites. The earliest evidence for this interpretation among Christian exegetes is found in the fragments from the *Chronicles* of Julius Africanus (ca. 160–ca. 240).⁹⁴

When humankind became numerous on the earth, the angels of heaven had intercourse with the daughters of men. In some copies I have found “the sons of God.” In my opinion, it is recounted [that the descendants] of Seth are called “Sons of God” by the Spirit, since the genealogies of the righteous and the patriarchs up until the Savior are traced from him [Seth]. But the descendants of Cain it designates as human seed, as having nothing divine because of the wickedness of their line and the dissimilarity of their nature, so that when they were mingled together, God grew angry. But if we understand them as angels, then it was they who transmitted magic and sorcery, as well as the numbers of the motion of astronomical phenomena, to their wives, from whom they produced the giants as children; and when depravity came into being because of them, God resolved to destroy every class of living things in a flood—this would be unbelievable. (Julius Africanus, *Chronicles*)⁹⁵

Africanus presents two possible interpretations of Gen 6:2. The first, for which he admits a preference, understands the sons of God as being the Sethites. Although he does not mention Enosh it is clear that he is aware of and working within this interpretive tradition. The second interpretation is the older tradition inherited from second temple documents like *1 En.* 6:2 and *Jub.* 5:1 that understood the sons of God as angels. Africanus clearly is not in favor of the older interpretation. Africanus demonstrates an intersection of the interpretations that understood Enosh as a righteous individual in the chain from Seth to Christ with the interpretation that the sons of God were Sethites. The newer interpretation allows him to link the sons of God with Seth and ultimately the righteous line of Jesus. Moreover, this provides him a way to explain the ongoing problem of evil in the world. The

⁹³ Alexander, 63.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ This passage is preserved by George Syncellos in his *Chronographia* (Adler and Tuffin, 26).

intermingling of the Cainite and Sethite races means that in spite of the flood evil continues to exist in the world. Whereas, if the sons of God had been angels, then that race of giants would have been responsible for evil and been wiped out in the flood. Africanus's comments are significant because it demonstrates that Christian exegetes were making similar interpretive moves as their Jewish counterparts by rejecting the "angels" interpretation. Instead, he understands it as a description of how Cain's descendants perpetuated evil in the world.

While there were still those who understood Gen 6:2 as referring to angels,⁹⁶ other Christian exegetes began to interpret the sons of God to refer to Enosh and the Sethites who intermingled with the Cainites.

For Enosh according to the Hebrews is "man." Truly, it [Scripture] confers upon him that which is distinctive of man. "He," it says, "hoped to be called by the name of the Lord," that action which is fitting for the righteous man. (Didymus the Blind, *On Genesis*)

We made the point before in teaching you that it is customary with Scripture to call human beings sons of God. So since these people took their origin from Seth and from his son named Enosh (the text, remember saying, "He it was who hoped to invoke the name of the Lord God"), those descended from him in future were called "sons of God" by sacred scripture for the reason of their imitation of the virtue of their ancestors up to his time. On the other hand, he gave the name "sons of men" to those born before Seth, the descendants of Cain and those taking their descent from him. "Human beings began to be numerous on the earth," the text says, "and daughters were born to them. Now, when the sons of God" (the descendants of Seth and Enosh) "saw that the daughters of men" (those born to the other [Cain], whom he described by saying that "daughters were born to them") "were beautiful." See how through this expression he indicates to us all their licentiousness; it was not through desire to raise families but out of sheer lechery. (John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 22.8)

The repentance of God [Gen. 6:6] is a sign of his awesome solicitude that perhaps thereby He may be able to care for those who forgot the power of the Creator, who mingled with the cursed seed of Cain in fornication and dissolute lives. (Saint Gregory, §295)

⁹⁶ See for instance: Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator* 3.2.14 (FC 23: 210–11); Nemesius of Emesa *On the Nature of Man* 58 (LCC 4:420); Ambrose, *On Noah* 4.8 (PL 14:385).

All that we indubitably know, from the authentic Scripture in the Hebrew and Christian traditions, is the fact that in the period before the flood there were many giants, all of who belonged to the earthly city of God in human society, and that there were sons of God descended from Seth who abandoned their holiness and sank down into this city of men. (Augustine, *City of God* 15.23)

Some interpreters correctly explain that the select race of Seth was called “angels of God” by Moses. For Genesis teaches that while the women of the tribe of Cain excelled in vengeful murder, brother-hatred, and apostasy, the foremost descendants of Seth began to call on the name of the Lord, that is, an angelic hymn. For Genesis says: “To Seth was born a son. He called his name Enosh. This one began to call on the name of the Lord God” ... For the descendants of Seth were like angels, singing an angelic hymn, while the descendants of Cain were joined with the damned, and God was provoked to anger. (*Chronicon Paschale* [Fraade, 85])⁹⁷

While there are a number of points of support for this tradition among the Greek Fathers, there is evidence for the popularity of this interpretation in the Syriac sources as well. What is important about this evidence is that while the Greek Fathers’ exegesis was influenced by the LXX (and the Old Latin), the Syrian exegetes used a different scriptural version, the *Peshitta*. Yet, the understanding of Gen 4:26b and its connection to the Sethites and the Cainites is resilient.

Unlike the LXX, the *Peshitta* retains the word “then” (from the Hebrew **אז**) and renders the passive **הוּחַל** with an active form. This results in the subject of the sentence being “he,” referring to either Seth or Enosh, and translated as “he began.” Thus in the *Peshitta* it is Seth or Enosh who “began to call on the name of the Lord.”⁹⁸ Consequently, this construction should not result in a reading that understands Gen 4:26b as Enosh being “called by the name of the Lord”. But this is exactly what happened anyway.

At about the same time that Eusebius of Emesa was interpreting the LXX to mean that Enosh “hoped to be called by the name of the Lord,” Ephrem the Syrian offered a similar interpretation in his *Commentary on Genesis*.

⁹⁷ The Greek text can be found in *Chronicon Paschale* (ed. L. Dindorf; CSHB 1; Bonn: Weber, 1832), 38. This tradition is also preserved in the *Chronographia* of John Malalas. However, there are textual problems since the first chapter is missing from the twelfth century manuscript. The comments on Cainites and Sethites seem to have been added by a later chronographer (Fraade, 88 n. 129).

⁹⁸ Fraade notes, however, that it is still possible to understand the Syriac to read in a generic sense of “people began to call on the name of the Lord” (92).

After Seth begot Enosh, [Moses] wrote *at that time he began to call on the name of the Lord*. Because Seth had separated himself from the house of Cain, the Sethites were called by the name of the Lord, that is, the righteous people of the Lord. (Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 5.1.2)

While Ephrem quotes from the *Peshitta*, it is clear that he interprets the verb “to call” (ἐπικαλεῖσθαι) in the passive voice.⁹⁹ The Sethites were “called by the name of the Lord” and therefore, righteous and separate from the Cainites. How Ephrem arrived at this interpretation from the *Peshitta* is not clear. He was either influenced by the LXX or was acquainted with the interpretive traditions surrounding Gen 4:26b.¹⁰⁰ What is significant is that in spite of using a different translation, Ephrem demonstrates the resilience of this interpretation of the verse and its connection to the story of Cain and Seth. Further investigation reveals that his interpretation of 4:26b is part of a broader interpretive approach preserved in Ephrem’s commentary.

We noted above how Ephrem described Cain’s death at the hand of Lamech. The motivation for this murder, we are told, was to allow the intermingling of the Cainites and Sethites.¹⁰¹ The Cainites, living under the curse of their forefather, were unable to cultivate the land and recognized that this would eventually bring about the end of their generation. As long as Cain was alive, the Sethites refused to intermingle with the Cainites. Lamech’s decision to kill Cain was motivated by the need to remove the barrier (Cain) between the two tribes and to allow them to intermingle (4.3.1–2).¹⁰²

Once Cain was dead the Cainites began finding ways to convince the Sethites to intermingle with them. The female Cainites began dressing to seduce the male Sethites. The women were assisted by two of Lamech’s sons. Jabal, the keeper of livestock, enticed the Sethites with meat while Jubal, the inventor of music, captivated them with

⁹⁹ Fraade, 92; Matthews, Amar, McVey, 133.

¹⁰⁰ Sebastian Brock notes: “This interpretation, which represents the dominant understanding of the Gen. 6:2 in Syriac writers of all periods, would seem likely to be of Jewish origin, even though it is not found explicitly in extant Jewish sources until very much later” (“Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,” *JJS* 30 [1979]: 226).

¹⁰¹ The prohibition against the Sethites intermingling with the Cainites is common in Syriac literature as witnessed by the many injunctions in the *Cave of Treasures*.

¹⁰² In his *Hymns of Paradise*, 1.11, Ephrem describes the Sethites as living on higher ground than the Cainites and refusing to go down to them. This is also a common theme found in the *Cave of Treasures*.

the sound of the lyre.¹⁰³ The plot worked. Lamech's removal of Cain prevented the progeny of Cain from perishing by intermarrying with the Sethites and thus blunting the effects of the curse placed on Cain (4.3.3). The result, however, is the diluting of the Sethite race.

Ephrem repeats this story in his comments on Gen 6:2. The Sethites, called the sons of God, left their wives for the female Cainites and intermarried with them.¹⁰⁴ The female Sethites, seeing that they had lost their husbands, followed suit and abandoned their former position and began to intermarry with the Cainite men. The Cainite men were interested neither in the women nor in gaining wealth, but in finding a way to have their lands cultivated and thus guarantee the longevity of their progeny (6.3.1–3).

Ephrem concludes his story about the progeny of Cain and Seth with a quote from Genesis. In Gen 6:12 we read that "God saw that all flesh had corrupted its way." This is typically understood as a summary statement detailing how humans and animals had become distorted to such an extent God was justified in destroying the world through the flood.¹⁰⁵ But Ephrem makes an important interpretive move in relation to this verse. Although he has not yet commented on that part of Genesis, he quotes the words of 6:12 as God's displeasure with the Cainites and Sethites and says, "It is because of this wantonness that assailed both the men and the women, Scripture says, all flesh corrupted its path" (6.3.3). By linking the summary statement of 6:12 with the intermingling of the Cainites and Sethites, Ephrem lays the blame for the corruption of creation and its subsequent destruction at the feet of the Cainites. Lamech's murder of Cain, followed by the seduction of the Sethites, led to the exponential growth of evil in the world.

Among Christian interpreters we may also observe the tendency to extend the critique of Cain and his progeny to the exegesis of Gen 4:26 and 6:1–4. Unlike Jewish interpreters, however, there was no linking of the Cainites with the beginning of idolatry. Rather the focus, based on the LXX reading of Gen 4:26, was on how the righteous generations of Seth, descended from Enosh, were called the "sons of God." The role of

¹⁰³ The *Cave of Treasures* relates how Jubal made musical instruments which were filled with devils and that lasciviousness and fornication increased among the children of Cain and that the daughters of Cain eventually led astray the Sethites (Budge, 87–90).

¹⁰⁴ A little later Ephrem notes that the female Cainites were of smaller stature than the Sethite men, perhaps this is somehow related to the curse of Cain (6.6).

¹⁰⁵ Wenham, 171.

the Cainites in Christian exegesis was to corrupt the righteous line of Seth/Enosh and ultimately cause God to destroy the world because of this intermingling.

Summary

The end of this story is anything but that. Although Cain simply fades from the scene in Genesis, the fact that he was able to build a city and raise children seemed unjust in light of his murder of innocent Abel. Compounding this injustice is the failure of Genesis to describe when and how Cain died. As it stands, Cain never seems to die. But these gaps in the Genesis story become the exegetical peg upon which numerous traditions were hung.

Cain's activity as a builder may seem innocuous in Genesis, but in the hands of ancient interpreters his city became more than a place for his family to live in protection. For some, the city becomes a symbol of Cain's grasping greed demonstrating that he had not learned the lessons of his crime. For others it is an attempt to leave behind a monument to himself. And for still others it is a philosophy that perpetuates the teachings of those who are "lovers of self." However it is interpreted, the common thread in each of these is the conclusion that the ongoing influence of Cain in the world is symbolized by his city. According to some interpreters, Cain did not simply construct a city and fade away in obscurity. He multiplied his crimes by building a monument that demonstrated pride in his crime.

Interpreters were also not satisfied with the way the narrative shifted away from Cain without mentioning his death. This created a theological problem since God was seen to allow a murderer to escape punishment. The result was a set of traditions that not only described his death, but also incorporated details that satisfied the need for divine retribution. Sometimes this was satisfied through descriptions of Cain's accidental death, his possible demise in the flood or his murder at the hand of his own descendant, Lamech. However they chose to describe his death, exegetes were careful to make sure that this gap in the story was sufficiently filled.

But even Cain's death did not bring an end to the story. His children, beginning with Lamech and his sons, continued to perpetuate the evil of their ancestor. They were held responsible for introducing idolatry, sexual immorality and the demise of the Sethites and some-

times even the angels of heaven. The result of this interpretive activity is that the legacy of Cain continues on and becomes an explanation for the continuing presence of evil in the world. As we saw in chapter two, Cain is the first sinner and even though some exegetes suggested that he was forgiven, there was a strong set of traditions that saw him as the perpetuator of evil. Cain was conceived in evil, committed evil, and evil continued through his progeny.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BLOOD OF RIGHTEOUS ABEL

Vain is thy Covenant O Jehovah, I am the Accuser
& Avenger of Blood O Earth Cover not thou the
Blood of Abel

(William Blake, *The Ghost of Abel*)

In the previous five chapters, the focus has been on how grammatical ambiguities and gaps in the narrative of Genesis 4 led to exegetical embellishments and expansions of the story. At the same time, there exists a set of traditions that, although based on the Cain and Abel story, do not find an obvious source in Genesis 4. In the case of Abel these include his status as a righteous individual, his role as avenger and judge, and the Christian portrayal of Abel as a prototype of Christ and the church. What follows below traces the development and significance of these Abel traditions.

Was Abel the first righteous person?

As noted in the previous chapters, Genesis 4 is short on details. In 4:1–2 we are told the names of Eve’s two sons and their respective occupations. The story then immediately shifts to a description of their sacrificial practices. Genesis does not provide any details about the brothers apart from their names and occupations. We are not told, for instance, anything about their personalities, their relationship with their parents or how they may have interacted with God prior to their presentation of sacrifices to him. In fact, Abel does not even get a speaking part in this drama. The only details and conversations that are provided are those which help set up the climax of the story; Cain’s murder of Abel. But in spite of the paucity of detail, some interpreters identified in the brothers characteristics that led them to apply labels to each of the brothers. In the case of Abel, the fact that his sacrifice was the first to be accepted by God established him as an ideal figure, the embodiment of virtue, which in turn led some exegetes to label him as the first righteous individual.

It is not clear when the classification of Abel as a righteous individual first began. The LXX, for instance, follows the Hebrew version of Gen 4:2 closely and does not expand the text in any way that hints at Abel's righteousness. There is a Greek fragment of *Jub.* 4:1 that calls Abel righteous (τὸν δίκαιον Ἀβελ), but there is no evidence for this reading in any of the extant Hebrew and Ethiopic copies of *Jubilees* suggesting that it is probably a later interpolation made by a Christian copyist.¹

The Wisdom of Solomon may provide one of the earliest indications that Abel was considered to be among the righteous. In Wis 10:1–21 there is a list of seven righteous heroes each of whom is paired with a wicked counterpart. The list begins with Adam in the garden and ends with the Israelite Exodus from Egypt. Each of these seven contrasting pairs demonstrates how Wisdom benefited the Israelite people throughout their history.² Wisdom saves those who embrace her and punishes those who reject her. Heading these seven pairs is a contrast between Adam, the first man, and his firstborn son, Cain.³ Wisdom is said to have sustained Adam in spite of his blunder (10:1). Cain, on the other hand, is said to have rejected Wisdom, committed fratricide (10:3) and, as a result of his crime, died in the flood (10:4). Interestingly, this is the only pair of the seven in this chapter that does *not* designate an individual as “righteous.” While Noah (10:4), Abraham (10:5), Lot (10:6), Jacob (10:10), Joseph (10:13), and Israel (10:20) are all labeled as “righteous,” Adam is not. Instead we have the only instance in this chapter in which an individual is designated as “unrighteous” rather than “righteous.” Cain is called an unrighteous man (ἄδικος) when he rejects wisdom and kills his brother (10:3). While this is inconsistent with the format of the subsequent pairs in the chapter, the reader could conclude that Adam was a righteous individual even though he is not designated as such.

But what of Abel? In 10:3 Abel merely functions as the evidence for Cain's unrighteousness. Even more so than in the Genesis account, his

¹ Albert Marie Denis, *Concordance grecque des Pseudépigraphes d'Ancien Testament* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain, Institut orienta, 1987), 89, 902.

² David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (AB 43; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 211; John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch* (JSPSup 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 57.

³ In keeping with the custom of the book, *Wisdom* does not mention any historical character by name. Since the book presupposes familiarity with the Jewish Scriptures, it is assumed that the reader would recognize the stories of Adam and Cain (J. A. F. Gregg, *The Wisdom of Solomon* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922], 95).

role here is minor. But since Adam is contrasted with the actions of his firstborn son, readers might inquire about the status of Adam's second son. The fact that Cain committed a crime and Abel did not suggests that Abel was innocent.⁴ Thus, although the author of the Wisdom of Solomon does not position Abel as one of the righteous individuals, readers could easily surmise that since Cain was unrighteous, Abel was righteous.⁵

Fourth Maccabees provides some insight as to how Abel was considered to be an ideal figure among exegetes. In the closing chapter of the book, the mother of the seven martyred brothers is given a chance to address her sons. As it presently stands, chapter 18 is probably a later insertion since the mother has already addressed her sons in 16:6–25 and then committed suicide in 17:1. The second speech in chapter 18 is an expanded version of the first, but this does not deny it rhetorical value particularly in the way that it catalogs the lives of ideal figures in Israel's history.⁶ In the speech the mother recalls for her sons the lessons taught to them by their father (18:10–19). The father is presented as one who fulfilled the injunctions of Deuteronomy 6 by teaching his children the commandments of God, the meaningfulness of the covenant, and by teaching them through paradigm.⁷ The catalog of the father's lessons is presented in two parts. The first part highlights the stories of eight ideal figures in Israelite history who suffered unjustly. Abel, Isaac, Joseph, Phinehas, the three young men and Daniel are all presented as a paradigm of those who remained obedient to God to the point of death (18:11–13).⁸ Part two is a chain of five scriptural quotations, each of which contain promises of rescue and/or reward for those suffering unjustly. In the context of the brutal torture scenes in 4 Maccabees during which the seven brothers embrace death rather than disobey God, the paradigmatic figures and the scriptural promises become applicable to their situation. Particularly relevant here is the recitation of the first five words of Ps 34:20 (33:20 LXX) which declares

⁴ Levison, 51.

⁵ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 572; Karina Martin Hogan, "The Exegetical Background of the 'Ambiguity of Death' in the Wisdom of Solomon," *JSJ* 30 (1999): 22.

⁶ David A. deSilva, *4 Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Sinaiticus* (SEPT; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 256–57.

⁷ deSilva, *4 Maccabees*, 259.

⁸ In the case of Isaac, the source of the trial is God's testing of Abraham. Phinehas represents those whose vigilance stems the tide of lawlessness among the Israelites (deSilva, *4 Maccabees*, 260).

“Many are the tribulations of the righteous” (18:15). This quotation supplies a dictum for the reader of 4 Maccabees that has already been reflected in the stories of Abel, Joseph, the three young men and Daniel. These stories prepare the reader, as a righteous person, to expect affliction.⁹ Abel’s place at the head of the list reflects not only the chronological order in which Israel’s ideal figure lived; it also positions him as the initial paradigm for those righteous individuals who suffer death. Unlike Wis 10:3, Abel is not merely a prop to demonstrate Cain’s unrighteousness. Instead, it is Cain who moves to the background and Abel is brought front and center as the first example of a righteous figure who was unjustly murdered. By recalling Abel’s fate the author of 4 Maccabees 18 demonstrates that the righteous have suffered since the beginning of creation and, as the other ideal figures in 18:11–13 reveals, this is the fate that all righteous individuals can expect. Thus, even though no declaration of righteousness is pronounced over Abel in Genesis 4, it is awarded to him posthumously by later interpreters who perceive him as the first example of righteous suffering.

Philo, of course, has much to say about Cain and Abel and often interprets the two brothers according to Greek Stoic ideas. His description of the younger son is as the embodiment of virtue (ἀρετή) and holiness (ὁσιότης), one who refers all things to God and represents all those who love God (*Sacrifices* 10, 14; *Worse* 32).¹⁰ Cain on the other hand, is representative of evil (κακία) and one who refers all things to himself (*Sacrifices* 14; *Worse* 32).

In spite of the large amount of space that Philo dedicates to the interpretation of the two brothers’ story, there is only one possible reference to Abel’s status as “righteous.” In his commentary on Genesis, Philo explains why Moses details the occupation of the younger brother, Abel, before that of Cain, the older brother. It is as a part of this commentary that, for the first and only time, Philo contrasts the two brothers by labeling specifically the one as righteous and the other as evil.

⁹ Jan Willem van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (JSJS 57; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 240; deSilva, *4 Maccabees*, 262.

¹⁰ Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 109; Flavius Josephus, *Judean Antiquities 1–4* (translation and commentary by Louis H. Feldman; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 19 n. 112.

Even though the righteous man (ὁ δίκαιος) was younger in time than the wicked one (τοῦ φαύλου), still he was older in activity. Wherefore now, when their activities are appraised, he is placed first in order. (Philo, QG 1.59)

Ralph Marcus notes that the word he translates here as “righteous” (ὁ δίκαιος) is supported by Procopius of Gaza.¹¹ The difficulty, of course, is that extant Greek versions of Philo’s *Questions in Genesis* are fragmentary and the bulk of the work is preserved in Armenian. When Marcus rendered his translation he was confident that “the Armenian language is singularly well designed to reproduce the word-order, word compound and many of the idioms of the Greek.”¹² However, the appeal to Procopius notwithstanding, caution should be exercised when referring to this portion of Philo’s works. Without an actual Greek text to consult, it is difficult to determine whether Philo used ὁ δίκαιος to describe Abel or whether the Armenian text and Procopius are anachronistically conditioned by an awareness of the Abel traditions. The fact that this seems to be the only occurrence in which Philo describes Abel as “righteous,” weakens the evidence that he is working within this part of the Abel traditions. Thus while Philo attributes many qualities of virtue to Abel, it is not clear that righteousness is one of them.

Josephus may be among the first of those who unambiguously associates the concept of righteousness with Abel. In *Antiquities* Josephus provides a description of the two brothers that goes beyond Genesis 4.

Now the brothers rejoiced in different pursuits. For Abel, the youngest, had regard for righteousness (δικαιοσύνης) and, believing that God was present with him in all which he did, gave consideration to virtue (ἀρετή); and his life was that of a shepherd. Cain on the other hand, was completely evil (πονηρότατος) and only interested in what he could gain. He was the first to think of plowing the earth.¹³ (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.53)

The description of Abel as a one who “had regard for righteousness” is part of Josephus’s moralizing tendency in *Antiquities*. On a number of occasions he makes brief additions or alterations to the biblical narrative in order to stress that the biblical characters are examples of

¹¹ Ralph Marcus, trans., *Philo*, Supplement I (LCL 380; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1953), 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, vii.

¹³ Translation mine.

virtue from which moral lessons may be drawn.¹⁴ As a part of these expansions, Josephus explicitly elaborates on the virtues and/or vices of a biblical character in order to demonstrate their paradigmatic qualities.¹⁵ Characteristics worthy of emulation include: courage, godliness, wisdom, and moderation. But the most common virtue to be applied to a character is “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνης). Attridge notes that in *Antiquities* righteousness “is so common as to be virtually without content. Δίκαιος is applied by Josephus to almost every positively evaluated figure in the biblical history. The term thus functions as the most inclusive designation for virtue in general.”¹⁶

In addition to Abel, other major biblical characters who receive this designation in *Antiquities* include: Noah (1.99), Abraham (1.158), Jacob (2.149), Samuel (6.294), Abigail (6.308), David (7.110), Solomon (8.21) and Jehoshaphat (8.394). Similar to 4 Macc. 18:11, however, is Abel’s designation as the first righteous person. In 4 Maccabees the list of righteous individuals begins with Abel not Adam. In the Wisdom of Solomon 10 Adam is the only positive character *not* designated as righteous, although one could imply as much. In *Antiquities* “righteousness” is never used in conjunction with Adam. Abel is the first biblical character with which this quality is associated. Thus, while “righteousness” in *Antiquities* is a virtue that is applied widely to positively evaluated figures in the biblical history, Abel stands at the head of all of these. This suggests, then, that the developing traditions surrounding the figure of Abel understood him to be the first human being who possessed qualities that could and should be emulated. Adam’s status as the first created being and his previous experiences with God may have disqualified him as an unsuitable paradigm. But Abel’s status as the first human to obey God outside of the garden made him a role model that could be emulated by all who lived in the Post-Edenic world.

Turning to the New Testament we find these authors following a similar interpretative trajectory. For instance, at the conclusion of the seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus’ condemnation of the religious leadership is interpreted through the figure of Abel. In

¹⁴ Harold W. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* (HDR 7; Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press for Harvard Theological Review, 1976), 68.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

Matt 23:35 the Matthean Jesus explicitly refers to Abel as “righteous” (Ἀβελ τοῦ δικαίου). Luke’s version of this saying in 11:51 does not refer to Abel as “righteous” which may suggest that it is a Matthean addition to the Q source.¹⁷ If it is an addition it demonstrates the degree of familiarity that Matthew had with the Abel tradition so that describing Abel as “righteous” was a natural expansion of the Q source.¹⁸

1 John 3:12 declares that Abel was righteous because of his deeds. While Matthew turns Abel’s righteousness into an epithet, the author of 1 John connects Abel’s status as righteous to the deeds he performed prior to his murder. In 3:12 the writer asks why Cain killed Abel and then answers: “because his deeds were evil but his brother’s righteous” (ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια). Whether Abel’s “righteous deeds” refer back to his divinely sanctioned sacrificial practices or something else is not explicated.¹⁹ But the author is clearly working within the righteous Abel tradition as evidenced by his use of terminology similar to that of Philo (QG 1.59) and Josephus (*Ant.* 1.53).²⁰ What is noteworthy here is the use of the Cain and Abel story once again as a paradigm for the readers. 1 John 3:12 exhorts readers *not* to be like Cain (οὐ καθὼς) who murdered his righteous brother. Moreover, they should not be shocked if the world hates them (3:13). Just as Cain hated Abel and eventually killed him, so too followers of Jesus should, like Abel, expect to be persecuted by those who hate them.²¹ As in 4 Maccabees and Josephus, Abel becomes a paradigm for positive, righteous behavior.

In Heb 11:4 Abel is presented as a paradigmatic figure who is extolled for both his righteousness and faith. In this chapter the author provides a definition of faith (vv. 1–3) followed by a list of characters from biblical history whose faith earned them God’s approval. Heading the list, once more, is Abel, who, because of his faith, was determined by God to be righteous (ἐμαρτυρήθη εἶναι δίκαιος). Whether Abel was declared “righteous” because of his sacrificial technique or his faith is a

¹⁷ James M. Robinson, *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 288; Dale C. Allison, *The Intertextual Jesus: Scripture in Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000), 85.

¹⁸ Matt 23:35 will be examined more fully in a subsequent section of this chapter.

¹⁹ Strecker, 109.

²⁰ Judith Lieu, “What Was From The Beginning: Scripture and Tradition in the Johannine Epistles,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 467.

²¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 444.

matter for discussion.²² But it is perhaps the common tradition of Abel as a righteous individual that leads the author of Hebrews to conclude that Abel also possessed “faith.” Earlier in 10:38, the author provided a quotation of Hab 2:4, “My righteous one will live by faith.” This quotation, in turn, becomes the basis for the faith of Abel and the rest of the paradigmatic figures listed in chapter 11 since faith and righteousness were linked together directly.²³ For the author of Hebrews, then, Abel becomes the first example of faith and righteousness that should be modeled by readers of the epistle.

In addition to the above, there is an abundance of examples in which Abel is referred to as “righteous” and only a sampling of them can be offered here. For instance, in the *Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 9:7–10 the seer is taken into the seventh heaven where he describes seeing “all of the righteous from the time of Adam onwards” including “holy Abel and all the righteous” who together worship the Lord (9:28). Reference to Abel’s righteousness is also found among the *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers* (6:4; 12:53), *Tg. Neof. Gen* 4:8, the *Epistles of Cyrpian* (55.5; 80.2), the *Celementine Homilies* (2.16), the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*²⁴ and the *Chronographia* of George Synkellos.²⁵ When specific “righteousness” terminology is missing, Abel is portrayed in variously different ways as the embodiment of virtue. Thus, the *T. Iss.* 5:4 refers to Abel as “holy” and as such places him in the position of being the first saint (καθὼς εὐλόγησε πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους ἀπὸ Ἀβελ ἕως τοῦ νῦν). Augustine too lists Abel as the first saint at the head of a list of saints that culminates with John the Baptist (*Against the Two Letters of the Pelagians* 3.24). And the *Apocalypse of Sederach* says that the divine virtue of love dwelt in the heart of Abel (1.18). A survey of the literature reveals that those authors who label Abel as “righteous” are usually Christians heavily influenced by the New Testament. Many times these authors include material about Abel as a part of a quotation of Matt 23:35 through which they are reading Genesis 4. As we will see in a

²² James Moffatt, *Epistle to the Hebrews* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924), 163–64; Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 316–17; William L. Lane, *Hebrews* 9–13 (WBC 47b; Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 334–35.

²³ Ellingworth, 572; David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 388.

²⁴ The *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* 7 contains an interesting statement put into the mouth of Mary in which she claims that there was no one righteous in the world before Abel.

²⁵ George Synkellos, *Chronographia*, 9.

subsequent section, Abel's tragic death and the title of "righteous" that was affixed to him by the Matthean Jesus becomes an important part of Christian exhortation to martyrdom.

There is one interesting development in the Abel traditions that is found in Augustine's writings. While Augustine often referred to Abel as "righteous" he was also concerned that some Christians misinterpreted Abel's righteous status to such a degree that they misunderstood the nature of sin. These interpreters taught that sin was not a state which one inherited simply because one was a human being, but rather was a sickness that infected those who imitated Adam's disobedience. In countering this teaching, Augustine asked why then could not humans have been made righteous by imitating Abel.

For although many sinners have preceded us in the time of this present life, and have been imitated in their sin by those who have sinned at a later date, yet they will have it, that only Adam is mentioned as he in whom all have sinned by imitation, since he was the first of men who sinned. And on the same principle, Abel ought certainly to have been mentioned, as he "in which one" all likewise are justified by imitation, inasmuch as he was himself the first man who lived justly. (Augustine, *Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism*, 1.19)

Augustine is clearly working within the righteous Abel tradition and his source for this tradition is most certainly the New Testament. Initially his appeal to righteous Abel seems merely a rhetorical exercise to counter an interpretation of Romans 5:14 that he considers to be aberrant. But as becomes clear in some of his later writings, there were some who had taken Abel's righteous status to mean that he was in fact sinless.

According to Augustine, Pelagius taught that Abel lived a sin free life, a charge that Augustine brings up more than once.

But they say: "He is not condemned; because the statement that all sinned in Adam, was not made because of the sin which is derived from one's birth, but because of imitation of him." If, therefore, Adam is said to be the author of all the sins which followed his own, because he was the first sinner of the human race, then how is it that Abel, rather than Christ, is not placed at the head of all the righteous, because he was the first righteous man? (Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 10)

He then enumerates those "who not only lived without sin, but are described as having led holy lives,—Abel, Enoch, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua the son of Nun, Phinehas, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Joseph, Elisha, Micaiah, Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, Mordecai, Simeon, Joseph to whom the Virgin Mary was espoused, John." (Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 42)

"It is certain," says he, "that in the earliest age Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel their sons, are mentioned as being the only four persons then in being. Eve sinned,—the Scripture distinctly says so much; Adam also transgressed, as the same Scripture does not fail to inform us; whilst it affords us an equally clear testimony that Cain also sinned: and of all these it not only mentions the sins, but also indicates the character of their sins. Now if Abel had likewise sinned, Scripture would without doubt have said so. But it has not said so, therefore he committed no sin; nay, it even shows him to have been righteous. What we read, therefore, let us believe; and what we do not read, let us deem it wicked to add." (Augustine *Nature and Grace* 44)

I must say that my suspicion is excited also by this, that in the work which I answered, he most openly said that "righteous Abel never sinned at all." Now, however, he thus expresses himself: "But we did not say that any man could be found who at no time whatever, from infancy to old age, has committed sin; but that, if any man were converted from his sins, he could by his own labor and God's grace be without sin." When speaking of righteous Abel, he did not say that after being converted from his sins he became sinless in a new life, but that he never committed sin at all. (Augustine, *Proceedings of Pelagius* 22)

The basis of Pelagius's teaching, according to Augustine, is that the Scriptures never mention any sin Abel committed. In tandem with this observation seems to be the conclusion that his status as a righteous individual would preclude him from having been tainted by sin. In order to combat these ideas, Augustine had to demonstrate not only that Abel did in fact sin, but that his status as a righteous individual was not necessarily at variance with his status as a sinner.

In like manner it was unnecessary to state whether Abel, notwithstanding that he is rightly styled "righteous," ever indulged in immoderate laughter, or was ever jocose in moments of relaxation, or ever looked at an object with a covetous eye, or ever plucked fruit to extravagance, or ever suffered indigestion from too much eating, or ever in the midst of his prayers permitted his thoughts to wander and call him away from the purpose of his devotion; as well as how frequently these and many other similar failings stealthily crept over his mind. And are not these failings *sins*, about which the apostle's precept gives us a general admonition that we should avoid and restrain them, when he says: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof?" (Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 45)

To conclude, if there was in righteous Abel that love of God whereby alone he is truly righteous who is righteous, to enable him, and to lay him under a moral obligation, to advance in holiness, still in whatever degree he fell short therein was of sin. (Augustine, *Nature and Grace* 45)

How accurate Augustine is reflecting Pelagius's teaching is difficult to determine. But accurate or not, Augustine's rhetoric demonstrates the degree to which ancient exegetes, Christians in particular, held Abel in esteem.

What we observe, then, is that Abel's status as a righteous person is an exegetical development associated with the acceptable sacrifice he offered to God and his unjust death. The fact that Abel was the first person in the Bible to actively please God and be accepted by God outside of the Garden positioned him as the first paradigmatic figure. While this status was equally the result of his position in biblical chronology as well as his demonstration of virtue, it nonetheless earned him the honor of being placed at the head of paradigmatic lists like those found in 4 Maccabees 18 and Hebrews 4. A noticeable aspect of this tradition is that Abel is declared to be the first righteous person while Adam is not. This is not to suggest that Adam was not righteous as is hinted in Wis 10:1–3 and the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*. It was probably taken for granted that Adam was righteous by virtue of his relationship with God in the Garden. But Abel is the first person to demonstrate righteousness when it really matters. In contrast to his father, Abel lived in a world that forced one to choose righteousness. As the tragic story of the two brothers reveals, Abel was the first in this new world to choose righteousness while Cain chose unrighteousness. As such, Abel became an ideal figure, the first example among many to follow, who were to be emulated by those who, like Abel, suffered unjustly.

Did Abel cry out for vengeance?

One development that was touched on in chapter three was the problem of the crying blood. In the Hebrew version of Gen 4:10 the term for "blood" (דם) is in the plural rather than singular construct which results in the problematic reading: "the voice of your brother's bloods are crying out" (קול דמי אחיך צעקים). Some interpreters like Philo and Josephus chose to overlook the plural blood which may stem from the fact that the LXX has smoothed out this wrinkle in the text. But others took the plural blood to represent a significant exegetical point. Rather than ignore this linguistic peculiarity, the plural blood was understood as the potential righteous descendants that would have been born to

Abel.²⁶ Thus the Mishnah uses Cain's crime and the cry from the plural blood as an example of the compounded guilt that rests upon those who commit murder (*m. Sanh.* 4.5). But there is a second direction in which ancient interpreters sometimes moved when they examined Abel's crying blood.

In the narrative, God's conversation with Cain is presented in dialog format. Thus even though the story is narrated in the past, the conversation is reported as if happening in the present. As a result of this format the present tense verbs used in both the Hebrew and the Greek versions of Gen 4:10 could make the cry from Abel's blood appear as if it is occurring in the present rather than in the past (MT—צעקים; LXX—βοᾶν). A literal reading of these verbs could give the impression that Abel's blood never stopped crying out. For some interpreters, it became an ongoing cry seeking vengeance from God.

Although he does not address the problem of the plural blood, Philo does interpret the blood as an ongoing cry to God. The description of the crying blood suggested to Philo that Abel, although murdered by Cain, still lives.²⁷

Abel, therefore, strange as it seems, has been both put to death and lives; he is destroyed or abolished out of the mind of the fool, but he is alive with the happy life in God. To this the declaration of Scripture shall be our witness, where Abel is found quite manifestly using his "voice" and "crying out" (βοᾶν) the wrongs which he had suffered at the hands of a wicked brother. For how could one no longer living speak? (Philo, *Worse* 48)

Abel's continued existence seemed the only way for Philo to explain the present tense of βοᾶν ("ongoing crying") in 4:10. The crying, then, becomes a perpetual witness against Cain and the crime he committed. Later in the same work, Philo again reflects on Abel's blood and this time connects it to the situation of the Israelites who suffered in Egypt. This connection is made through an exegetical link between Gen 4:10 and Exod 2:23. In both of these passages, it is the cry that reaches up to God that represents the suffering of the innocent. Just as murdered Abel's blood cried out to God from the earth so too the cry of the enslaved Israelites reached upwards toward God (*Worse* 93). Through this exegetical link Philo is able to associate the sufferings of the first murder victim with the sufferings of the Israelites.

²⁶ cf. *Gen. Rab.* 22:9; *Tg. Neof.* Gen 4:10; *Tg. Onq.* Gen 4:10.

²⁷ Alan Mendelson, "Philo's Dialectic of Reward and Punishment," *SPhA* 9 (1997): 118–19.

In his commentary on Genesis, Philo emphasizes again the perpetual existence of Abel's voice by interpreting 4:10 as God hearing the prayers of those already dead.

What is the meaning of the words, "The voice of your brother calls to me from the earth"? This is most exemplary, for the Deity hears the deserving even though they are dead, knowing that they live an incorporeal life. But from the prayers of evil men He turns away His face even though they enjoy the prime of life. (Philo, QG 1.70)

Noteworthy here is Philo's failure to mention the blood which has been overshadowed by an emphasis on the voice. In Gen 4:10 the "voice" is not that of Abel, but of his blood crying out to God. Philo's eraser of the blood is part of an interpretative strategy whereby he reconfigures the picture of inanimate blood speaking into a "voice" that continues to speak even beyond the grave.²⁸ This is the voice of those who have suffered and Abel, in turn, becomes a paradigmatic figure for all who suffer at the hands of the wicked. While there is no indication that Philo understood the cry as a request for vengeance, he did understand it as creating a separation between those who suffer innocently and those who oppress them.²⁹ Abel's "voice" became a symbol to Philo of God's ongoing concern for those who suffer. Consequently, the same cry from Abel was heard in the mouths of the Israelites under Egypt and any other people who were wrongfully oppressed.

A particularly interesting text among the Abel traditions is *1 En.* 22:5–7. In this chapter Enoch is taken by his interpreting angel, Raphael, to a place where he can view a high mountain pockmarked with large pits that serve as repositories for the souls of the dead. Both the good and evil souls are placed in these pits. The description of Enoch's vision of this mountain is broken into two parts. The first describes how the souls of the dead are placed in pits where they receive punishment consistent with the lives they have lived (vv. 1–4). The second recounts the ultimate destiny of these souls after the final

²⁸ Serge Ruzer, "The Cave of Treasures on Swearing Abel's Blood and Expulsion from Paradise: Two Exegetical Motifs in Context," *J ECS* 9 (2001): 267.

²⁹ D. Zeller comments that "in contrast to the spiritual death of the evil man, the life of the soul, consisting of virtue alone, is not sufficient to describe the destiny of the slain righteous. There, Philo's sense of justice demands a real afterlife of the soul with God" ("The Life and Death of the Soul in Philo of Alexandria: The Use and Origin of a Metaphor," *SPhA* 7 [1995]: 28). A rabbinic parallel to Philo is found in *b. Ber.* 18b which states: "The righteous are called living even after their death, the sinners dead during lifetime."

judgment. Some will receive further punishment while others will be resurrected (vv. 8–13).³⁰ Dividing these two sections is a vision of Abel pleading for vengeance.

There I saw the spirit of a dead man making suit, and his lamentation went up to heaven and cried and made suit. Then I asked Raphael, the watcher and holy one who was with me, and said to him, “This spirit that makes suit—whose is it—that thus his lamentation goes up and makes suit unto heaven?” And he answered me and said, “This is the spirit that went forth from Abel, whom Cain his brother murdered. And Abel makes accusation against him until his seed perishes from the face of the earth, and his seed is obliterated from the seed of men.” (*1 En.* 22:5–7)

Enoch’s vision of Abel is derived from an exegetical embellishment of Gen 4:10.³¹ The description of Abel’s spirit making suit is a conflation of the crying blood in Gen 4:10 and God’s declaration in Gen 9:4 that blood is the seat of the soul (נפש). By associating the two together, the author transforms the inanimate blood in 4:10 into a personification of the dead Abel, which is understood as the dead man’s “spirit” (רוח).³² The cry of Abel’s spirit reaching heaven is an amplification of God’s words to Cain in 4:10. Whereas in Genesis Abel’s crying blood is the evidence of Cain’s crime, in *1 Enoch* the tenor of the blood is changed to that of a cry for vengeance.

The request being made by Abel is not a trivial one. It is not merely an appeal to God to avenge his own murder. Instead it has been configured to demand that *all* of Cain’s seed be wiped-out from the earth. This is possibly associated with the interpretation of Abel’s plural blood in Gen 4:10 by which some exegetes understood the plural blood to be an expression of Abel’s potential righteous offspring. The author of *1 Enoch*, however, reconfigures this interpretation of the plural blood, within the context of the cry for vengeance, so that Abel’s demand is reflective of Cain’s crime. Just as Cain destroyed not only Abel but also his potential offspring, so too Abel demands not only that Cain be punished, but that all of his descendants be obliterated from the earth as well.³³ This interpretation reconfigures 4:10 so that Abel’s role

³⁰ G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 302.

³¹ T. Francis Glasson, *Greek Influence in Jewish Eschatology* (London: SPCK, 1961), 16.

³² Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 305.

³³ A parallel to 22:7 is found in 108:2–3 where those who have obeyed the law are promised that “the names of (the sinners) will be blotted out from the Book of Life and the books of the Holy One; their seeds shall be destroyed forever and their spirits shall perish and die.” This is similar to the traditions surrounding Cain’s sevenfold

is no longer that of a silent corpse. Instead he is allowed to live on through his crying blood which provides him a perpetual voice asking for vengeance.

Before commenting further on this passage, it will be helpful to note other places where this cry for vengeance appears. In *1 En.* 7:6 and 8:4, the cry for vengeance is briefly mentioned in the context of humans being killed.³⁴ The earth brings accusation against the murderers (7:6) and the cries of the innocent reach to heaven (8:4). This motif is filled out further in *1 Enoch* 9. The passage is an interpretation of the sons of God and daughters of men story in Gen 6:1–4. Highlighted twice in these verses is the blood which has been shed upon the earth and the cries of the innocent victims.

Then Michael and Sariel and Raphael and Gabriel looked down from the sanctuary of heaven upon the earth and saw much bloodshed upon the earth. All the earth was filled with the godlessness and violence that had befallen it. And entering in, they said to one another, “The earth, devoid (of inhabitants), raises the voice of their cries to the gates of heaven” ...And now behold, the daughters of men have born sons from them, giants, half-breeds. And the blood of men is shed upon the earth. And the whole earth is full of iniquity. And now behold, the spirits of the souls of men who have died make suit; and their groan has come up to the gate of heaven; and it does not cease to come forth from before the iniquities that have come upon the earth. (*1 En.* 9:1–2, 9–10).

As with the spirit of Abel in 22:5–7, the connection between bloodshed and the cry for vengeance is deduced from Gen 4:10 through an exegetical connection to Gen 9:4.³⁵ But the cry for vengeance in 9:10 goes beyond that of 7:6 and 8:4. The fact that the cry “does not cease to come forth” implies, as with Abel in 22:7, a perpetual demand for vengeance that will only cease once retribution has been meted out. It is a cry that can only be silenced by God responding to the request.

Outside of the Enochic tradition, prayers for vengeance by those who have been persecuted to the point of death are a common theme in Jewish and Christian literature. Often they are influenced, as in *1 Enoch*, by the cry of Abel’s blood in Gen 4:10 and combined with a request for retaliation for the murder of the righteous. Examples of

vengeance whereby some exegetes interpreted Cain’s punishment as extending to all of Cain’s descendants (see chapter four above).

³⁴ For the thematic and linguistic connections between *1 En.* 7:6, 8:4, 9:2, 10 and 22:2–7, see Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 186, 201, 208, 305–306.

³⁵ Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 208.

such prayers can be found in 2 Macc 8:2–4, Rev 6:9–11, the *Sib. Or.* 3:307–13, and the *T. Mos.* 9:6–7. Common to these prayers is the mention of either shed blood or blood crying out and the demand that God avenge the death of the righteous.³⁶ With this background in mind we can assess the role of Abel in *1 Enoch* 22.

As it presently stands, chapter 22 is constructed from many layers of developed traditions that, at times, contradict one another. While the development of the Enochic tradition is not a part of our focus here, it does have some bearing on our understanding of the Abel tradition and its appearance in chapter 22. Broadly speaking, the first layer of the tradition was probably vv. 1–4 where the vision of the mountain and pits for the dead was initially introduced. The vision was later expanded to include an interpretation found in what is now known as vv. 8–13. Modern scholars suggest that it was the introduction of this second section, and v. 12 in particular, that led to the introduction of the third layer, the Abel vision (vv. 5–7).³⁷ Verse 12 serves to clarify the purpose of the pits on the mountain by specifying that, contrary to Raphael's statements in vv. 1–4, the righteous are separated from the wicked. In describing one of the pits verse 12 reads:

And this has been separated for the spirits of them that make suit, who make disclosure about the destruction, when they were murdered in the days of the sinners.

Verse 12 is similar in language to vv. 5–7 and echoes the theme of the Abel story. Those in the pit are innocent victims who were violently murdered and now bring a request for vengeance.³⁸ But why was it necessary to add the vision of Abel to the chapter? Verse 12 is already in harmony with the vengeance themes in *1 En.* 7:6 and 8:4 and the figure of Abel makes no debut there. The vengeance prayers in Jewish and Christian literature also were able to convey a similar message by echoing Gen 4:10 without specifically quoting it. What was accomplished by adding Abel in vv. 5–7?

The answer, perhaps, is that *1 En.* 22:5–7 represents the earliest, extant convergence of two separate but similar traditions. As noted

³⁶ Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91–108* (CEJL; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 312.

³⁷ This is an oversimplification of the development of this text. For a more thorough presentation of the problems relating to the literary history see, Marie-Theres Wacker, *Weltordnung und Gericht: Studien zu 1 Henoch 22* (FB 45; Würzburg: Echter, 1982), 178–90; Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 302–303.

³⁸ Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 308.

above, the Enochic tradition, in agreement with the vengeance prayers, interprets Gen 4:10 through an exegetical connection to Gen 9:4. Abel's murder became a paradigm by which the ancients interpreted the shedding of innocent blood. The crying blood in 4:10 was, in turn, viewed as a demand by the first murder victim that God avenge his death. This interpretive tradition allowed exegetes to adopt the language and imagery of Gen 4:10 and apply it to their readers who were being persecuted, some until the point of death. At the same time, there was a developing tradition that understood Abel to be the first paradigmatic figure to be emulated. Abel was the first person to be righteous when it mattered most. As the literary history of *1 Enoch* 22 developed, the insertion of the Abel vision in vv. 5–7 provided a paradigmatic figure that embodied the role of those violently killed. While verse 12 described the innocent victims crying out for vengeance with imagery commensurate with Gen 4:10 and 9:4, the vision of Abel provided readers with a tangible, central figure who stood in the same position as the murdered righteous, and did so since the earliest days of creation. He is the perpetual voice for the murdered righteous; a permanent accuser of the wicked. Moreover, the request that all of Cain's descendants be wiped out from the earth provides a powerful illustration of the kind of retributive justice that the righteous are requesting.

Objections to the above suggestion might include the point that Abel is not called righteous here and that a more cautious interpretation of *1 Enoch* 22 will note that the chapter emphasizes not the righteous state of the victims, but the violence of their murders and the retributive justice they are seeking.³⁹ This is certainly correct, but we have also seen examples from Josephus and 4 Maccabees where Abel is identified as a paradigmatic righteous individual. Fourth Maccabees is particularly relevant since Abel is held up as a paradigm of righteous individuals who suffer until the point of death. If *1 Enoch* represents an early convergence of two traditions, vengeance prayers and the paradigmatic Abel figure, then it is not necessary to insist on Abel's righteousness in this passage or that of the innocent victims. Readers of *1 Enoch* who were aware of the Abel traditions could easily connect the role of vengeance prayers with the paradigmatic figure of Abel.

Apart from *1 Enoch* 22, Abel's role as a representative of the righteous demanding vengeance is a common one. In the New Testament

³⁹ Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch*, 306. But we may note that the emphasis on the righteousness of the individuals later *1 Enoch* 47.1–4.

the only instances in which Abel is mentioned by name is when he is connected with the themes of righteousness and vengeance.⁴⁰ In Matt 23:34–35, for instance, Jesus rounds off his condemnation of the religious leaders by invoking the stories of two people who were unjustly murdered.

Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. (Matt 23:34–35 [NRSV])

Here the figures of Abel and Zechariah stand as bookends to biblical history.⁴¹ Abel is the first person in the Bible to be murdered (Gen 4), Zechariah is the last (2 Chr 24).⁴² Both stories include elements of blood and vengeance. In Gen 4:10 it is Abel's blood, shed by Cain, that was interpreted as asking God for vengeance. In 2 Chr 24 Zechariah dies while asking God to avenge his death (24:22) and it is on account of his blood that Joash is subsequently killed by his servants (24:25). These deaths represent not merely murders, but martyrdoms that require retribution.⁴³ In Matt 23:35 blood appears three times and is called "righteous" which emphasizes that God will avenge the death of innocent victims.⁴⁴ The Matthean Jesus' appeal to these figures as part of his pronouncement against the religious leaders is reflective of his previous accusations against them. In 23:30–31 he anticipates their claim that they are not partners in the shed blood of the prophets (κοινωνοὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι) by declaring them to be the sons of murderers (υἱοὶ ἐστε τῶν φονευσάντων). By capping his accusations with an appeal to Abel and Zechariah, Jesus creates a communal solidarity

⁴⁰ Abel is mentioned in 1 John 3:12, but only as Cain's brother. But even here the theme of righteousness is present.

⁴¹ I have nothing to add to the identification of Zechariah or Matthew's perplexing addition of "Barachiah". For a discussion of the problem see, Charlene McAfee Moss, *The Zachariah Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew* (BZNW 156; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 103–26; W.D. Davies & Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 3:318–19.

⁴² I speak of "last" in the context of literary rather than chronology. Genesis is the first book of the Hebrew Bible and 2 Chronicles the last. Presumably it was the same in antiquity (Davies and Allison, 319).

⁴³ Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 880.

⁴⁴ Davies and Allison, *Gospel of Matthew*, 317.

with the crime of blood that makes the religious leaders the targets of God's vengeance.⁴⁵ Readers of Matthew familiar with the vengeance prayer motif and Abel's paradigmatic status would recognize that Jesus' words not only hold the religious leaders culpable for the blood of the righteous, but also identify them with the person of Cain and the crimes he committed. As such, they become the objects of Abel's ongoing call for God's vengeance.⁴⁶

In Hebrews Abel is mentioned by name twice. In 11:4 Abel is said to have offered a better sacrifice than Cain, which earned him God's declaration of "righteousness." But the author adds an additional, perplexing, statement: "and although dead, he still speaks" (ἀποθανὼν ἔτι λαλεῖ). How and why is Abel speaking? The statement seems out of place until it is compared with its parallel statement in 12:24 where we read that the blood of Christ speaks better than Abel (λαλοῦντι παρὰ τὸν Ἀβελ). Combined in these two verses are all of the elements that fostered Abel's role as a representative figure demanding vengeance for the righteous.⁴⁷ As in Philo, *1 Enoch* and Matthew, Abel's "speaking" should probably be understood as the present tense voice of the blood in Gen 4:10.⁴⁸ "The author of Hebrews takes up the blood's cry, but transforms its tenor. From the fact that Abel's blood was crying after the murder he infers that it keeps on crying up to the present and he interprets the cry for vengeance as a claim for final justice. Abel's cry testifies to his faith in things hoped for, his conviction that in the end all evil will be punished."⁴⁹ Yet the author of Hebrews does not stop here. As part of his Christological interpretation of biblical history, he presents the blood of Christ as superseding the blood of Abel.

⁴⁵ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (WBC 33b; Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 676; Dale C. Allison, *The Intertextual Jesus*, 84-87.

⁴⁶ The Lucan version of this saying (11:47-51) is different in a number of ways when compared to the Matthean version, but conveys a similar imagery and message. Luke does not include the epithet of "righteous" for the blood or for Abel. He also makes a general charge of blood libel against "this generation" rather than Matthew's "you" referring to the religious leaders. Also missing is Jesus' accusation that they are the "sons of murderers". But in spite of these differences, the theme of Godly vengeance against those who kill the righteous is still present. Those who approved of the deeds of their ancestors are the target of Abel's ongoing cry for God to avenge the blood of the innocent.

⁴⁷ Kuhn "Ἀβελ," *TDNT* 1:6-8.

⁴⁸ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 3:17; *Ellingworth*, 573. Lane is in the minority when he argues that the "speaking" in 11:4 refers not to Abel's blood in Gen 4:10 but to the sacrifice in Gen 4:4 (335).

⁴⁹ Ton Hilhorst, "Abel's Speaking in Hebrews 11:4 and 12:24," in *Eve's Children*, 123.

While Abel's voice demands justice, the blood of Christ promotes reconciliation.⁵⁰ As we saw in Philo and *1 Enoch*, the cry of the righteous, typified by Abel, sought to exclude the wicked and demanded justice. The author of Hebrews, however, seeks to promote inclusion rather than exclusion (12:25).⁵¹

There is one final document that warrants our attention as we conclude this section. Among Jewish and Christian documents that contain Abel traditions, the *Testament of Abraham* contains the most unusual one of all. The document purports to be an account of the events preceding Abraham's death. Part of these events is Abraham's mystical journey to heaven in a chariot driven by the archangel Michael (chs. 11–14). When they approach the entrance to heaven Abraham witnesses two scenes. The first is of two groups of people each entering through a set of gates. The one gate is broad while the other narrow. Leading the people through the gates are angels. Those entering through the narrow gate are the righteous while those entering through the broad gate are sinners. Positioned between the two gates is a golden throne upon which sits the person of Adam whose appearance is described as terrifying and wondrous (12:4–6). As Abraham watches this scene Adam alternates between sitting on the throne rejoicing and falling on the ground wailing. Each action is dependent upon which gate a particular group of people is entering. As Michael explains the first scene, the introduction of the second scene interrupts their conversation. Abraham sees two fiery angels with flaming whips driving thousands of souls through the broad gate towards destruction. Abraham and Michael follow the two angels, enter the broad gate, and encounter a second man sitting on a throne described as follows.

And in the middle of the two gates stood a terrifying throne, in appearance like crystal, flashing forth as fire. And a marvelous man, resembling the sun, like unto a son of God, sat upon it. Before him stood a table with the appearance of crystal wholly made of gold and silk. On the table lay a book; its thickness was three cubits and its width was six cubits. On the right and on the left stood two angels who were holding a papyrus roll and ink and a reed pen . . . And the marvelous man sitting on his throne, judged and declared a verdict upon the souls. The two angels on the right and the left were making a written register. The one on the right recorded deeds and the one on the left recorded sins. (*T. Ab.* 12:4–12 [Allison])

⁵⁰ Ruzer, 267.

⁵¹ Moffatt, 218–19.

As Abraham watches the scene unfold, he sees the man on the throne ask one of the angels to open the book and report on the sins of the soul before him. Those who prove to be righteous are taken by an angel to the place for the righteous. But those who are sinners are taken by another angel to the place of punishment. When Abraham asks about this scene and the identity of the person sitting on the throne, Michael says:

Observe, all holy and just Abraham, the fearful man upon the throne. This is the son of the first-formed. The one called Abel, whom the most evil and fratricidal Cain killed. And he sits here to judge all the creation, and he carefully examines the righteous and sinners, for God said, "I do not judge you, but every man will be judged by a man." For this reason it was given to him to judge the world until his great and glorious *parousia*. And then, just Abraham, will be the perfect judgment and recompense, eternal and unalterable, which no one is able to question. Every person has arisen from the first-formed, and because of this, each will be judged by his son. (*T. Ab.* 13:2–5)

The throne imagery may be a combination of Jewish and Egyptian elements, with an exegetical dependence upon the "son of man" scene in Dan 7:13.⁵² The *Testament of Abraham* is a Jewish document with Christian revisions, but it is impossible to determine what belongs to which.⁵³ Many of the traditions found in the document have a long history in Judaism and Christianity. But the presentation of Abel in the *Testament of Abraham* is virtually without parallel in Jewish and Christian literature.⁵⁴ To be sure, it is not remarkable for Jewish and

⁵² For an explanation of possible Egyptian imagery see the work of G.W.E. Nickelsburg, "Eschatology in the Testament of Abraham: A Study of the Judgment Scenes in the Two Recensions," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (ed. G.W.E. Nickelsburg; Septuagint and Cognate Studies; Missoula, Mont: Published by Scholars Press for the SBL, 1976), 23–83. The argument that the Abel scene is based on an exegetical connection to Dan 7:13 may be found in Phillip B. Munoa, *Four Powers in Heaven: The Interpretation of Daniel 7 in the Testament of Abraham* (JSPSup 28; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998).

⁵³ Dale C. Allison, *Testament of Abraham*. (CEJL; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 28–31. I am consciously avoiding a discussion of the three stages of judgment that appear in this passage. Although they are probably a combination of Jewish and Christian recensions, they do not add to my overall discussion of Abel's role as Judge. For a discussion of the textual and redaction history of this passage see, Jan Dochhorn, "Abel and the Three Stages of Postmortal Judgment: A Text-Critical and Redaction-Critical Study of the Christian Elements in *Testament of Abraham* A 13:2–8," in *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity, and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity* (ed. I. Henderson and G. Oegema; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 398–415.

⁵⁴ Matthias Delcor, *Le testament d'Abraham* (SVTP 2; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 60, 141; Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 281. Some have compared this scene with the Tg. Neof. Gen 4:8 where Cain denies that there is a postmortem judgment, which Abel

Christian authors to place figures from sacred tradition on a divine throne.⁵⁵ This does not explain, however, how Abel came to be elevated to the position of judge of creation. In the text, we are told that Abel's power and authority springs from his succession to Adam. But even this does not clarify why Abel should become a judge.

The interpretive key to this scene may be found in the words of God quoted by Michael to Abraham in 13.3: "I do not judge you, but every man will be judged by a man." In the vengeance prayers and the Abel scene in *1 Enoch*, an exegetical link brought together Abel's talking blood in Gen 4:10 with God's declaration about blood in Gen 9:4. With this link between 4:10 and 9:4 already established, it would not be unreasonable for someone to look a bit further and expand the exegesis. Thus, the reader would notice that in the very next verse blood is mentioned again, but this time with an important addition. God says:

And surely your blood, your lifeblood, I will require from the hand of every beast. And from the hand of man, each from the hand of his brother (𐤀𐤍), I will require the life of man.⁵⁶ (Gen 9:5)

Of probable interest to interpreters here is the first occurrence since Gen 4:8–11 of "brother" (𐤀𐤍). This term is used in Genesis 4 to emphasize Cain's actions against Abel, and its reappearance in 9:5 in the context of shedding blood, makes it very likely that interpreters would have understood this verse as alluding to the Genesis 4 story.⁵⁷ Moreover, a reader of Gen 9:4–5 would soon discover that 9:6a provided even more information about the shedding of blood. After the flood, God provides a guideline which states:

Whoever sheds the blood of a man, by a man shall his blood be shed.⁵⁸ (Gen 9:6a)

defends. While this is certainly an important thematic parallel, it does not present Abel in the role as judge. There is simply no other known document that offers this presentation of Abel.

⁵⁵ See the *Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 9:8–11 where it mentions that Adam, Abel and Enoch each have thrones in heaven. Munoa, 121; Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91–108*, 735–37.

⁵⁶ Translation mine.

⁵⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 193. Such a connection between Gen 4:10 and 9:5 is made by Irenaeus which he then goes onto to connect to Matt 23:35 (*Haer.* 5.14).

⁵⁸ Translation mine.

The instruction in 9:6a provides an etiology of the human legal system.⁵⁹ Judgment against humans is rendered by other humans. Since 9:6a mentions the shedding of blood, a theme already associated with the figure of Abel in 4:10 and 9:4, exegetes may have interpreted this link with the mention of “brother” in 9:5 as evidence that Abel also plays a role in the judgment described in 9:6a. Abel’s status as the first human whose blood was shed led to the conclusion that Abel becomes a judge.

When Gen 9:6a is compared to God’s words in the *T. Ab.* 13:3, it is apparent that it is not the same exact phrase. God’s statement “I do not judge you, but every man will be judged by a man” does not mention the shedding of blood even though it applies God’s words to Abel’s role as judge. But if Gen 9:6a was understood as establishing Abel’s role as judge, then the author of *Testament of Abraham*, working within this interpretive tradition, could have implemented this scene as a natural extension of the exegetical link between Gen 4:10 and 9:4–6.⁶⁰ While the presentation of Abel here is distinctive, the judgment motif is not. There was an expectation that the righteous would judge their persecutors (*Wis* 5:1; *1 En.* 38:5; 48:9; 95:3; 96:1; 97:5; 98:12).⁶¹ Abel typified righteous individuals, particularly those who had been violently killed. In *1 Enoch* he was transformed into a perpetual voice for the murdered righteous; a permanent accuser of the wicked. With this background already well attested it is possible that, in some circles, Abel embodied the belief that the righteous would judge their persecutors.⁶² If this is correct, then the *Testament of Abraham* showcases the combining of Abel traditions to a degree not seen anywhere else. Abel is not only the paradigm of the righteous and the accuser of the wicked. He is the very personification of vengeance in the form an eschatological judge. The humiliation that marked Abel’s tragic life in Genesis 4 is reversed. The innocent victim is exalted to be the dispenser of justice.⁶³

There were at least two riddles facing interpreters in relation to Abel’s crying blood. One was the unusual way that the blood was in

⁵⁹ Dochhorn, “Abel and the Three Stages of Postmortal Judgement,” 413; Wenham, 193–94.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 414.

⁶¹ Nickelsburg, “Eschatology in the Testament of Abraham,” 35; Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 281.

⁶² Allison, *Testament of Abraham*, 281.

⁶³ Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 77.

the plural construct. The other was the way the present tense verbs in the narrative could be read as Abel's blood never going silent. Both of these riddles were understood by exegetes as providing the basis for important theological claims. Abel's inanimate blood was transformed into an ongoing cry for vengeance; a cry that was quickly transferred and applied to any innocent person whose blood was shed. Vengeance prayers and depictions of the persecuted righteous often echoed the imagery of Gen 4:10. The connection between Abel and the persecuted righteous became so well known that the two traditions converged in *1 Enoch* 22 where Abel is portrayed as the perpetual voice for the murdered righteous; a permanent accuser of the wicked. On the other hand, the cry for vengeance incorporated the hope that one day the oppressors would be handed over to the righteous. By incorporating the exegetical link between Gen 4:10 and 9:4–6, the author of the *Testament of Abraham* was able to construct a scene in which Abel became the judge of creation. The transformation of the crying blood into a cry for vengeance by the righteous translated into Abel's presentation as the very personification of vengeance in the form an eschatological judge.

Was Abel the first martyr?

The Genesis 4 story does not give a specific reason for why Cain killed Abel, although interpreters were happy to suggest a myriad of reasons. Genesis also does not detail whether or not Abel was a good person and whether or not he was one who obeyed God. Although God's acceptance of his sacrifice suggests that Abel was a godly person, it is never spelled out as such. The only thing that Genesis relates is the tragic death of a man who seems to have stumbled upon the correct type of sacrifice God wanted. Nonetheless, Abel's status as the first recorded murder victim in biblical history earned him the epithet of "righteous." This was an ancillary result of the assumption that he was the first human being to remain obedient to God to the point of death as demonstrated by the way in which he often heads lists of paradigmatic figures intended for emulation. One corollary of Abel's classification as "first righteous victim" is an interpretive development whereby he becomes identified as the first martyr.

Abel's status as the first martyr is not always stated as such, but it is certainly inferred. In 4 Macc 18:11, Abel heads a list of paradigmatic

characters from biblical history. While the title of “martyr” is not given to Abel here, the brief description of him is relevant. Rather than mention Abel’s admirable quality of offering correct sacrifices to God, he is merely listed as “Abel, murdered by Cain.” The presentation of Abel highlights only his death. Certainly those familiar with the story would remember his other qualities as well, but they are not the focus of the reference.⁶⁴ In the context of the torture scenes in 4 Maccabees and the overarching theme celebrating martyrdom, the brief description of Abel is relevant to the interpretation of the story. Rather than be celebrated for his sacrificial practices, he is held up as an exemplar of noble death. As the first murder victim in the Bible, his location at the top of a list of paradigmatic figures in an encomium of martyrdom attributes to him the classification of first martyr.⁶⁵

Matthew 23:35 has a similar portrayal of Abel. As part of Jesus’ condemnation of the religious leaders, he invokes the deaths of Abel and Zechariah. Once again, no mention is made of Abel’s sacrifice only of his death. The reference here is more graphic than in 4 Maccabees given that it uses Abel’s blood as a metonymy to describe his death. As with 4 Maccabees, the context of the Abel reference is significant. The interjection of Abel, and Zechariah, occurs at the conclusion of Jesus accusing the religious leaders of guilt by extension for the deaths of the prophets (23:29–31). The appeal to “all the righteous blood poured out on the land” (πάν ἀίμα δίκαιον ἐκχυννόμενον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) encapsulates all of biblical history from Abel to Zechariah. The suggestion, then, is that the sacred history of martyrdom extends from the prototypical shedding of Abel’s blood up until the time of Jesus.⁶⁶ Abel is the first recorded martyr.⁶⁷

The appearance of Abel in Heb 11:4 and 1 John 3:12 are less clear. Although both of these passages mention Abel’s death, they also include mention of his superior offering and righteous deeds. In Hebrews the

⁶⁴ Abel’s righteous is implied later in 18:15 as part of the quotation of Ps 33:20 (LXX). See above for further discussion.

⁶⁵ H. A. Fischel, “Martyr and Prophet (A Study in Jewish Literature),” *JQR* 37 (1947): 273; deSilva, *4 Maccabees*, 259.

⁶⁶ Hagner, *Matthew*, 677–78; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 556.

⁶⁷ Lk 11:50–51 conveys a similar idea when Jesus declares that “in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.” (NRSV).

focus is on Abel's ongoing speaking, which emphasizes his fidelity with the persecuted. Persecution, of course, is a major motif in martyrdom, and so the idea of Abel as the first martyr might be lurking below the surface.⁶⁸ In 1 John 3 the focus is not on Abel but Cain, so it is not surprising that martyrdom language and imagery is not clearly present.

One place that martyrdom language does appear is in the epistles of Ignatius of Antioch (35–110 CE). This is not surprising since his martyrdom in Rome at the beginning of the second century CE is well attested. During his trip from Syria to Rome, he wrote six letters. In these letters he not only extols the virtues of martyrdom, but, as seen in his letter to the Romans, he also seems to crave it. In his letter to the Ephesians he links his impending confrontation with wild beasts at Rome with his status as a disciple (1.2).⁶⁹ In chapter 12 of the letter he praises the Ephesians and their connection with the Apostle Paul by calling them a "highway for martyrs."⁷⁰ As part of this lauding of them and martyrdom a quotation of Matt 23:35 is altered to include Ignatius in an unbroken line of martyrs.

I know both who I am, and to whom I write. I am the very insignificant Ignatius, who have my lot with those who are exposed to danger and condemnation. But you have been the objects of mercy, and are established in Christ. I am one delivered over [to death], but the least of all those that have been cut off for the sake of Christ, "from the blood of righteous Abel" to the blood of Ignatius. You are initiated into the mysteries of the Gospel with Paul, the holy, the martyred, inasmuch as he was "a chosen vessel." (Ignatius, *Eph.* 12)

The passage is problematic. The quotation of Matthew only appears in the longer recension of the letter, which was most likely edited by a later hand. So it is doubtful that Ignatius inserted himself into the quotation from Matt 23:35 and declared himself as standing within the history of martyrdom. But even so, it is significant that a later editor chose to identify Ignatius's martyrdom with that of Abel. The replacing of Zechariah with Ignatius demonstrates the degree to which

⁶⁸ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 377. In a list similar to that in Hebrews 11, Aphrahat names individuals who were martyred beginning with Abel (Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* [StPB 19; Leiden, Brill, 1971], 111, 133).

⁶⁹ William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 43.

⁷⁰ This seems to be based on the Ephesians sending Paul off in Acts 20:38 with the realization that they would never see him again (Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 73).

Abel's role as the first martyr had penetrated early Christian thinking; so much so that altering the verse in Matthew was not seen as consequential. Being a martyr meant being part of a sacred history of martyrdom that extended back through the time of the apostles up until the time of righteous Abel. Matthew 23:35 exercised such a significant influence on early Christian thinking that an editor considered it acceptable to alter the verse to include the martyrdom of Ignatius and thus place him within that sacred history.

The significant influence of Abel traditions on Christian attitudes towards martyrdom can be observed in the works of Cyprian. Cyprian was the bishop of Carthage from 249–258 CE and his term in office was punctuated by two persecutions of the church and the *Lapsi* controversy. During the Decian persecution (250 CE) Cyprian fled Carthage, but some who stayed behind “lapsed” in their conversion by sacrificing to the emperor. Afterward some asked to be received back into the Church. Their requests were granted, but there was strong opposition from Cyprian and the faithful among the Carthaginian clergy, who insisted upon earnest repentance. Cyprian was himself martyred during the subsequent persecution initiated by Emperor Valerian I. Cyprian prepared his people for the persecution by writing his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* and set an example by refusing to sacrifice to the emperor when he was brought before the Roman proconsul. He was eventually imprisoned and beheaded in 258 CE. It is within this context that Cyprian wrote encouraging his flock not to “lapse,” but to remain faithful and even to embrace martyrdom. With this setting in mind, we can consider the role of Abel in Cyprian's writings.

As in the Jewish and Christian literature examined above, Cyprian considered Abel to be the first martyr. In a treatise on the Lord's Prayer, Cyprian argues that it was Abel's righteousness that caused him to offer a correct sacrifice, be murdered by Cain, and become a paradigm for believers.

Abel, peaceable and righteous in sacrificing in innocence to God, taught others also, when they bring their gift to the altar, thus to come with the fear of God, with a simple heart, with the law of righteousness, with the peace of concord. With reason did he, who was such in respect of God's sacrifice, become subsequently himself a sacrifice to God; so that he who first set forth martyrdom, and initiated the Lord's passion by the glory of his blood, had both the Lord's righteousness and His peace. Finally, such are crowned by the Lord, such will be avenged with the Lord in the day of judgment. (Cyprian, *The Lord's Prayer* 4.24 [Deferrari])

There are several interpretive trajectories common to the Abel traditions in place here. First is the suggestion that Abel is the initiator of martyrdom. This is an idea that extends through the literature from at least the first century CE. A second, related, aspect is the belief that Abel's death was a sacrifice that symbolized the death of Jesus. As we will see later in this chapter, Abel was commonly viewed by Christians to be a type of Christ.⁷¹ Third, the promise of vengeance for the murdered righteous is a theme that is well attested in the tradition and was emphasized by the placement of Abel on the throne in the *Testament of Abraham*. All of these themes suggest the enduring nature of the association of Abel with martyrdom and are more pronounced in those treatises and letters in which Cyprian exhorts his readers to embrace martyrdom.

In Cyprian's *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Abel is presented as a model and inspiration to those who suffer to the point of death. Moreover, persecution should not surprise the Christians since suffering has been the lot of the righteous from the time of Abel.

And these are not new or sudden things which are now happening to Christians; since the good and righteous, and those who are devoted to God in the law of innocence and the fear of true religion, advance always through afflictions, and wrongs, and the severe and manifold penalties of troubles, in the hardship of a narrow path. Thus, at the very beginning of the world, the righteous Abel was the first to be slain by his brother. (Cyprian, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 11)

As part of his encouragement towards martyrdom, Cyprian adds details about Abel not found in Genesis. Twice he adds that Abel "willingly" embraced death.⁷²

Thus Abel, who first initiated and consecrated the origin of martyrdom, and the passion of the righteous man, makes no resistance nor struggles against his fratricidal brother, but with lowliness and meekness he is patiently slain. (Cyprian, *Treatise on Patience* 10)

In his letters, Cyprian appeals to Abel as the first martyr in order to reassure and inspire those facing the prospect of martyrdom. In a letter to a group of Christians in prison, Cyprian encourages them that

⁷¹ Michael A. Fahey, *Cyprian and the Bible: A Study in Third-century Exegesis* (BGBH 9; Tübingen: Mohr, 1971), 560.

⁷² Ibid.

suffering is not to be unexpected since this has been the lot of the righteous since the time of Abel.

And so when you reflect that you shall be judge, that you will reign with Christ the Lord, you must inevitably rejoice, you must spurn the tortures of the moment for the joy of what is to come; knowing that it was so ordered from the beginning of the universe that here righteousness should struggle and wrestle in this world, for at the very beginning the righteous man Abel was slain, and thereafter all those righteous men have been slain, both the Prophets and the Apostles whom he sent forth. (Cyprian, *Epistle* 6.2 [Clarke])

In a letter to the Christians at Thibaris, Cyprian claims that God had been giving them warnings about an impending persecution. Models for the conduct of the Christians in the present age are to be found in the Old Testament and include Abel, Abraham, the three young men, Daniel, and the Maccabees. As part of this presentation of heroes, Abel not only heads the list, but should be a source of imitation in his martyrdom.

Let us, beloved brethren, imitate righteous Abel, who initiated martyrdoms, he first being slain for righteousness. (Cyprian, *Epistle* 58.5.1)

Finally, in a variation on the theme, Cyprian encourages the bishop of Rome not to be discouraged by the internal conflicts of the church. He then holds up Abel, as one slain by his brother, as an example of how even within families, persecution is possible.⁷³

And it is not only against the menaces of Gentiles and Jews that we should be alert and watchful; we can see that our Lord Himself was seized by His own brethren and betrayed by a man whom he himself had chosen to be one of the apostles. So it was too in the very beginning of the world. The just Abel was slain by none other than his brother. (Cyprian, *Epistle* 59.2.4)

Without doubt, Cyprian's context had much to do with his preoccupation with martyrdom. Two persecutions and the *Lapsi* controversy meant that during his short tenure as bishop he was forced to confront the possibility of martyrdom. Abel's status as the first righteous innocent victim afforded Cyprian the opportunity to praise Abel's flawless

⁷³ Fahey, *Cyprian and the Bible*, 561. A similar usage of the Abel story is found in the *Apostolic Constitutions* to describe the situation of an innocent person who has been unjustly excluded from the community by a bishop (2.3.21).

character and hold him up as a paradigm of martyrdom.⁷⁴ The martyrdom tradition associated with Abel's death became useful in the context of a persecution.⁷⁵

Upon reflection, Abel's role as the first martyr is more a Christian than Jewish motif. To be sure, 4 Macc 18:11 offers evidence that Abel could be viewed this way in Jewish circles. But the weight of the evidence is found in Christian rather than Jewish literature. This imbalance in the tradition can probably be attributed to Christianity's orientation around the death and resurrection of Christ. As a religion founded on the murder of its innocent leader, Christians would naturally gravitate towards figures in biblical history whose own stories would help to interpret Christ's death. Added to this is the impact of the words of Jesus in Matt 23:35, which not only mention Abel, but create a sacred history of martyrdom that extends from Abel to the time of Jesus. This verse exercised such a significant influence on early Christian thinking that an editor considered it acceptable to alter the verse to include the martyrdom of Ignatius and thus place him within that sacred history. During two persecutions in Cyprian's lifetime, Abel's status as the paradigmatic innocent victim was emphasized as a way to encourage faithfulness to Christ and the Church. By imitating Abel and embracing martyrdom, Christians were reassured that their obedience to death was not in vain. Rather, it made them yet another link in the ongoing chain of the sacred history of martyrdom that began with Abel.

Was Abel a prototype of Christ and the church?

Unlike much of the material examined in previous chapters, the interpretive developments that turned Abel into a righteous individual and the prototype of martyrdom are not based on the exploitation of the grammatical and narrative ambiguities in Genesis 4. Instead, these interpretations owe more to a teleological view of the Bible whereby that which is perceived to be the ultimate goal of history causes figures and events from the past to be interpreted as "types" of a future event or person. One aspect of the Abel traditions that is a part of this

⁷⁴ Fahey, *Cyprian and the Bible*, 560.

⁷⁵ Abel's status as "martyr" also finds him located in a number of liturgies of the church (John Hennig, "Abel's Place in the Liturgy," *TS* 7 [1946]: 126–41).

typological exegesis is the tendency by Christians to interpret Abel's story as a prefiguring of the Christ event and the establishment of the church.

The link between Abel and Christ was often the result of how Christian interpreters viewed Genesis 4 through the Christ event. Abel was the first shepherd in the Bible and thus foreshadows Christ as the good shepherd. Both Abel and Christ were considered to be innocent victims murdered by their brothers; Abel by Cain, Christ by the Jews. Both offered a sacrifice that was pleasing to God. Abel offered a lamb to God while Christ, the Lamb of God, offered himself. Abel was "resurrected" through the birth of his brother Seth. Christ was raised from the dead by God.⁷⁶

The association of Abel with Christ occurs quite early in Christian history. The link between Abel's speaking blood and that of Christ in Heb 12:24 may indicate an intention to evoke all of sacred history, from righteous Abel to the sacrifice of Christ.⁷⁷ This presentation of Abel in the New Testament, written sometime in the second half of the first century, suggests the eagerness with which some early Christians sought to typologically interpret the Cain and Abel story.

In the second century, Irenaeus states that Abel prefigures Christ (*Adv. Haer.* 4.25.2; 4.34.4) and in his homily on *Pascha*, Melito of Sardis suggests that those who want to understand the mystery of the Lord should "look at Abel who is similarly murdered" (59) since Christ "was in Abel murdered" (69).⁷⁸ Two centuries later, Methodius of Olympus, in a treatise on chastity, includes the lines:

Abel, clearly prefiguring Thy death, O blessed One, with flowing blood, and eyes lifted up to heaven, said, Cruelly slain by a brother's hand. (Methodius of Olympus, *Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 11.2.11)

Similarly, in a poem on the origin of sin, the fourth century Christian poet Prudentius wrote concerning the demise of death:

⁷⁶ Philip Alexander, "Cain and Abel," in *A Dictionary of Jewish and Christian Relations* (eds. Edward Kessler, Neil Wenborn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 70–71; Trygve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian, with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Tradition* (ConBot 11; Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978), 145–49.

⁷⁷ Lane, 474.

⁷⁸ Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha* (trans. Stuart George Hall; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 33, 37; A.J. Springer, "Proof of Identification: Patristic and Rabbinic Exegesis of the Cain and Abel Narrative," *St Patr* 39 (2006): 260–61.

In sin it had its origin, in sin it fell. For Abel it struck down first, then struck down Christ, and met its end by wounding one who has no end. The ancient story thus foreshadowed things to come. The latest slaying was foreshadowed by the first. (Prudentius, *The Origin of Sin* 22–26 [Eagen])

In the fourth-century Syriac *Life of Abel* we find that not only has the author of the narrative expanded Genesis 4 to include new details, but also that theological commentary has been added to insure that the reader does not miss the importance of the Abel story.

In Abel is depicted a type of killing of his Lord, and at the same time a type of His resurrection is depicted in the raising of the corpse... They do well to say that they took him from the valley and buried him in the mountain. And already on the third day God appeared to Cain and punished him once the abused corpse was in peace. (This was) so that by his ascent might be depicted the type of Him of whom Mary said: “*They have taken my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.*” And if you consider, you will also find our Lord’s ascension in Abel: they lifted up Abel from the valley to the mountain, and Christ was lifted up in the body from Bethany to heaven. (*Life of Abel*, 25, 27)

Finally, Augustine makes a number of allusions to the typological significance of the Cain and Abel story and the link between Abel and Christ is one that he employs more than once.⁷⁹

Abel and Christ, Cain and the Jews—in like manner to the people of the Jews was preferred the Christian people, for redeeming the which as Abel by Cain so by the Jews was slain Christ. (Augustine, *Psalm* 78:8)

Whence then did the Psalmist know this in the beginning, save because the Church speaks, which was not wanting to the earth from the commencement of the human race, the first-fruits whereof was the holy Abel, himself sacrificed in testimony of the future blood of the Mediator that should be shed by a wicked brother? (Augustine, *Psalm* 119:150)

While Christians were enthusiastic to connect the deaths of Abel and Christ, there was another way that the teleological view caused the story to be interpreted that lent it to the service of religious polemic. Some Christian exegetes interpreted the story so that the brothers each became representative of two different people groups. This in itself is not unique since Philo provides some the earliest dualistic thinking about the two brothers and their story; Cain represented the lover-of-self

⁷⁹ Rick Benjamins, “Augustine on Cain and Abel,” in *Eve’s Children*, 130–31.

and Abel the lover-of-God.⁸⁰ Targums *Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan* to Gen 4:8 both did the same thing by providing the brothers with speeches that challenged the notion of divine judgment. This insertion made Cain the rejecter of divine justice and Abel the defender of correct doctrine.⁸¹

But Christian typological exegesis could be more pointed in its use of the story. Some interpreters used a “two people” hermeneutic to interpret the Old Testament. This method was a type proof-texting that divided all of the stories and characters into two groups. All positive messages were applied to the future church. All statements of divine wrath and judgment were applied to the Jews. This hermeneutic made the heroes of the Old Testament become the lineage of the church. The Jews, on the other hand, were portrayed as a people who never listened to their prophetic leaders and teachers.⁸² Particularly useful in this interpretive approach was the way that the Bible often communicates divine favoritism toward late-born sons. The list of non-first-borns who attain distinction reads like a register of the great names of Israelite history (e.g. Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon).⁸³ With this motif well attested in the Scriptures, Christians were provided with the exegetical evidence needed to claim that the younger brother was intended to supersede the older brother. When the story of Cain and Abel is added to this idea, we find Abel, the younger brother, transformed into a representative of the church, while Cain, the older brother, becomes a representative for the Jews.⁸⁴

One way that this “two peoples” hermeneutic was employed was to provide answers to Jewish interlocutors. As Christians engaged with Jews, often polemically, the role of the Mosaic law was frequently a part of the discussion. Christians laid claim to the Old Testament, interpreted it through a Christological lens, but dismissed the law as irrelevant to Christians. Jews, understandably, questioned this. How

⁸⁰ Ricardo, J. Quinones, *The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 23.

⁸¹ Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966), 156; Martinez, “Eve’s Children in the Targumim,” in *Eve’s Children*, 41. For a full discussion of the speeches attributed to Cain and Abel in the Targums, see chapter three above.

⁸² Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 131.

⁸³ Levenson, 70.

⁸⁴ Ruether, 134. Cain’s role as representative of the Jews will be discussed more fully in chapter seven.

could one be a follower of the God of Israel, and yet reject God's law? One particular prescription of the law that was argued over was circumcision since it was one of the most recognizable features that made a Jew a Jew.⁸⁵ Christians rejected the need for circumcision and sought to explain it away by reinterpreting the Old Testament. In some instances, the story of Abel was employed as a part of this effort.

In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr makes a brief, but important appeal to Abel. As part of his argument that the church is superior to Judaism, Justin had to explain why Christians did not need to be circumcised. In order to do this he had to reinterpret circumcision not as a sign of God's covenant with the Jews but as a mark of their suffering (*Dial.* 16.2–3; 19.2). Circumcision, according to Justin, was God's way of marking off the Jews from all other nations and insuring their just punishment in due time.⁸⁶ In order to illustrate his point, Justin argues that if circumcision was necessary then why were the patriarchs (Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Melchizedek) considered to be righteous without it? He then adds the claim:

This circumcision is not, however, necessary for all men, but for you Jews alone, in order that, as I have already said, you may suffer these things which you now justly suffer... For if, as you claim, circumcision had been necessary for salvation God would not have... looked with favor upon the sacrifice of uncircumcised Abel (Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 19.2–3)

This is an unprecedented treatment of Abel's story. Thus far there has not been any interpreter who suggested that circumcision could have played any role in God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice. Yet, Justin employs Abel's status as uncircumcised, a detail Genesis 4 neither confirms nor denies, as proof that circumcision is not required of Christians. While this is only a brief mention of Abel, it is important to Justin's overall argument against circumcision. In *Dial.* 19.5, Justin states that all of these patriarchs were righteous and pleasing to God yet uncircumcised. In 23.5 he contrasts circumcision with righteousness. The result of this contrasting interpretation is that Abel, as one of the uncircumcised patriarchs, becomes a demonstration of righteousness through his deeds rather than circumcision. Moreover, Justin lays claim to Abel for Christianity and deprives the Jews of Abel's story. Since he was not circumcised, and circumcision is only for Jews, Abel

⁸⁵ Theodore Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law* (SBLDS 20; Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press, 1975), 138.

⁸⁶ Stylianopoulos, 137.

was not, therefore, a Jew, but a Christian. Such a move is consistent with Justin's overall interpretive strategy whereby he uses examples from the Old Testament to demonstrate that Jews do not have any true claims to being the children of God and that God's real children have always been those who respond to Christ.⁸⁷ Since Abel obeyed God apart from the law, he was a prototypical Christian.⁸⁸

Tertullian too appeals to Abel in his discussion of circumcision and the law.⁸⁹ He also adds another, more observable feature of the law, Sabbath observance. As with circumcision, Jews questioned how Christians could claim to follow God and yet contravene the Sabbath commandments. In his *Answers to the Jews*, Tertullian argues that prior to the Mosaic law there was an "unwritten law" that was habitually obeyed by the patriarchs like Noah, Abraham and Melchizedek and earned them the epithet "righteous." This renders the Mosaic law as secondary and as such, since it was given to the Jews, is not a requirement for Christians.⁹⁰ To demonstrate his point, Tertullian appeals to Abel as an example.

Therefore, since God originated Adam uncircumcised, and unobservant of the Sabbath, consequently his offspring also, Abel, offering Him sacrifices, uncircumcised and unobservant of the Sabbath, was by Him commended; while He accepted what he was offering in simplicity of heart, and reprobated the sacrifice of his brother Cain, who was not rightly dividing what he was offering. (Tertullian, *Answer to the Jews*, 2)

He then repeats this claim in a subsequent chapter:

In short, let them teach us, as we have already premised, that Adam observed the Sabbath; or that Abel, when offering to God a holy victim, pleased Him by a religious reverence for the Sabbath. (Tertullian, *Answer to the Jews*, 4)

As with Justin, Tertullian's use of Abel (and other patriarchs) does not simply blunt Jewish criticism of Christian practices. It deprives them of Abel's story since Tertullian claims that Christians are obeying the

⁸⁷ Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 163–84.

⁸⁸ See Justin's statement to the effect that all peoples before Christ, including Abraham, were Christians because they lived according to the Logos (1 *Apog.* 46).

⁸⁹ As does Aphrahat after him: "Abel, Enoch, Noah, Shem and Japheth were not in the circumcision, [yet] were pleasing before God" (*Demonstration* XI.3—*On Circumcision*). See Neusner, 22.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

first, unwritten law and that Jews are, in effect, foster children who are heirs of a subsequent, written law. Since Abel obeyed that first Law he is a prototypical Christian.

But Tertullian could be even more explicit in making Abel a prototypical Christian. As part of an explanation of why the “spiritual sacrifice” of Christians is better than the “earthly sacrifices” of the Jews, we find Tertullian using the Cain and Abel story to demonstrate that the “two peoples” interpretation was as old as creation itself.

So, again, we show that sacrifices of earthly oblations and of spiritual sacrifices were predicted; and, moreover, that from the beginning the earthly were foreshown, in the person of Cain, to be those of the “elder son,” that is, of Israel; and the opposite sacrifices demonstrated to be those of the “younger son,” Abel, that is, of *our* people. For the elder, Cain, offered gifts to God from the fruit of the earth; but the younger son, Abel, from the fruit of his ewes. “God had respect unto Abel, and unto his gifts; but unto Cain and unto his gifts He had not respect” ... From this proceeding we gather that the twofold sacrifices of “the peoples” were even from the very beginning foreshown. (Tertullian, *Answers to the Jews* 5)

Tertullian’s claim to the younger son, Abel, as “our people” is a patent example of how the “two peoples” hermeneutic was used to deprive Jews of their own ancestors and to Christianize Abel. Capitalizing on the Bible’s habit of showing divine favoritism toward late-born sons, Tertullian uses God’s acceptance of Abel’s sacrifice as exegetical “proof” that the acceptance of Christians over Jews was known, predicted and anticipated in the Hebrew Scriptures from the very first moments that human beings lived outside of Eden.⁹¹ Abel, the younger son, is not only the prototypical Christian; he is the spiritual ancestor of the future church.⁹²

The interpretation of Abel as the prototypical Christian and spiritual ancestor of the church finds resonance with a number of authors.⁹³ But Augustine is probably one of the most prolific in his interpretation

⁹¹ Ruether, 133.

⁹² Springer, 261.

⁹³ The *Instructions of Commodianus* states that the race of Abel believed on Christ (36) and as the younger brother was approved by Christ (39). Maximinus bishop of Turin holds up Cain and Abel as prototypes of the Jews (*Contra Judeas* I) and John Chrysostom has a similar interpretation of Cain and Abel’s sacrifice as that of Tertullian (*Contra Judeas* I.7). See also Ambrose, *The Sacrifice of Abel and Cain* 1.1.4; 1.2.5.

of the two brothers. In his *The City of God* the two brothers each come to represent two different groups of people.

Of these two first parents of the human race, then, Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God...Accordingly, it is recorded of Cain that he built a city, but Abel, being a sojourner, built none. For the city of the saints is above, although here below it begets citizens, in whom it sojourns till the time of its reign arrives, when it shall gather together all in the day of the resurrection; and then shall the promised kingdom be given to them, in which they shall reign with their Prince, the King of the ages, time without end. (Augustine, *City of God* 15.1)

Augustine continues the “two peoples” hypothesis by allegorically interpreting Cain’s reputation as the first city builder. Cain is a type of the Jews and Abel a type of Christ and the church.⁹⁴

Such was the founder of the earthly city. He was also a figure of the Jews who slew Christ the Shepherd of the flock of men, prefigured by Abel the shepherd of sheep: but as this is an allegorical and prophetic matter, I forbear to explain it now; besides, I remember that I have made some remarks upon it in writing against Faustus the Manichaean. (Augustine, *City of God* 15.7)

And in a commentary on Psalm 129, of which Augustine interprets as speaking of the church, he says:

“Many a time have they fought against me from my youth up” (v. 1): The Church speaks of those whom She endures: and as if it were asked, “Is it now?” The Church is of ancient birth: since saints have been so called, the Church has been on earth. At one time the Church was in Abel only, and he was fought against by his wicked and lost brother Cain. (Augustine, *Psalm* 129:2)

As with others before him, Augustine has appropriated Abel to be a spiritual ancestor of the church. At the same time, he disinherits Jews from their heritage. According to Augustine, the Jews are nothing more than a prop in the ongoing story of the church. Abel is not a hero of Jewish righteousness but Christian history.

Typological exegesis of the Cain and Abel story enabled Christians to stake a claim on Abel. The parallels between the story of Abel and that of Christ seemed to support their teleological view of history. Abel

⁹⁴ Augustine has much more to say about Cain than Abel and his comments to this effect will be examined in chapter seven.

was not simply the first righteous individual to be murdered; he was the one who set in motion the march of history towards the Christ event. Once Abel was made into a type of Christ, it was not difficult to view him as a prototype of the church. Noticing that the younger brothers of scripture seem to be the ones who receive divine favor, Christian exegetes used a “two people” hermeneutic that made Abel a Christian and the spiritual ancestor of the church. The corollary of this interpretation was that while it provided Christians an identity in the Old Testament story, it shifted Jewish identity. Jews were called the “older brother” and as a result, the ones without divine favor.

Summary

Abel's death meant, in many ways, a new life for him. Although his appearance in Genesis was brief and tragic, the subsequent incarnations given to him in interpretive traditions made him into an ideal figure. The fact that he was the first to offer an acceptable sacrifice in a post-Edenic world made him the first righteous individual. As such, he topped the list of ideal figures from Israel's history that were to be emulated. The result is a number of traditions in Jewish and Christian literature that identify him as “Abel the righteous.”

Closely related to Abel's status as “righteous” are the exegetical developments surrounding the crying blood in Gen 4:10. The present tense verbs in the narrative were read as giving Abel's inanimate blood a perpetual voice. Rather than merely interpret the shed blood as evidence of Cain's crime, exegetes understood it as a cry for vengeance. Reflecting this perception of Abel's blood is the tradition of vengeance prayers. These prayers demanding justice from God for the shed blood of the innocent often echoed the language and imagery of Gen 4:10. Perceived exegetical links between Gen 4:10 and 9:4 led interpreters to develop a picture of Abel's spirit demanding justice from God which finds a culmination in 1 *Enoch* 22. The picture of Abel demanding for the obliteration of all of Cain's seed provides a central figure who has stood in the same position as the persecuted righteous since the beginning of the post-Edenic world. As such he becomes a perpetual voice for the righteous demanding vengeance from God for the death of the innocence.

Some took Abel's role even further. Expanding upon the exegetical link between Gen 4:10 and 9:4, they concluded the 9:5–6 also spoke

about Abel in a way that made him a judge. This led to the presentation of Abel in the *Testament of Abraham* as sitting on a throne and judging the unrighteous. Now Abel was not only demanding vengeance, he became the very personification of vengeance. The silent, innocent victim found in Genesis was transformed into an eschatological judge. The humiliation that marked his tragic life in Genesis was reversed and the cry of his blood turned into his role as a dispenser of justice.

For Christians, Abel's status as the first martyr was important due to its connection with Jesus' words in Matthew. The "blood of righteous Abel" became a rallying point for a number of Christians who were suffering under various forms of persecution. Related to this was the way that some used typological exegesis to turn Abel into a prototype of Christ and the church. A teleological view of biblical history offered exegetes the opportunity to claim that as the younger brother, Abel was the spiritual ancestor of the church. The result of this interpretation was that Jews were disenfranchised from their own history.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WAY OF CAIN

“I incline to Cain’s heresy” he used to say
“I let my brother go to the devil in his own way.”
(Robert Luis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*)

How bad was Cain?

As with Abel, Cain was saddled by interpreters with titles and character traits that do not appear in the Genesis 4 story. While Abel received a number of descriptive titles, it is the identification of his “righteousness” and his role as an ideal figure in biblical history that was most common. In Christian writings Abel’s status as “righteous” can be attributed to the words of Jesus in Matt 23:35 which were repeatedly quoted by interpreters in the Christian era. A survey of the literature demonstrates that exegetes were just as happy to employ any number and type of descriptions to identify Cain as the first murderer, but, as would be expected, in a much more negative light.

Among the earliest documents to attach a descriptive to Cain is the Wisdom of Solomon. As noted in the previous chapter, Cain is presented in 10:3 as the first person to reject Wisdom and to be labeled “unrighteous” (ἄδικος). The significance of this presentation is that he has the notoriety of being the only person in this list to be referred to in this way. Even the collective enemies of the “righteous” are not called ἄδικοι. It seems that as the first one to commit murder, and as one to head the list of the enemies of the righteous ones, Cain’s crime became the archetype of all wrongdoing and thus earned him an extraordinary name.¹ Furthermore, in 10:4 Cain is regarded as the reason for the flood thereby making his responsibility for evil far greater than is communicated in Genesis 4.² The result is that the author of Wisdom has

¹ Karina Martin Hogan, “The Exegetical Background of the ‘Ambiguity of Death’ in the Wisdom of Solomon,” *JSJ* 30 (1999): 22.

² John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch* (JSPSup 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 60–61. For an overview of those

sharpened the evil of Cain so that he is responsible for three crimes, each related to and more serious than the first. He rejected Wisdom, murdered his brother and brought destruction upon the world.

In *Ant.* 1.53, Josephus contrasts the dispositions of Cain and Abel. Following the order in Gen 4:2, he describes Abel's occupation first, but then adds an interpretive gloss stating that Abel was "one who had regard for righteousness." Similar to the author of Wisdom, however, Josephus sharpens the depiction of Cain's evil as demonstrated by the way he uses the adjective *πονηρός*. In 1.53 Josephus portrays Cain as "wholly evil" (*πονηρότατος*) using the superlative form of the adjective which seems to be a calculated move to present a totally depraved Cain. In 1.61 Cain is described as advancing evil to the extent that not only does he increase his own wickedness, but he even becomes a teacher of evil activities to others (*διδάσκαλος αὐτοῖς ὑπῆρχε πονηρῶν*). Lastly, in 1.66, using the superlative form of *πονηρός* again, Josephus claims that Cain's descendants became even more evil than him and that each one, in succession, surpassed the other in their evil exploits (*Κάιος τοὺς ἐγγόνους πονηροτάτους συνέβη γενέσθαι*). As in Wisdom, no longer is Cain only the first to commit murder. According to Josephus, Cain is the institutor, teacher and progenitor of all evil. Cain and his children are responsible for the decline of humanity.³

Among the numerous negative descriptions that Philo uses for Cain he says that Cain is an atheist (*Worse* 103, 119) and those who think like him are a part of the race of Cain (*Posterity* 42). Elsewhere he calls Cain wicked (*QG* 1.59), the representative of evil doctrine (*Sacrifices* 1.5) and the ultimate symbol of wickedness (*Flight* 1.64).

Christian authors also followed this interpretive trajectory. 1 John 3:12 describes Cain as unrighteous and a murderer (*πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ*). In Jude 11 those who walk in the way of Cain are condemned (*τῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ Κάιν*), a statement which resonates with the claim made by Josephus that not only was Cain evil, but he also instructed others how to perform evil deeds.⁴ 1 Clement 4:7 views

interpreters who attribute the reason for the flood to Cain and his descendants see chapter 5 above.

³ Harold W. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* (HDR 7; Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press for Harvard Theological Review, 1976), 123; Flavius Josephus, *Judean Antiquities 1–4* (translation and commentary by Louis H. Feldman; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 21–22. For a discussion of Cain's descendants and their responsibility for the increase of evil in the world, see chapter five above.

⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (WBC 50; Waco: Word, 1983), 79.

Cain as the prototype of hatred and envy towards one's brother that leads to murder (ζῆλος καὶ φθόνος ἀδελφοκτονίαν κατειργάσατο). In an epistle attributed to Ignatius Cain is called the successor to the devil (*Hero* 5)⁵ and in the *Apocryphon of John* he is called "unrighteous" (*Ap. John* II, 24, 16–25, 118–19)."

Rabbinic interpreters were not always as critical of Cain as there predecessors, but they weren't above making some sharp comments about him. In *Gen. Rab.* 2:3, we find a parallel to the claim in Wisdom and Josephus that Cain's evil actions had repercussions on creation. Rabbi Judah interpreted the description of the earth as "void" in *Gen* 1:2 as a reference to Cain. Connecting Cain's act of lawlessness with the chaos of the pre-creation world, he said: "And void refers to Cain, who desired to return the world back to formlessness and emptiness." Other interpreters referred to Cain as an "empty pot" (*Gen. Rab.* 19:11) or a "vessel full of urine" (*Num. Rab.* 20:6).

There is one title, however, that is most commonly applied to Cain and that is the label of "fratricide" (ἀδελφοκτόνος). It seems that the first murderer was forever branded for the specific type of murder he committed. Thus, in *Wis* 10:3 we read that an unrighteous man perished because he committed fratricide (ἀδελφοκτόνους) in a fit of anger. Philo refers to Cain as a fratricide no less than ten times and sometimes uses the label as a way to talk about Cain without mentioning his name.⁶ The same branding of Cain is found in Josephus's *Ant.* 1.65, a fragment of *Jub.* 4:15⁷ and in *1 Clem.* 4:7.⁸

In the New Testament, specific "fratricide" terminology (i.e. ἀδελφοκτόνος) does not appear in conjunction with Cain. But there is one instance that strongly suggests that the New Testament authors were aware of the tradition and thus requires some extended treatment here.

1 John 3:15 states that everyone who hates his brother is an ἀνθρωποκτόνος. This word is usually translated as "murderer" or "man-slayer" and is rarely used in classical Greek.⁹ The only other appear-

⁵ See also Cyprian who calls Cain unrighteous (*Jealousy and Envy* 10).

⁶ *Worse* 96; *Posterity*, 49; *Agriculture* 21; *Virtues* 199; *Cherubim* 52; *Flight* 60; *Reward* 72, 74.

⁷ Albert-Marie Denis, *Concordance grecque des pseudepigraphes d' Ancien Testament* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Univesité Catholique de Louvain, Institut orientaliste, 1987), 902.

⁸ See also Tertullian, *Patience* 5; *Hel. Syn. Pr.* 12:54.

⁹ Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 447.

ance of the term is in John 8:44 where Jesus uses it to label the devil as one who was a murderer from the beginning.¹⁰ In 1 John there is no explicit connection between Cain and ἀνθρωποκτόνος, but the implications are understood. Cain hated and killed his brother and as the first murderer serves as the chief representative for all brother haters who are labeled an ἀνθρωποκτόνος.¹¹ While both the Gospel and 1 John use ἀνθρωποκτόνος to describe the referent as a murderer, the applications are somewhat different.¹² In the Gospel the context seems to be the conflict between the Johannine community and the local synagogue. In 1 John the author is more concerned with the internal problems of community life. The familial language that permeates 1 John 3 suggests that in spite of the terminology used, the author has a particular type of murder in mind: fratricide. The author presents a contrast between those who are children of God and those who are not and condemns all who hate their brothers. Since the focus is on community life through familial language, it would seem plausible that the author used traditions shared with the Gospel to label the brother haters not simply as murderers but more specifically as fratricides. But the use of ἀνθρωποκτόνος in 1 John is still problematic since it is a rarely used term. A survey of extant Greek literature for the uses of

¹⁰ Rather than tackle the more complicated questions surrounding the relationship between the Gospel and the Epistle, it seems more prudent to agree with Lieu and others that the similarities between the two documents are the result of being heirs to the same set of interpretive traditions (Judith Lieu, "What Was From The Beginning: Scripture and Tradition in the Johannine Epistles," *NTS* 39 (1993): 476–77; Ruth B. Edwards, *The Johannine Epistles* [Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], 55; John Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John* [SP 18; Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002], 23).

¹¹ It is striking that both times the term is used in the New Testament there is a connection to the devil. In John 8:44 the devil is the father of "the Jews" and in 1 John 3:12 Cain is said to be from the evil one. The depiction of Cain as the son of the devil was a well established tradition in Jewish and Christian literature and the tradition's probable influence on the Gospel and 1 John can be acknowledged without rehearsing it in detail here. For a full discussion of the tradition see chapter one above as well as: Jan Dochhorn, "Mit Kain kam der Tod in die Welt: Zur Auslegung von SapSal 2,24 in 1 Clem 3, 4; 4, 1–7, mit einem Seitenblick auf Polykarp, Phil. 7,1 und Theophilus, Ad Autol. II, 29, 3–4," *ZNW* 98 (2007): 105–59. James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 147, 157; Lieu, 467–68; Dahl, "Der Erstgeborene Satans und der Vater des Teufels (Polk. 7 1 und Joh 8 44)," in *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), 70–84.

¹² Rudlof Bultmann suggested that the author's source contained the term ἀνθρωποκτόνος and therefore induced him to make reference to the Cain and Abel story (*The Johannine Epistles* [trans. Phillip O'Hara; Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1973], 54).

the word ἀνθρωποκτόνος reveals its rarity, apart from two occurrences in Euripides' works.

Euripides uses the term twice and both times to describe a peculiar type of murder. In the *Cyclops* (ln 127) ἀνθρωποκτόνος describes how humans are eaten by the Cyclopes. In *Iphigenia in Tauris* (ln 386) ἀνθρωποκτόνος is used in the context of human sacrifice. While the scarcity of the term in ancient literature signals the need for caution, the impression is that when it was used ἀνθρωποκτόνος did not refer to murder in general, but to those acts of killing which were considered to be particularly repugnant, including, but probably not limited to, the sacrifice and/or devouring of a human victim. The killing of a family member could be viewed with the same repugnancy. In the story of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the heroine is a priestess of Artemis and her job consists of consecrating men to be put to death on the altar. The plot is framed around how she helps her brother, Orestes, to escape this fate.

Such a use of ἀνθρωποκτόνος by Euripides is interesting since both here and in 1 John it is the (potential) act of fratricide that is central to the stories. Iphigenia rescued her brother; Cain killed his brother. When combined with the Cain illustration in 1 John 3:15, the ἀνθρωποκτόνος label would have been an effective condemnation of those who refused to follow the example of Christ. Moreover, since they follow the example of Cain and hate their brothers they could be more properly called fratricides.¹³ What this suggests is that when the author of 1 John used the Cain illustration the consensus was to already identify him as a fratricide (ἀδελφοκτόνος). Although the terminology used in 1 John is somewhat different due to the author's interpretive tradition, the Cain and Abel story was already part of a broader context of traditions. Thus the condemnation of those who do not love their brothers in 1 John 3 could be understood as an act of fratricide at the communal level. This is not to suggest that there was an actual threat of death, but simply that hatred of one's brother

¹³ There may be some connection to Jesus tradition here with anger towards one's brother being connected to murder in Matt 5:21–24 (Alan E. Brooke, *The Johannine Epistles* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1912], 94; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*. [WBC 51; Waco: Word, 1984], 191; Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 65–78). A similar theme is found later in the Jewish work *Derek Eres Rabba* 11:13 (57b) which attributes to Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, a contemporary of the Johannine authors, the saying, "He who hates his neighbor is among the shedders of blood" (Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 447).

was easily equated with Cain's act of fratricide. Although the terminology in 3:15 can be more accurately translated as "murderer" or "manslayer," using a label reserved for repugnant acts of killing in the context of the familial language and the Cain and Abel illustration would have made it easy to identify the act as a specific type of murder: fratricide.

The branding of Cain is a development of his crime. Ancient exegetes were not satisfied with merely calling him "unrighteous" or "wicked." Instead they magnified his crime in ways that cannot be found in Genesis 4. Not only was Cain the first to commit murder, he was also the first to reject Wisdom, promote evil and bring about the destruction of the world. He is, in many ways, the prototype of the wicked; the first to bring evil into the world and to multiply it. While his crime earned him a certain level of notoriety, it was the specific type of murder that attracted the attention of some exegetes. Cain committed fratricide, which in the minds of some authors, was very serious indeed. So serious, that the author of 1 John could appeal to the story as part of his warning to the brother haters.

How greedy was Cain?

One aspect of the Cain and Abel traditions examined in chapter one was the meaning of the brothers' names. Abel's name was sometimes interpreted as meaning "breath," "nothing" or "sorrow" (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.52; Philo, *Migration* 13.74). Cain's name, on the other hand, was often interpreted to mean "possession." In the Hebrew version of Gen 4:2 Cain's name is part of a word play in Eve's cryptic statement made at her first son's birth. This word play is created by her claim to have "gained" (קנה) a man which has a poetic similarity to the name Cain (קין). When Eve's statement was translated into Greek the word play was lost and no attempt was made to retain it.¹⁴ But in spite of this, some interpreters seem to have been aware of the assonance between Cain's name and his mother's statement. Although working in Greek, they used their knowledge of this word play in Hebrew to develop traditions about Cain. The result is that Cain was portrayed as a greedy individual who oppressed others in order to gain riches.

¹⁴ John William Wevers, *LXX: Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies 35; Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1993), 51.

In his rendition of Genesis 4 Josephus notes that Cain's name signifies "possession," (κτησιν) which he interprets to mean that Cain was greedy (πρὸς τὸ κερδαίνειν μόνον [*Ant.* 1.52–53]). This is evidenced by Cain's choice of occupation. Abel became a shepherd, a choice representing his acknowledgement of God and nature (*Ant.* 1.53–54). Cain, on the other hand, was the first to think of plowing the land, an act that Josephus interprets as forcing the ground to yield in an unnatural way. But Josephus does not end his attack on Cain's character here. After recounting Abel's murder and Cain's punishment, Josephus goes on to claim that Cain continued to become even more wicked (*Ant.* 1.60). He increased his property and possessions through robbery and force and became a teacher of wickedness to others. And as if this was not enough, Josephus credits Cain with the invention of weights and measures which led humanity away from a simple life based on trust into one steeped in deception, dishonesty and the continued pursuit to increase possessions and property (*Ant.* 1.61).¹⁵

Although Philo does not credit Cain with the invention of weights and measures, he does emphasize the notion that Cain was driven to gain more property and possessions. As with Josephus, this too is predicated on Philo's understanding of Cain's name meaning "possession" (*Cherubim* 52). The central flaw in Cain's character, according to Philo, was his failure to recognize that all possessions belonged to God rather than him (*Cherubim* 52, 65).¹⁶ For Philo, Cain is the ultimate narcissist. He represents self-love and those who are willing to go to any lengths in order to secure riches, honor, glory and authority. According to Philo, Cain's partisans are those in society who are rich, live a life of luxury, are strangers to labor and are constantly in the company of those people or things that bring them pleasure (*Worse* 32–34). In his efforts to portray Cain as an archetype he labels anyone who is a lover of self as a "Cain" and therefore a murderer (*Worse* 78).

¹⁵ Plato notes that in primitive humanity people were neither rich nor poor and thus free from envy and strife (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.679B3–C2). This may be what has influenced Josephus' description as he attempts to establish Cain as the proto-deceiver. See Feldman, *Judean Antiquities*, 22 n. 133.

¹⁶ This was why God rejected Cain's offering and Philo accuses Cain of being deficient in two areas: (1) he was late in bringing an offering to God; and (2) he did not offer God the first fruits of his harvest. This is the tragic result of individuals, like Cain, who either think they are the source of all the good things they enjoy or, even worse, they acknowledge God as the source but somehow think they deserve them (*Sacrifices* 52–56). See, Hindy Najman, "Cain and Abel as Character Traits," in *Eve's Children*, 113, 115.

Noting that Genesis never discusses how or when Cain died, Philo concludes that his wickedness lives on and thus, like Cain, never dies (*Confusion* 122; *Flight* 60, 64). In this way, Philo is able to attribute the presence of evil in the world and the pursuit of possessions to the ongoing influence of Cain and those who follow in his footsteps.

The sentiments found in Philo and Josephus can be heard in the midrash as well. In *Gen. Rab.* 22:9 we find Cain associated with Ps 37:14:

R. Joshua said in R. Levi's name: "It is written, *The wicked have drawn out their sword*—this refers to Cain; *to cast down the poor and needy* refers to Abel."

Prov 28:3 says "a ruler who oppresses the poor is like a beating rain that leaves no food." This proverb is referenced in *Exod. Rab.* 31:17 and applied to Cain of whom it is said he was impatient to possess the whole earth and that his desire for property and possessions motivated him to kill Abel. Finally, in *Eccl. Rab.* 6:2.1 we find that the person described in Eccl 6:3 who lives many years, but does not have satisfaction of soul is alluding to Cain because he was not satisfied with his money and his possessions.¹⁷

Even when Cain is not mentioned by name, echoes of the tradition linking him to the oppression of the poor can be detected. One such example is found in Sir 34:19–22:

The Most High is not pleased with the offerings of the ungodly; and he is not propitiated for sins by a multitude of sacrifices. Like one who kills a son before his father's eyes is the man who offers a sacrifice from the property of the poor. The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; whoever deprives them of it is a man of blood. To take away a neighbor's living is to murder him; to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood.¹⁸

Although Cain is not mentioned by name in this passage there are several traits listed here that is part of an interpretive trajectory

¹⁷ The author, like Philo, is aware of Genesis' failure to mention Cain's death. The author suggests that Ecclesiastes' statement that the unsatisfied individual has no burial is a description of how Cain lived until the time of Noah and was then swept away by the flood, thus denying Cain a proper burial. The claim that the passage alludes to Abel as one who suffers an untimely death is predicated on a Hebrew word play. The word for untimely death is *nefel* from the root *nafal*, "to fall", which is how Abel died as a result of his brother's violence.

¹⁸ Translation mine.

concerning Cain: (1) a rejected offering; (2) the crime of murder; (3) depriving the poor of their property and wages; and (4) the claim that the oppression of the poor is analogous to shedding innocent blood. What this may indicate is the existence of two parallel traditions that sometimes interconnect. On the one hand there is a strong tradition which condemns those who oppress the poor.¹⁹ On the other hand, there is yet another tradition which also condemns the oppression of the poor, but identifies the oppressors with wicked Cain and the oppressed with righteous Abel. Because of the considerable thematic overlaps between the two traditions, one could easily move between them without the need to mention Cain and Abel by name. As the traditions developed, Cain and Abel became archetypes for the wicked oppressors and the righteous poor and it was not necessary to differentiate between the two traditions. Other examples of these overlapping traditions may include Sir 21:5 where, like the cry of Abel's blood, the prayer of the poor reaches up to the ears of God. This is followed by a warning against the rich building houses with other people's money (21:8). Similarly, in *1 En.* 99:11–16 the wicked are described, as in Josephus and Sirach, as those who use deceitful weights and measures and build homes through the labor of others. Although Cain is not mentioned by name in these texts, the parallels between the two traditions concerning the oppression of the poor are notable.

An echo of this tradition may be found in the New Testament as well. James 5:1–6 contains a condemnation of wealthy individuals who persecute the poor.

Come now, rich people, weep, wailing over your miseries that are coming. Your riches have rotted, and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have become rusted, and their corrosion will be a testimony against you, and will consume your flesh like fire. You have stored up treasure for the last days. Behold, the wages of the workers who harvest your fields, which you kept back by fraud, they cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have nourished your hearts for the day of slaughter. You condemned and murdered the righteous one. Does he not resist you?²⁰

¹⁹ Greed for money, power and position was one of the most significant vices to be warned against in Jewish literature (Prov 1:11; Eccl 4:1–4; Wis 2:18–20; *1 En* 94 ff [Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History*, 122]).

²⁰ Translation mine.

If one listens closely to the statements found in 5:1–6 it is possible to hear an echo of the Cain and Abel story. Indeed, this would not be the first time such an echo has been heard. A number of scholars have noted that the cry of the harvesters reaching the ears of the Lord of hosts in Jas 5:4 is similar to Abel's blood crying out to the Lord from the ground in Gen 4:10.²¹ The setting for the passage in James is the condemnation of the rich who have abused the poor.²² However, the eschatological tone of the passage changes to one of encouragement in 5:7 when James shifts his remarks to the oppressed by calling for patience and promising them that God will act on their behalf in the future.²³ This is similar to what we have already seen in relation to Abel's cry for vengeance in *1 En.* 22:5–7. But there are at least two other echoes which link James's statements here with the Cain and Abel tradition.

The first is located in 5:3–5. Here we are told that the rich have abused and stolen the wages of the harvesters and that their cries have reached the Lord of hosts. As noted above, several New Testament scholars have observed the parallel between Jas 5:4 and Gen 4:10.²⁴ The fact that James does not include any allusion to blood crying out is not a problem because, as we saw in Josephus, Philo, Hebrews, *1 Enoch*, and the *Testament of Abraham*, it is not the blood that is important, but the ongoing cry for the Lord to avenge the oppressed.²⁵ Thus in order for James to communicate the plight of the oppressed to his readers it was only necessary to describe the cry which was raised by all those who, like Abel, suffered at the hands of their oppressors. As in many of the traditions concerning Cain examined above, it is through deceit and forced labor that the rich are able to enjoy a life of pleasure. Thus it appears that James is working within that tradition which identified Cain as the archetype of the wicked even though he is not mentioned

²¹ Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James Peter and Jude* (AB 37; NY: Doubleday, 1963), 51; Martin Dibelius, *A commentary on the epistle of James* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 238; Ralph P. Martin, *James* (WBC 48; Waco: Word, 1988), 179; James H. Ropes, *An Exegetical and Critical Commentary on the Epistle of Saint James* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1916), 289.

²² James has a consistently negative portrayal of the rich (1:10–11; 2:6–7; 5:1–6). For a discussion of James' attitude towards the rich see David Hutchinson Edgar, *Has God Not Chosen the Poor: The Social Setting of the Epistle of James* (JSNTSup 206; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

²³ *Ibid.*, 188, 198.

²⁴ Reicke, 51; Dibelius, 238; Martin, 179; Ropes, 289.

²⁵ See the discussion about Abel's cry for vengeance in chapter six.

by name. Like Sir 34:19–22 and *1 En.* 99:11–16, explicitly naming Cain was not necessary. But because the two traditions overlapped significantly James could merely point out the characteristics of the wicked rich which were also commonly associated with Cain. Readers who were familiar with the tradition would understand the significance of the cries of the oppressed reaching the ears of the Lord.

The second echo is located in the enigmatic statements of 5:6. In 5:6a we find James accusing the rich of condemning and killing the righteous one. While many New Testament scholars have concluded that this righteous individual is a collective singular for all oppressed peoples, it seems possible that if James's statements in 5:4 are an echo of Gen 4:10, then the righteous one is not merely a collective singular, but is also a reference to Abel as the archetype of *all* righteous individuals.²⁶ The murder of this individual fits quite nicely with the Genesis account as well as the way the tradition developed later. The point, then, is that one need not decide between Abel and a collective singular when identifying the righteous individual. The overlapping traditions would allow for both options at the same time without the need for one to take precedence over the other.²⁷ Moreover, when we then examine the resistance offered by the murdered individual in 5:6b it resonates with what we have already seen in the Cain and Abel tradition.

The interpretation of 5:6b depends on how one understands the Greek in this sentence. What does James mean by the righteous one resisting? If we understand the phrase οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν as stating a fact, as some have, then it appears that we have a conundrum. How can the righteous poor *not* be resisting the rich? But if we understand the statement in 5:6b as a rhetorical question, as does Davids,

²⁶ Suggestions for the identification of this righteous one have ranged from Jesus as the one executed by the Jewish aristocracy (Theophylact, *PG* 125:1184 as quoted in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* ed. by Gerald Bray [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 55; Irenaeus *Adv. Haer* 18.3; F. Mussner, *Der Jakobusbrief* [5th ed.; HTKNT 13.1; Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1987], 199), to James himself as the titular head of a righteous community under attack (See Greeven's note in Dibelius, 239). A similar connection was made by Hegesippus in Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 2.23.15. The general consensus, however, is that the statement is not referring to a specific individual but is a collective singular used to describe all who are righteous, poor, and oppressed (Dibelius, 1975, 239; Martin, 182; Ropes, 292).

²⁷ Ropes notes that a parallel to this statement may be found in Matt 23:35 where we find the phrase "Abel the Righteous." Unfortunately, Ropes does not expand upon this observation (292).

Westcott and Hort, and some French translations,²⁸ the result, then, is a statement which describes an action similar to the ongoing outcry of the righteous; the continual cry to God for vengeance even though the righteous are dead. In Philo, *1 Enoch* and Hebrews the voice and spirit of Abel was described as continually crying out to the Lord. If James is working within the Cain and Abel tradition, then portraying the righteous individual(s) as one who is abused, murdered and then continues to resist the wicked rich (i.e. by calling out to God) even after death would be in keeping with the interpretive trajectory of the tradition.²⁹ If, as seems possible, James's readers were familiar with the way that the tradition incorporated the condemnation of the rich as part of the Cain and Abel story, then it would not be impossible for them to hear the echoes of Genesis 4 in James's statements. Thus their conclusion would have been that those who oppress the poor and withhold their wages are guilty of the same crimes committed by Cain.

The meaning of Cain's name led to an exegetical development whereby the first murderer also became the archetype for those who oppress the poor. Josephus, Philo and the rabbis accused Cain of being a greedy, scheming individual whose motivation for murdering Abel was so that he could gain more wealth and possessions. At the same time, there existed a parallel tradition in Judaism and Christianity which was concerned with how the righteous poor were oppressed by the wicked rich. This tradition included a broad condemnation of the practices of those rich individuals who oppressed these righteous poor in order to further enrich themselves. The cries of the poor were portrayed as continually ascending to God requesting vengeance even if they had been murdered. The Cain tradition followed the same trajectory as the first, but rather than describe the situation in general terms, those working in this tradition borrowed imagery from the

²⁸ Davids suggests that rendering 5:6b as a question is possible "due to the passages climactic position and such passages as Rev. 6:9–11." Thus the question presented to the reader is, Davids says: "Does he not resist you?" and the implied answer is: "Yes, he does; by calling for justice before God's throne. This just one died quietly (from starvation or outright murder), but he still speaks. They have killed the poor righteous Christians, *but*, their voice is now still resisting them (the language may recall God's act in 4:6), like the wages still crying out" (Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 180).

²⁹ Thus the change of tenor in 5:7 where James ceases to address the rich and begins to exhort his readers to be patient because God will avenge them.

Cain and Abel story in order to establish archetypes of the wicked rich and the righteous poor. Because the traditions were both focused on the same goal, condemnation of the rich, one did not have to choose between them. Both traditions were equally useful and overlapped to such a degree that one could easily read the one and still hear echoes of the other.

Who sinned more, Adam or Cain?

Since the time of the Apostle Paul, responsibility for the presence of sin and death in the world has been laid at the feet of Adam (Rom 5). Paul established Adam as the prototypical sinner in contrast with the “second Adam,” Christ. Adam sinned and with his sin death entered the world (Rom 5:12, 14). But not every interpreter viewed the situation in quite the same way as Paul. Some, while acknowledging Adam’s failure to obey, did not consider Adam to be the prototypical sinner. They also did not consider him responsible for the presence of death in the world. One reason for this reading of Adam’s story is the dissonance between what was said and what actually happened. In Gen 2:17 God warns Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (cf. Gen 3:3). Yet when Adam and Eve do eat the fruit they do not die. Instead, they are cursed, banished from God’s garden, and yet Adam lives to an age of 930. Some interpreters recognized the problem and found a way around it through the way that they interpreted the Cain story.

In our story of firsts, Genesis 4 is the first time that sin has been introduced to the equation of humanity’s relationship with God. Even though Adam and Eve had both clearly disobeyed God and suffered the consequences of that disobedience, their act of eating forbidden fruit is never described in Genesis as sin. It is only in the Cain and Abel story that sin makes its debut and only in relation to Cain (Gen 4:7). Cain, therefore, has the distinction of being the first human condemned for an act that is defined as sin. Moreover, in spite of God’s declaration in 2:17 that Adam and Eve would die, it is their son Abel who is the first person in biblical history to experience death and he does so at the hand of the first sinner, Cain. These observations led some interpreters to attribute more responsibility for sin and death to Cain than to Adam.

The Wisdom of Solomon provides an early example of this interpretive approach. In Wis 2:24a we read, “but through the envy of the devil, death entered the world.” Two questions need to be addressed in conjunction with this verse. First, to what does the phrase “the envy of the devil” (φθόνῳ διαβόλου) refer? Second, what or who is the source of death here?

There are two possible interpretations of φθόνῳ διαβόλου. The first may consider the phrase an allusion to the view that the serpent was actually Satan and that he deceived Eve because he envied Adam and Eve. Such a view is supported by 2 *En.* 31.3–6 and *The Life of Adam and Eve* 10–17. In the LXX, διαβόλος is the normal rendering for ἔχθρα, which means “enemy” and includes no metaphysical sense.³⁰ In the Hebrew Bible, ἔχθρα is only used five times as a proper noun and is translated each time by διαβόλος.³¹ So while it is possible that Wis 2:24 is referring to the serpent/devil’s deception of Eve, it is not certain. If this is an allusion to Eve’s deception in Gen 3:4 then it is one of the earliest extant Jewish documents to equate the serpent with the devil.³² But if διαβόλος is translated as “of the enemy,” then it is possible that 2:24 constitutes an allusion to Cain’s murder of Abel. In Wisdom, “types” are employed who represent people of the author’s day. In Wis 10:3–4 Cain represents a type of the unrighteous who murder the innocent. If 2:12–20 is read with the Cain and Abel story in mind, the situation is the same. Unrighteous people plan to ambush and kill the righteous because they are envious of them.³³ The activity of Cain and the opponents of the righteous as an “enemy” are parallel.³⁴ The problem of envy, then, should be attributed to Cain and not the devil.³⁵ Cain was jealous of Abel since God accepted the one’s sacrifice over that of the other. If this interpretation is correct, then Cain is the cause of death through his act of murdering Abel. “Death, as a physical fact, entered

³⁰ J. A. F. Gregg, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 23.

³¹ Job 1:6, 12; 2:1; 1 Chr 21:1; Zech 3:1.

³² David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (AB 43; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 121; Hogan, 21.

³³ Gregg, 22.

³⁴ Levison, 51–52.

³⁵ As we will see below, this was the way some Christian interpreters read Wisdom 2:24. Note too 6:23 which says that envy does not associate with Wisdom and 10:3 where Cain is said to have rejected Wisdom.

into the world not with Eve, but with Cain, who was the first to take human life.”³⁶

The second question concerns how death is understood in 2:24 and elsewhere in Wisdom. First, death is an independent power that brings people to eternal destruction.³⁷ It was not part of God’s plan nor was it created by God (1:13; 2:23).³⁸ Second, it only effects the unrighteous. The righteous, although murdered by the unrighteous, exist in eternal peace (3:2–4). Third, death is not the result of sin but being formed from the earth. In 7:1 mortality (θνητός) is assumed to be the natural result of humans being formed from the earth (γῆγενοῦς ἀπόγονος πρωτοπλάστου). This is recalled in 10:1 where Wisdom is said to have recued the “first formed father of the world” (πρωτόπλαστον πατέρα κόσμου) from his transgression. There is no suggestion here that mortality or bad consequences resulted from Adam’s sin.³⁹ Wisdom saves Adam so that he can fulfill his role of ruling the world. The seriousness of Adam’s sin is glossed over in 10:1 and there is no attempt to lay the blame on Eve. Instead Eve’s role is ignored and the reader’s attention is shifted to the situation of Cain.⁴⁰ Cain rejected wisdom, killed Abel, and caused the world to be flooded, which, as a result, led to his own death (10:3–4). The entrance of death into the world, consequently, is not associated with Adam and his transgression, but with Cain and his murder of Abel. Cain is the archetype for the unrighteous who, through envy of the righteous, allowed death to enter the world (cf. Wis 1:12–13). Therefore, according to the Wisdom of Solomon, Cain’s sin was worse than Adam’s because it brought death and destruction upon the world.⁴¹ “Cain is the first ‘unrighteous man,’ the ancestor and symbol of all who afterwards deserted Wisdom. The tragedy of Cain and Abel is being reenacted in every age: Cain inflicts physical death and chooses for himself spiritual death, while Abel is the type of the just who suffer in the body, but are heirs of immortality.”⁴²

³⁶ Gregg, 22.

³⁷ Levison, 52.

³⁸ Gregg, 21.

³⁹ Hogan, 18.

⁴⁰ The exclusion of Eve from the discussion may add further weight against interpreting 2:24 as the devil deceiving Eve.

⁴¹ Hogan, 23.

⁴² Gregg, 23.

Unlike Paul, Philo does not view Adam's sin in universalistic and historical terms. For Philo, there is nothing essentially evil. This is demonstrated in his treatise on the *Sacrifices of Cain and Abel* where he lists 148 wicked characteristics of those who love pleasure (*Sacrifices* 32). Conversely, he makes no attempt to define "good" nor does he attribute to it an opposite reality (*Sacrifices* 34). There is only a collection of evil characteristics that people adopt.⁴³ Philo never explains the origin of evil, but he does describe evil as the result of voluntary actions by wicked people (*Sacrifices* 81). "For an action to be regarded as evil in Philo's scheme of things, it must be voluntary."⁴⁴ Understanding this distinction in Philo is particularly relevant when examining the way he contrasts Adam's exile from the Garden (Gen 3:24) with Cain's departure from the presence of God (Gen 4:16).

Those who suffer this loss under compulsion, overwhelmed by the force of and inexorable power, deserve pity rather than hatred. But all those who voluntarily and of deliberate purposes have turned away and departed from the Existent Being, transcending the utmost limits of wickedness itself—for no evil could be found equivalent to it—these must pay no ordinary penalties, but such as are specially devised and far beyond the ordinary. Now no effort of thought could hit upon a penalty greater and more unheard of than to go forth into banishment from the Ruler of the Universe... Adam, then, is driven out by God; but Cain goes out voluntarily. Moses is showing us each form of moral failure, one of free choice the other not so. The involuntary act, not owing its existence to our deliberate judgment, is to obtain later healing... But the voluntary act, inasmuch as it was committed with forethought and set of purpose, must incur woes forever beyond healing. For even as right actions that spring from previous intentions are of greater worth than those that are involuntary, so, too among sins those which are involuntary are less weighty than those which are voluntary. (Philo, *Posterity* 9–11)

Philo does not portray Adam as the prototypical sinner because he considers Adam's separation from God to be involuntary. Cain, on the other hand, chose to go away from God's presence voluntarily making Cain guilty of a greater sin than Adam and earning him, therefore, the greater punishment.⁴⁵ Cain is the prototypical sinner and his punishment is banishment from God.

⁴³ Alan Mendelson, "Philo's Dialectic of Reward and Punishment," *SPhA* 9 (1997): 111–12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁵ Mendelson, 113.

When Josephus recounts the story of Adam and Eve and God's prohibition of eating from the tree of knowledge, he removes the warning about death (*Ant.* 1.40; cf. Gen 2:17). The punishment for eating from the tree is no longer death but "destruction" or "ruin" (ὄλεθος).⁴⁶ Later, after the couple has eaten from the tree, God expands upon the meaning of their punishment which consists of no longer living a happy life and eating what grows naturally without hardship and toil. In addition, God tells them that it was his intention for them that "old age would not come upon you swiftly and your life would be long" suggesting that death was always a natural part of human destiny, albeit in the distant future (1.46). By rewriting Genesis 3 in this way, Josephus has removed the penalty of death from Adam's sin and, like the Wisdom of Solomon, made death a natural result of being mortal. There is no indication in Josephus that Adam was an immortal being who lost his immortality as a result of disobedience. A few lines later, however, the topic of death is introduced by Cain's murder of Abel. In contrast to the death that Adam and Eve would eventually experience, Abel's death is unnatural since it came about through murder. As in Wis 2:24, the introduction of death into the world is not from Adam's sin, but Cain's crime of killing Abel. Moreover, while Adam disobeyed God and was punished, Cain continued to increase his evil by teaching others (*Ant.* 1.60–61). Thus, Cain, not Adam, is the prototypical sinner.

Even among some Christian interpreters who certainly would have been influenced by Paul, there is a tendency to interpret Cain's sin as greater than Adam's as well as the reason for the entrance of death into the world. In *1 Clem.* 4:1–7 we find a word-for-word citation of Gen 4:1–8 (LXX).⁴⁷ This quotation is part of a larger section that starts at the opening of the letter, continues through section 6 and deals with the problem of jealousy in all of sacred history.⁴⁸ Immediately preceding the quote Clement writes that it was "envy by which death itself entered into the world" (3:4). Following the citation of Gen 4:1–8, Clement repeats this evaluation saying: "You see, brothers, how envy and jealousy led to the murder of a brother" (4:7). Clement

⁴⁶ Levison, 104; Feldman, *Judean Antiquities*, 16.

⁴⁷ Donald A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome* (*NovTSup* 34; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 68–69.

⁴⁸ David K. Delaney, "The Sevenfold Vengeance of Cain: Genesis 4 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1996), 71.

is quoting Wis 2:24 and his placement of the verse like book ends for the Genesis 4 citation demonstrates that he interpreted it as referring to Cain and not the devil.⁴⁹ This, in turn, reflects the understanding that death occurred not through Adam's sin (cf. Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12), but through Cain's murder of Abel, which in turn was caused by his envy of Abel.⁵⁰

In his evaluation of sin, Irenaeus of Lyons consistently refers to Cain as the primordial example of sinful behavior for the rest of humanity and describes his life as consisting not only of the one sin of murder, but of a cascading series of sins indicative of a basic and persistent orientation away from God.⁵¹ He compares the sin of Adam with that of Cain and concludes that Cain, not Adam, committed the more serious sin. Adam immediately felt a sense of shame and repented. Cain, on the other hand, persisted in evil and received the curse of God (*Adv. Haer.* 3.23.3–4).⁵² In a subsequent section Irenaeus interprets the “division” of Cain's sacrifice in Gen 4:7 as the incongruity between Cain's heart and actions (*Adv. Haer.* 4.18.3). He bore the sin of hatred and envy against his brother, attempted to appease God with sacrifice, and thus exacerbated the first sin of envy instead of lessening it. Like some other interpreters, Irenaeus presumes Cain's reputation as the true starting point for cultivated evil in the world. In his view Cain's sinful behavior was not a series of unrelated misdeeds, but a series of transgressions that fed on each other, progressing from bad to worse and forming a kind of trajectory toward depravation.⁵³

Finally, in an apologetic survey of biblical history by Theophilus of Antioch we find similar conclusions albeit with a slightly different approach. Similar to *1 Clem.* 3.4–4:7, Theophilus associates Wis 2:24 with the Cain and Abel story. But unlike Clement he does not identify the envy of διαβόλος with Cain “the enemy,” but with the devil/serpent's deception of Adam and Eve. Theophilus writes that the devil, jealous that Adam and Eve were succeeding and angry that he had not accomplished in putting them to death, convinced Cain to kill Abel.

⁴⁹ Gregg, 22; Delaney, 721; Dochhorn, “Mit Kain kam der Tod in die Welt,” 152–53. In 4:7 Clement combines the theme of Wis 2:24 “jealousy” (φθόνος) with the description of Cain's act of fratricide (ἀδελφοκτονία) in 10:3.

⁵⁰ Delaney, 72.

⁵¹ Ibid., 101.

⁵² Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 217.

⁵³ Delaney, 104.

Theophilus then comments about Cain's murder of Abel, "And thus did death get a beginning in this world, to find its way into every race of man, even to this day" (*Autol.* 2.29). God, having pity on Cain and wanting to give him the opportunity to repent, asked, "Where is Abel your brother"? Cain did not take the chance to repent, but instead vehemently rejected it. As with the other interpreters we have examined, it was Cain's sin that brought death into the world, not Adam's sin, and Cain's sin was worse since, unlike Adam, he did not repent, but continued to increase his wickedness.

While Paul held Adam responsible for the proliferation of sin and death in the world, other interpreters laid the blame on Cain. Rather than contrast the sin of Adam with a "second Adam" some interpreters contrasted Adam's sin with that of Cain. The fact that Adam did not die when he ate from the forbidden tree led to the conclusion that death was not a result of Adam's sin. The first recorded death in the Bible was that of Abel, and he died because of Cain. Consequently, Cain, not Adam, was seen by some to be the prototypical sinner. Thus even though Adam introduced disobedience into the world, it was Cain who cultivated and multiplied evil in the world.

Was Cain the first heretic?

One facet of the Cain traditions that has been observed frequently is the tendency by the ancients to impugn Cain's character to a degree that does not exist in the Genesis account. Not satisfied with his status as the first murderer or sinner, some interpreters extended their critique of Cain to include accusations that he oppressed the poor, increased sin and brought about the destruction of creation. Some even accused him of becoming a teacher of evil practices. Once Cain had been identified as the prototypical sinner and teacher of wicked things it was only a short step towards labeling him as a teacher of false doctrines. Cain became, in the eyes of some exegetes, the world's first heretic.

The theme of Cain as teacher appears in various ways among Jewish authors. As we saw above, Josephus was not satisfied with presenting Cain as a murderer, but expanded the details of Genesis 4 to accuse him of being a greedy individual who invented ways to increase his evil. And as if that were not enough, Josephus goes on to describe Cain as a teacher of wicked ways (διδάσκαλος αὐτοῖς ὑπῆρχε πονηρῶν), a point that is emphasized when he details how Cain's descendants

became successively more evil (*Ant.* 1.60–62). Since Cain is portrayed as the prototypical sinner by Josephus, Cain’s act of teaching makes him the first to actively challenge God’s established order of creation. Consequently, Cain is the first teacher of false doctrine.⁵⁴

Philo provides an allegorical interpretation of the brothers that posits Cain and Abel each as the representative of a distinct doctrine (*Sacrifices* 3). Abel is a spokesperson of the God loving doctrine (τὸ φιλόθεον δόγμα) while Cain a representative of the lover of self (τὸ φίλαυτον). In an allegorized reading of Gen 4:8, Philo make the brothers debate their “doctrines” by transforming their encounter in the field into a debate between them.⁵⁵

And Cain said to Abel his brother, “Let us make our way to the Plain.” And it came to pass when they were on the plain that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him (Gen 4:8). What Cain is aiming at is by means of a challenge to draw Abel into a dispute, and to gain mastery over him by plausible sophistries that have the appearance of truth. For, drawing our conclusions about things that are obscure from things that are manifest, we say that the plain, the rendezvous to which he summons him, is a figure of contest and desperate battle. (Philo, *Worse* 1)

Well, I think that it has been made sufficiently clear that the plain on to which Cain challenges Abel to come is a figure of a contest to be fought out. We must next endeavor to discover what the subjects of their investigations are when they have gone forth. It is evident that they are to investigate opposing views clean contrary to each other. For Abel, referring all things to God is a God-loving creed; but Cain, referring all to himself—his name means “acquisition”—a self-loving creed. And lovers of self, when they have stripped and prepared for conflict with those who value virtue keep up the boxing and wrestling until they have either forced their opponents to give in or have completely destroyed them. (Philo, *Worse* 32)

What Philo has done by creating this mock debate is to establish the brothers as representatives of two opposing theological viewpoints.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Pseudo-Philo does not portray Cain as a teacher, but he does describe Cain’s descendants as teachers. Lamech murders in order to teach his sons how to do evil deeds and his children teach the art of music and metallurgy in order to encourage idolatry (*LAB* 2.8–10).

⁵⁵ D. M. Gunn and D. N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14.

⁵⁶ Geza Vermes, “The Targumic Versions of Genesis 4:3–16,” in *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (SJLA 8; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 114 n. 39; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 162.

Abel represents those who believe that they should love and honor God. Cain represents those who are self-absorbed, have little or no regard for others and, by implication, are anti-God. What is more, Philo describes Cain not simply as a representative of this anti-God philosophy, but a teacher of it. In his analysis of Cain's descendants, Philo allegorically interprets Cain's children to represent all those who follow the same self loving philosophy of Cain. For Philo, those who reject God are students of Cain's philosophy.

...and if any one accuses you of impiety, make your defense with a good courage, saying that you have been brought up very admirably by your guide and teacher (ὁφηγητῇ καὶ διδασκάλῳ), Cain, who recommended you to honor the powers that are nearest in preference to that Cause which was afar off, to whom you ought to attend for many other reasons, and most especially because he showed the power of his doctrine by very evident works, having conquered Abel the expounder of the opposite doctrine, and having removed and destroyed his doctrine as well as himself. (Philo, *Posterity* 38)

A tradition similar to that of Philo is found in Targums *Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan*. Although the Targums do not present Cain as a teacher as such, he does represent a theological view contrary to that of Abel. Similar to Philo, the Targums present the brothers debating one another in the field just prior to Cain's murder of Abel. The following is the debate between the brothers as it appears in *Targum Neofiti*.

And Cain said to Abel his brother. "Come! Let the two of us go out into the open field." And when the two of them had gone out into the open field, Cain answered and said to Abel: "I perceive that the world was not created by mercy and that it is not being conducted according to the fruits of good words, and that there is favoritism in judgment. Why was your offering received favorably and my offering was not received favorably from me?" Abel answered and said to Cain: "I perceive that the world was created by mercy and that it is being conducted according to the fruits of good words. And because my works were better than yours, my offering was received from me favorably and yours was not received favorably from you." Cain answered and said to Abel: "There is no judgment, and there is no judge and there is no other world. There is no giving of reward to the just nor is vengeance exacted of the wicked." Abel answered and said to Cain: "There is judgment, and there is a judge, and there is another world. And there is giving of reward to the just and vengeance is exacted of the wicked in the world to come." Concerning this matter the two of them were disputing in the open field. And Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. (Tg. Neof. Gen 4:8)

In the Targums Cain is made to question the principles of justice and mercy by which Judaism believed God governed the world.⁵⁷ This is compounded by his claim that there is no “other world” and no divine recompense for sin. The result of placing this speech in his mouth is that, as in Philo, Cain becomes a representative of a heterodox position on God’s role in the world.⁵⁸ He has rejected the existence of divine justice in the present world and the one to come.⁵⁹ Thus, the act of killing Abel immediately after their debate is not only the result of his jealous anger against his brother, but is also a demonstration of his belief that he will not be held accountable. The murder is the climax to a life marked by evil deeds and wrong doctrine. Ultimately, the reason Cain killed Abel is because of their differing theological positions. Abel is portrayed as a confessor of faith who is no longer a silent helpless victim, but is now a martyr for the cause of correct doctrine.⁶⁰ Cain, on the other hand, is an atheist who promotes a heretical view of the world.⁶¹

The earliest example of this tradition in Christian literature is found in the New Testament. In Jude 11 Cain is invoked as part of a warning against false teachers. The occasion of the letter is the recent entrance of a group who promote antinomistic tendencies. Jude accuses these people of rejecting Christ (v. 4), moral authority (v. 8), of engaging in immoral behavior (vv. 6–8, 10) and of seeking to gain financially (μισθός) from their erroneous ways (v. 11).⁶² Jude objects to their presence at the church’s fellowship meal and refers to their teachings as “waterless clouds” and dead fruit trees (v.12).⁶³ As part of his assessment of this group he accuses them in verse 11 of “going in the way of Cain” (τι τῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ Κάιν ἐπορεύθησαν), a phrase that is not expanded upon. But in spite of the brevity of the allusion, it seems self evident that Jude is appealing here to the tradition that held Cain as the first heretic.⁶⁴ The expression “went in the way of Cain” prob-

⁵⁷ Jouette M. Bassler, “Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums,” *JSJ* 17 (1986): 61.

⁵⁸ Bernard Grossfeld, *Targum Neofiti 1: An Exegetical Commentary to Genesis Including Rabbinic Parallels* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 2000), 89.

⁵⁹ Vermes, 115.

⁶⁰ Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966), 158.

⁶¹ Bassler, 58.

⁶² Bauckham, 11–12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁴ There is no allusion here to Cain’s act of murdering Abel nor is there language reminiscent of 1 John 3:12–15 which would suggest that they were guilty of communal

ably refers to the false teachers following Cain by imitating his sin of heresy. In the LXX, the phrase “went in the way of his father” is often used to refer to people who follow the moral example of those before them.⁶⁵ Adding to this appraisal is the fact that Cain is the first of three biblical characters that Jude appeals to in this verse. He also accuses the false teachers of “abandoning themselves to the error of Balaam” and “perishing in the controversy of Korah” (v. 11). The grouping of all three of these characters is significant since all of them are, at various times, pointed to as examples of false teachers.⁶⁶ The Bible records that Balaam refused to curse Israel (Num 22:18; 24:13), but later interpreters presented him as a greedy individual who advised Balak how to entice Israel to sin.⁶⁷ The result was a memory of Balaam that held him responsible for leading Israel into sin and profiting from it.⁶⁸ Korah became the classic example of the antinomian heretic. While his notoriety in Numbers derives from his challenge of Moses’ and Aaron’s authority (Num 16), later interpreters understood his sin to be in relation to the law of the fringes which immediately preceded the story of the rebellion (Num 15:37–41). Interpreters portrayed Korah’s rebellion as a reaction to the tassel. Korah was said to have created garments without the tassel, which was interpreted as a direct challenge to the command of the Lord and made him a teacher of false doctrines.⁶⁹ “Jude is clearly using a topos in early Judaism, adopted readily by anti-heretical Christian writers, according to which Cain is the prototype and progenitor of theological heresy.”⁷⁰ By appealing to all three of these biblical characters in the context of his “woe” against

fratricide. Bigg suggests that the allusion to Cain here was used by Jude to claim that “the false teachers murder men’s souls”, but this is not so clear (Charles Bigg, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902], 332).

⁶⁵ See for example LXX 3 Kgdms 15:26, 34; 16:2, 19, 26; 4 Kgdms 8:18, 27; 16:3; 2 Chr 11:17; 21:6; Ezek 23:31; all of which refer to following someone’s moral example and, except for one instance, are all negative (Bauckham, 80).

⁶⁶ See *t. Sota* 4:9 for an example of the trio. Balaam appears in Rev 2:14; 2 Tim 2:19 quotes Korah from Num 16:5 and 1 Clem 51:3–4 quotes Num 16:33.

⁶⁷ See for instance LAB 18:13; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.126–30; Philo, *Moses* 1.295–300.

⁶⁸ Bauckham, 81; Duane F. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter* (SBLDS 104; Atlanta: Scholars Press: 1988), 59.

⁶⁹ Bauckham, 83.

⁷⁰ Birger Albert Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 1990), 103.

the false teachers, Jude has placed the false teachers into a long line of “heretics” beginning with Cain.⁷¹

It seems clear that by the first century CE there exists an established Jewish tradition that designates Cain as the first heretic. This tradition presented him as a teacher of wickedness and false doctrine and classified those who imitated Cain’s sin as part of his lineage and therefore “Cainites.” The Epistle of Jude demonstrates that early Christians were keen to adopt this tradition and use it in polemics against those who challenged the “orthodox” position of the church. By the second century CE the tradition was used regularly by Christian authors. As the church combated various heterodox theologies that threatened to undermine its teaching, the Cain tradition was employed more than once as a way to label and marginalize the “heretics.”

Among the earliest extant references to heretical groups as “Cainites” by heresiologists is the work by Clement of Alexandria. In a discussion of teachings that have challenged the church, Clement outlines the way that various heresies were named. Some were named after their founder (Valentinus, Marcion), others after a place or nation (Peratics, Phrygians). Still others for their lifestyle (Encratites), doctrines (Docaetae, Haemetites), or for what Clement calls “nefarious practices and enormities” (Simonians called “Entychites”). Included in this list are those heresies which were named after individuals honored by the groups including the “Cainites and the Ophians” (*Strom.* 7.17). How Cain was “honored” is not stated. Moreover, Clement does not clarify if the designation “Cainite” was adopted by the group or used by heresiologists as a pejorative description.

In his *Prescription against Heretics* 33, Tertullian writes about heresies that were present at the time of the apostles including that of the Nicolaitians (Rev 2:6, 15). He goes on to say that there is yet another group of Nicolaitians who are called the “Cain heresy,” and designated as “antichrists.” The “Cain heresy” to which Tertullian is referring can probably be read as “Cainite” since in his treatise on *Baptism* 1, he refers to “a viper of the Cainite heresy, lately conversant in this quar-

⁷¹ Frederik Wisse, “The Epistle of Jude in the History of Heresiology,” in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Alexander Bohlig* (ed. Martin Krause; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 143.

ter, which has carried away a great number with her most venomous doctrine, making it her first aim to destroy baptism.”⁷²

By the late second century CE, the designation “Cainite” was already beginning to become common currency as a way to designate those who were considered to be heterodox. A survey of Christian literature from the first four centuries demonstrates that the label “Cainite” was used by a number of writers to discuss various heretical groups.

But even though there have been denominated certain other heresies—I mean those of the Cainites, Ophites, or Noachites, and of others of this description—I have not deemed it requisite to explain the things said or done by these, lest on this account they may consider themselves somebody, or deserving of consideration. (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 8)

Moreover, also, there has broken out another heresy also, which is called that of the *Cainites*. And the reason is that they magnify *Cain* as if he had been conceived of some potent Virtue which operated in him; for Abel had been procreated after being conceived of an inferior Virtue, and accordingly had been found inferior. (Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against all Heresies* 2)

I come to those heretics who have mangled the Gospels, Saturninus, and the Ophites, the Cainites and Sethites, and Carpocrates, and Cerinthus, and his successor Ebion, and the other pests, the most of which broke out while the apostle John was still alive, and yet we do not read that any of these men were re-baptized. (Jerome, *Lucif.* 23)

So what was formerly called the heresy of Cain pours poison into the body of the Church; it has slept or rather been buried for a long time, but has been now awakened by Dormitanti. (Jerome, *Vigil.* 8)

Scholars have sometimes assumed that the church fathers were referring to actual heretical sects rather than heresies in general. But these references need to be analyzed with caution. Missing from among these references to the “Cainite heresy” is specific descriptions of doctrines or practices. Many of these authors associate the Cainites with other groups (Ophian, Nicolaitians, etc), but no system of belief and practices is provided. In fact, the only author who approaches the description of a system is Irenaeus in his *Against the Heresies*, 31. Irenaeus states that “others declare that Cain derived his being from the Power above,” that they hold Judas, the traitor, in esteem and that “they

⁷² Pearson, 96.

produced a fictitious history, which they style the Gospel of Judas.” But Irenaeus does not label this group as “Cainites.” He merely communicates their views on the origin of Cain. The system he describes is not labeled “Cainite” as such until the above work of Pseudo-Tertullian, which was heavily dependent upon Irenaeus’s work.⁷³ Furthermore, none of the “Cain” material in the recently published Nag Hamadi texts supports the assertion that a real sect called “Cainites” ever existed. Similarly, the recent publication of the Gospel of Judas makes no mention of Cain.⁷⁴ A more cautious approach to the material would suggest that there were a variety of heretical sects that could be labeled from time to time as “Cainites” according to the Jewish tradition whereby Cain was considered to be the prototype and progenitor of theological heresy and all subsequent heretics were his (spiritual) children.⁷⁵

The tradition that Cain was a teacher of wickedness has no basis in the biblical text. There are neither gaps in detail nor ambiguities in vocabulary or grammar that would naturally lead ancient exegetes to this conclusion. Yet, such a tradition did arise and designated Cain as the first heretic. Jewish evidence for this tradition seems to be relegated, for the most part, to the first century CE or earlier.⁷⁶ But Christian adoption of the tradition extends through several centuries. That Christians found the tradition useful is probably due, in some part, to its appearance in Jude which then exercised influence over Christian interpreters. The result was yet another usage of the Cain and Abel story. Not only was Cain the son of the devil, the first murderer, and prototypical sinner, he was also the first heretic in the world and all those that followed in his wake were condemned as “Cainites.”

⁷³ Pearson, 97. Similar statements are made by Epiphanius (*Panarion*, 38), but as with Pseudo-Tertullian, the statements are an expansion of those found in Irenaeus.

⁷⁴ Stanley E. Porter, *The Lost Gospel of Judas: Separating Fact from Fiction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 53.

⁷⁵ Pearson, 104–105. An interesting example of this tendency may be found among the Poems of Prudentius. In his poem on *The Origin of Sin* (lms 35–75), Prudentius repeatedly refers to Marcion as “Cain” and compares Cain’s failure to “divide correctly” with Marcion’s incorrect division of doctrine (*The Poems of Prudentius*, 44–47).

⁷⁶ Depending on how one dates the tradition in the Targums. Vermes dates the traditions to the first century or earlier (103).

Was Cain the Father of the Jews?

In the previous chapter we observed how some Christian interpreters used the “two peoples” hermeneutic as a way to lay claim to figures in biblical history. Observing the numerous instances in the Old Testament in which the younger brother surpasses the older both in divine favor and importance, some Christians interpreted the younger brothers as a type of the church. When this interpretive method was applied to the Cain and Abel story, Abel was transformed into a type of Christ while Cain became a representative for the Jews.⁷⁷ The result was the development in Christian theology of an “*Adversus Judaeos*” tradition that sometimes used the Cain and Abel story as “proof” that the Jews had been disinherited by God and replaced by the Christians.⁷⁸

It is difficult to say when Christian interpreters first connected Cain with the Jews. One possibility is located within the New Testament Gospel of John. But before examining the evidence it is important to point out the ambiguous nature of references to “Jews” in the Gospel of John. In the wake of the Shoah, critical scholarship of the New Testament has come to appreciate that references to “the Jews” in the Johannine Gospel do not represent the Jewish people. Rather, these are characters in the story who have reached a conclusion about the person of Jesus. The situation in John does not accurately reflect the experiences of the historical Jesus. “The conflicts between Jesus and ‘the Jews’ are more the reflection of a christological debate at the end of the first century than a record of encounters between Jesus and his fellow Israelites in the thirties of that century.”⁷⁹ Therefore, any reference to “the Jews” in John’s Gospel should be set off in quotation marks to indicate that they do not represent the Jewish people. As we will see below, however, there is a long tradition in Christian interpretation that connects “the Jews” in John, or the wider New Testament, as a basis for Christian supersessionist claims. The story of Cain and Abel became an important part of that theological trajectory.

In John 8:39–47 Jesus engages in a debate with “the Jews” over the identification of their father. “The Jews” claim that they have Abraham

⁷⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 134.

⁷⁸ Clark M. Williamson, “The ‘Adversus Judaeos’ Tradition in Christian Theology,” *Encounter* 39 (1978): 273–96.

⁷⁹ Francis J. Maloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4; Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1998), 10.

as their father, but Jesus accuses them of trying to kill him, an act that would not have been in keeping with Abraham's character. When they go a step further and claim that God is their father, Jesus answers:

You are from your father the devil (διάβολος), and you want to do your father's desires. That one was a murderer (ἀνθρωποκτόνος) from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, because he is a liar and the father of *lies*.⁸⁰ (John 8:44)

At first glance, it appears that Jesus is referring to the serpent's deception of Eve in Genesis 3, which some interpreters understood as the devil's "murder of humanity."⁸¹ But there are also possible echoes of Genesis 4 and the Cain tradition that have caught the attention of modern scholars. First, the idea that the devil was a "father" seems to echo traditions that attributed Cain's birth to an encounter between Eve and the devil.⁸² Adding weight to this suggestion is the statement in 1 John 3:12 "that Cain was from the evil one." It is possible that later Targumic and haggadic traditions reflect ideas that were already known in Johannine circles.⁸³ Second, the occurrence of ἀνθρωποκτόνος (murderer) is significant since, as we saw above, it is one of only two occurrences in the New Testament. The other occurrence in 1 John 3:15 links the actions of the brother haters with Cain and refers to them as "fratricides" or "murderers." Cain, of course, was the first murderer and often referred to as "the fratricide." Jesus' statement "he was a murderer from the beginning" could be heard as an allusion to the Genesis 4 story and the interpretive traditions built around it. Third, the linking of the term διάβολος with "murder" could be an allusion to Wis 2:24 which, as we saw above, was sometimes interpreted as a reference to Cain introducing death into the world. Whether or not John's audience would have heard Jesus' words as a reference to the devil's deception of Eve or to Cain's murderous activity is not clear. But if the Cain tradition was in mind in 8:44, as some have argued, it is easy to see why the Johannine Jesus says the devil is the father of "the Jews."⁸⁴ Since they are trying to kill him, even as Cain, the devil's

⁸⁰ Translation mine.

⁸¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John Volume 1* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2003), 760.

⁸² See chapter one for a discussion of this tradition.

⁸³ Keener, 761.

⁸⁴ Dahl, 70–84; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (i–xii) (AB, 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 358.

son, killed Abel, they are guilty of the same activity of Cain and therefore, like Cain, are children of the devil. Therefore, in John's Gospel, it is possible that labeling "the Jews" as "sons of Cain" is actually an accusation of heresy. Since "the Jews" are on the wrong side of the christological debate, they are guilty of theological fratricide.

Outside of the New Testament references to "the Jews" in John and the wider New Testament were often understood as meaning not opponents in a christological debate, but the entirety of the Jewish race. The first extant evidence of Christian interpreters linking the Jewish people with Cain in this way is found in Irenaeus of Lyons. In his work *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus sketches an outline of relations between Jews and Gentiles in which he attempts to demonstrate that the Jewish people have been replaced by the Christians and that "Jewish administration of the things of God was 'temporary.'"⁸⁵ At the same time, Irenaeus does not contest the validity of the Jewish Scriptures, but argues for continuity between the events of the Old and New Testaments. His efforts lead to a typological exegesis whereby events in the Old Testament foreshadow those in the New. One topic which receives treatment is the practice of offering sacrifices. Irenaeus argues that the command of Moses to offer sacrifices has not been set aside, but merely altered. Jewish sacrifices are from "slaves" while Christian sacrifices are from "freedmen." Jews only offer a tenth of their less valuable objects, while Christians offer all of their property and even themselves to God (18.2). Irenaeus then supports this contention with a citation of Genesis 4.

For at the beginning God had respect to the gifts of Abel, because he offered with single-mindedness and righteousness; but He had no respect unto the offering of Cain, because his heart was divided with envy and malice, which he cherished against his brother, as God says when reproving his hidden [thoughts], "Though you offer rightly, yet, if you do not divide rightly, have you not sinned? Be at rest;" since God is not appeased by sacrifice. For if any one shall endeavor to offer a sacrifice merely to outward appearance, unexceptionably, in due order, and according to appointment, while in his soul he does not assign to his neighbor that fellowship with him which is right and proper, nor is under the fear of God;—he who thus cherishes secret sin does not deceive God by that sacrifice which is offered correctly as to outward appearance. (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.18.3)

⁸⁵ Williamson, "The 'Adversus Judaeos' Tradition," 284.

In a single stroke Irenaeus condemns Jewish sacrifice by comparing it to the offering of Cain. He transforms the LXX's cultic interpretation of Gen 4:7 from a critique of how Cain offered his sacrifice into a critique of inward motivation for sacrifice.⁸⁶ Rather than read 4:7 as a description of the way Cain divided his sacrifice, Irenaeus interprets it to mean that Cain's heart was divided and therefore caused God to reject it. Irenaeus then connects Cain's offering with the Jews even more explicitly by interpreting Jesus' words to the Pharisees in Matt 23:27–28 in the context of Cain's rejected offering:

Wherefore did the Lord also declare: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs. For the tomb appears beautiful outside, but within it is full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness; even so you also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within you are full of wickedness and hypocrisy." For while they were thought to offer correctly so far as outward appearance went, they had in themselves jealousy like to Cain; therefore they slew the Just One, slighting the counsel of the Word, as did also Cain. For [God] said to him, "Be at rest;" but he did not assent. Now what else is it to "be at rest" than to forego purposed violence? And saying similar things to these men, He declares: "You blind Pharisee, cleanse that which is within the cup, that the outside may be clean also." And they did not listen to Him. (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.18.3)

Not only does Irenaeus use the story of Cain's rejected offering to sweep away Jewish sacrifice, he uses it to link the Jews with the murder of Jesus. Since Cain's sacrifice was rejected due to his divided heart, argues Irenaeus, so too the Jews had a divided heart in relation to God. Just as Cain appeared to have offered correctly, but did not divide correctly, so too the Jews appear to be righteously obeying the law, but in reality do not have the proper motivation. Cain was jealous and motivated by wickedness which led to his murder of Abel. So too, Jewish wickedness and envy of Jesus led to their murder of him.⁸⁷ Irenaeus ends his critique of Jewish sacrifice with one more connection to the death of Jesus. He claims that the church alone offers "pure oblations" but that "the Jews do not offer thus: for their hands are full of blood; for they have not received the Word, through whom it is offered to God" (4.18.4).

⁸⁶ For a discussion of the LXX's translation of Gen 4:7 see chapter two.

⁸⁷ Williamson, "The 'Adversus Judaeos' Tradition," 284; A. J. Springer, "Proof of Identification: Patristic and Rabbinic Exegesis of the Cain and Abel Narrative," *St Patr* 39 (2006): 261.

At first glance the connections between Jesus' words to the Pharisees in Matt 23:27–28 may seem like an exaggerated bit of exegesis. Irenaeus seems to be deliberately bending Gen 4:7 in order to fit the words of Jesus. But a clue to Irenaeus's thinking may be found in what Jesus says in the next seven verses. Immediately following the "woe" in 23:27–28 Jesus condemns the Pharisees for building the tombs of the prophets whom their fathers killed (23:29–30). He holds them guilty by extension, refers to them as the "sons of murderers" and predicts that they will murder his prophets as well (23:31–34). Jesus then declares that they are guilty of "all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah" (23:35). In this context it is easy to see how Irenaeus could connect Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees with Cain's rejected offering and murder of Abel. Jesus himself had already made the link by holding the Pharisees collectively guilty for the murder of Abel. Once this link had been made by Jesus, Irenaeus was provided with an interpretive grid that assisted his typological exegesis. Jesus' critique of the inner motivation of the Pharisees versus their outward appearance must have suggested an allusion to Gen 4:7. Once this allusion was observed, Irenaeus's natural conclusion would be that the Pharisees are guilty of the same crimes as Cain: improper sacrifice and murder. Jesus' insistence that the Pharisees are collectively guilty of Abel's murder (and all the righteous ones since) led Irenaeus to conclude that Cain was a type of the Jews. Just as Cain's divided heart led him to kill Abel so the divided hearts of the Jews led them to kill Jesus.

Another example of this kind of exegesis is found in the works of the fourth century "Persian Sage," Aphrahat. Aphrahat lived in Persia at a time when Jews were enjoying relative peace and prosperity and Christianity was suffering from persecution. In his *Demonstrations*, he addresses themes related to Christian life and church order. But four of the *Demonstrations* are concerned with Judaism. It appears that there was a movement within the Persian church by some either to become Jews or return to Judaism, or to incorporate Jewish elements into Christianity. As a possible response to this movement Aphrahat deals with the Jewish critique of Christianity including the topics of circumcision, Passover, Sabbath observance, and food laws.⁸⁸ In the sixteenth *Demonstration* he discusses the claims of Jewish identity

⁸⁸ Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (StPB 19; Leiden, Brill, 1971), 4.

and argues that since Israel repeatedly ignored the prophets, God abandoned them and replaced them with the Gentiles. As part of this exercise he cites people who were not part of Israel, but were more pleasing to God including: Jethro, Rahab and Uriah the Hittite. What is significant for the present investigation is how Aphrahat chose to end this *Demonstration*. In 16.8 he states that he wrote the *Demonstration* because Jews take pride in claiming to be the children of Abraham. As part of his response to this claim he quotes from John 8:44 (see above), but he alters it in an important way. He says:

Our redeemer said to them, "You are the children of Cain and not the children of Abraham."

Aphrahat's citation is curious since, as we saw above, Cain does not appear in John 8:44. Apparently he has combined Jesus' description of the devil as the father of the Jews in John 8:44 with Cain's identification with the "evil one" in 1 John 3:12. Through this exegetical link he seems to have concluded that the Jews were not only the devil's children but also that of Cain. While Aphrahat's exegesis is not as strident as that of Irenaeus, it does reflect another instance of a church father using Cain as a way to exclude Jews from their heritage. God has rejected the Jewish people in favor of the Gentiles and the Jewish claim to Abraham is nullified since Jesus himself declared them to be "children of Cain."⁸⁹

A survey of Christian literature reveals that a number of authors employed the Cain and Abel story as a way to either disinherit Jews or to make Cain into a "type" of the Jews. Tertullian claimed that Israel was typified by Cain's sacrifice while Abel's sacrifice represented the church. Tertullian was careful to note that Abel's sacrifice was the sacrifice of "our people," a move which implicitly denied the Jews any claims to Abel (*Adv. Iud.* 2).⁹⁰ In a homily, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, claimed that the two brothers each established a prototype of the synagogue and the church; Cain as the parricidal Jews and Abel as the Christians (*Cain* 1.2.5). Likewise, John Chrysostom in one of his sermons against Jews compared Cain and the Jews. God demanded Cain to love his brother, but Cain's response was to murder Abel. The Jews are like Cain since they refuse to show love to their younger

⁸⁹ Springer, "Proof of Identification," 262.

⁹⁰ See the previous chapter for further discussion of Tertullian's typological exegesis of the Cain and Abel story.

brother the Christian.⁹¹ Similar to Aphrahat, Jerome in a letter to Pope Damascus, connects the devil, Cain and the Jews when he says: "The devil previously exhibited the fratricidal Jews by anticipation in Cain" (*diabolus fratricidae Iudae os in Cain ante parameditans* [36.16.]).⁹² The Cain and Abel story was used by many Christian interpreters and became a part of the *Adversus Iudaeos Tradition*.⁹³ It is in Augustine, however, that it receives its most extensive treatment.

Augustine makes mention of Cain as a type of the Jews in his comments on the Psalms (78:8; 119:150) and in *City of God* 15.7. But it is in the context of his critique of the Manichaeans that he provides full typological exegesis of the story. Against one Manichean in particular, he defended Christian use of the Old Testament. As he lays the groundwork for his argument in *Against Faustus the Manichean*, Augustine argues that the Old Testament revealed types of Christ.⁹⁴ In 12.7 he contends that all of scripture, either directly or indirectly, points to Christ. Moreover, the whole narrative of Genesis is, he claims, a prophecy of Christ and the church (12.8). As Adam was joined to Eve, so also Christ was joined to the church and left his mother, "the synagogue of the Jews, which clung to the carnality of the Old Testament."⁹⁵ With this introduction, Augustine describes the correlation between the Jews and Cain.

Augustine begins with the brothers' sacrifices (12.9). Since Cain's was "from the earth" it represents the "earthly observance of the Old Testament." Abel's offering of "sheep and the fat thereof" is a symbol of the "faith of the New Testament praising God in the harmless service of Grace." Although Cain offered well, he did not divide well. Augustine charges that, in the same way, the Jews were correct in their practices, but "they were guilty of unbelief in not distinguishing the

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae adversus Iudaeos* 8.2.6–9.

⁹² Jerome, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae* (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum; Vindobonae: Tempsky, 1910), 285.

⁹³ In an unusual reading of Genesis 4, George Synkellos says that it is Lamech, not Cain, who is a type of the Jews that crucified "the Savior in the middle of the sixth age." This reading is possibly a conflation of the typological reading of Cain as the father of the Jews with the interpretation of the sevenfold vengeance in Gen 4:15 and 4:24.

⁹⁴ Springer, "Proof of Identification," 263.

⁹⁵ This is Augustine's allegorical interpretation of the statement in Gen 2:24: "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh."

time of the New Testament when Christ came, from the time of the Old Testament.”

In Gen 4:7 (LXX) God commands Cain to “be still.” But Cain ignored the command, failed to confess his sin to God and thus “became the servant of sin in killing his innocent brother” (12.9). Likewise, if the Jews “had acknowledged the time of salvation through the pardon of sins by grace” they would not “be in subjection to sin reigning in their mortal body” and not “have stumbled on the stone of stumbling, and have been inflamed with hatred against him whose works they grieved to see accepted by God.”

For Augustine’s purposes, Cain’s murder of Abel represents the murder of Christ by the Jews (12.9). Abel is the younger brother and Christ is the head of the younger people, which is the church. Cain is the older brother and represents the older people of the Jews. Cain killed Abel in a field. Christ died on Calvary.

When God asks Cain where his brother is, Cain maintains ignorance and says that he is not his brother’s keeper (Gen 4:9). In the same way, Augustine claims, the Jews have no answer for God about Christ and plead ignorance saying that they do not know Christ (12.10). But just as Cain feigned ignorance so the Jews deceive themselves in thinking they can refuse Christ. God’s response to Cain was an accusation couched in the question/statement, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me.” Correspondingly, God accuses the Jews “for the blood of Christ has a loud voice on the earth.” The blood of Christ is “the voice of the faithful redeemed by his blood.”

In Gen 4:11–12 God curses Cain from the earth and, though he tills it, the earth will not yield to him. Augustine notes, that Cain was not cursed “on” the earth but “from” it (12.11).⁹⁶ So too “the unbelieving people of the Jews is cursed from the earth, that is, from the church.” The church curses the Jews as murderers of Christ, because as the earth received the blood of Abel so the church received the blood of Christ. And the earth (the church) will not yield to the Jews since, after killing Christ they continue to till the ground of an earthly circumcision, an earthly Sabbath, an earthly Passover.” Like Cain, the Jewish people “continue tilling the ground in carnal observance of the law, which does not yield to them its strength because they do not perceive the grace of Christ.”

⁹⁶ See chapter four for a discussion of these verses in the LXX and the interpretive traditions attached to them.

Nonetheless, in spite of their guilt of killing Christ, the Jews, like Cain, are not to be killed in retribution (12.12). In Gen 4:14 (LXX) Cain complains that "I will be groaning and trembling on the earth and anyone who finds me will kill me."⁹⁷ Augustine interprets this as a reference to the Jewish Diaspora since "no one can fail to see that in every land where the Jews are scattered they mourn for the loss of their kingdom, and are in terrified subjection to the immensely superior number of Christians." Furthermore, God's response to Cain, "whoever kills Cain shall receive a sevenfold vengeance" (Gen 4:15), is a warning to Christians not to kill the Jews. "For whoever destroys them in this way shall suffer the sevenfold vengeance, that is, shall bring upon himself the sevenfold penalty under which the Jews lie for the crucifixion of Christ." For the "preservation of the Jews will be proof to believing Christians of the subjection merited by those who, in the pride of their kingdom, put the Lord to death."

Finally, just as God provided Cain with a mark so that no one would kill him, God provided a mark for the Jews by giving them a law, which they alone observe (12.13). Augustine demonstrates the validity of this interpretation by pointing out that Jews, whether living under Pagan or Christian subjection, have "never lost the sign of their law, by which they are distinguished from all other nations and peoples." He goes on to claim that no emperor or government who find this people with the mark "kills them," an act which Augustine defines as making them cease from being Jews. The Jews are permanently marked off as a separate people, unlike the rest of the world. The only way the mark can be removed is "when a Jew comes over to Christ." Then and only then is he "no longer a Cain."

Augustine's use of typology was different than what was the norm. Usually historical types were used to prefigure a "newer" or "better" type, not the complete removal and replacement of one. Augustine, however, used typological exegesis of Genesis 4 to demonstrate what he viewed to be the spiritual improvement and heavenly superiority of Christianity over Judaism.⁹⁸ On the other hand, Augustine's view that Jews were a living witness to Christian truth was original and, as Paula Fredriksen has pointed out, unusually tolerant in comparison to

⁹⁷ Augustine rewrites Gen 4:7 so that it is God who describes Cain's groaning and trembling rather than Cain himself. This seems to be part of his goal of interpreting the Jewish Diaspora as part of the curse of Cain on the Jews for rejecting Christ.

⁹⁸ Springer, "Proof of Identification," 265.

pagans and some Christian groups.⁹⁹ Augustine argued that Jews played a positive role in redemption history.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it is important to remember that however strident his exegesis may sound to modern ears, his remarks are not aimed at Jews but his Manichean opponents. His concern was not so much with Jews in the flesh, but with “textual” or “hermeneutical” Jews.¹⁰¹ The Marcionites, Manicheans, and other dualists had excised the Old Testament in the interest of a docetist Christology.¹⁰² Augustine defended Christian use of the Old Testament, and, in a paradoxical way, his arguments also became a defense of Jews and Judaism.¹⁰³

Yet, in spite of Augustine’s “tolerant” view of Jews, it must be acknowledged that, whether or not he was writing about “real” or “hermeneutical” Jews, he established the theological terms that placed Jews under pariah status.¹⁰⁴ By interpreting Cain’s banishment as a curse on Jews he helped to create the framework of Jewish Christian relations for centuries. Jews were protected under pariah status, but regularly persecuted. The story of Cain’s wandering was extended into the medieval legend of the wandering Jew.¹⁰⁵ The legend related the story of a Jew who taunted Christ on the way to the crucifixion and then was cursed to walk the earth until the Second Coming. Like Cain’s “groaning and trembling on the earth,” the desolation and homelessness of the Jews was considered to be a positive witness to Christian belief.¹⁰⁶ While Augustine may have considered the law as a “mark of separation” others carried the idea further and required Jews to wear a distinguishing mark as a badge of shame as happened at the fourth Lateran council (1215) and in Nazi Europe.¹⁰⁷ Augustine’s use of the Cain and Abel story to support his theological goal of vindicating Christianity, had the knock-on effect of subjecting the Jews under the

⁹⁹ Paula Fredriksen, “Excaecati Occulta Justitia Dei: Augustine on Jews and Judaism,” *JECs* 3 (1995): 298–99.

¹⁰⁰ See for instance Augustine’s comments in *City of God* 18.46.

¹⁰¹ Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 271.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 324.

¹⁰⁴ David Nirenberg, “Birth of the Pariah: Christian Dualism and Social Science,” *Social Research* 70 (2003): 12.

¹⁰⁵ G.K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1965), 3.

¹⁰⁶ Williamson, “The ‘Adversus Judaeos’ Tradition,” 292.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 291.

church and excluding them from any claims to God and the scriptures. The only reason for the continued existence of Jews, in Augustine's opinion, was as a witness to the truth and triumph of Christianity.

The association of the Jews with Cain is a hallmark of Christian anti-Judaism. In an attempt to appropriate the Hebrew Scriptures for themselves, Christian exegetes employed the Cain and Abel story to deny Jews a legitimate place in biblical history. Rather than viewing Jewish heritage as a positive aspect of Christianity, it was used as an exegetical prop to support Christian theological claims. Cain's murder of his younger brother Abel provided an opportunity to demonstrate God's rejection of the Jews and elevation of Christianity from one of the earliest stories in the Bible. The result was a framework that helped to dictate not only the disastrous relationship between Jews and Christians, but also established the theological foundations for the exclusion and persecution of Jews. In the hands of Christian interpreters the story of Cain became the story of the Jewish people.

Summary

Cain's infamy extended far beyond his act of violence. Ancient exegetes were not satisfied with merely calling him "unrighteous" or "wicked." Instead they magnified his crime in ways that cannot be found in Genesis 4. Not only was Cain the first to commit murder, he was also the first to reject Wisdom, promote evil and bring about the destruction of the world. The pens of interpreters turned him into the prototype of the wicked. He was listed as the first to bring evil into the world and to multiply it.

Not only was he the first murderer he was also the archetypical oppressor of the poor. Interpreters accused Cain of being a greedy, scheming individual whose motivation for murdering Abel was so that he could gain more wealth and possessions. The result was that Cain's multiplying of evil was motivated by his greed. He not only sought gain for himself, but taught others how to commit evil acts in the pursuit for riches.

While Paul held Adam responsible for the proliferation of sin and death in the world, others laid the blame on Cain. The fact that Adam did not die when he ate from the tree led them to the conclusion that death was not a result of Adam's sin. The first recorded death in the Bible was that of Abel murdered by Cain. Consequently, it was Cain,

not Adam, who became the prototypical sinner. Even though Adam introduced disobedience into the world, it was Cain who cultivated and multiplied evil in the world.

The tradition that Cain was a teacher of wickedness led to a subsequent designation. Cain was the first heretic. Christians, in particular, found this tradition useful. Not only was Cain the son of the devil, the first murderer, and prototypical sinner, he was also the first heretic in the world and all those that followed in his wake were condemned as “Cainites.” To be associated with the figure of Cain was to stand with those who were contrary to everything Christianity represented.

Probably the most pernicious use of Cain’s tragic story was his association with the Jews. In the hands of Christian interpreters the story of Cain became the story of the Jewish people. Christians used the Cain and Abel story to deny Jews a legitimate place in biblical history. Rather than viewing Jewish heritage as a positive aspect of Christianity, it was used as an exegetical prop to support Christian theological claims. The result was a framework that helped to dictate not only the disastrous relationship between Jews and Christians, but also established the theological foundations for the exclusion and persecution of Jews.

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