

WHY DID GOD ACCEPT ABEL'S SACRIFICE & REJECT CAIN'S?

I. SOME PERSPECTIVES

1. From the seriously Calvinist *The Pilgrim Study Bible* (Oxford, 1948), ed. E. Schuyler English: "Abel [*that which ascends*] is a picture of all those who recognize their own sinfulness and their need of God's salvation, and who are willing to approach God in His way, through the blood sacrifice, which speaks of the later death of Christ on the Cross. Sin *cannot* be atoned for unless blood is shed. . . . The reason why God accepted Abel's offering and did not accept Cain's . . . is that Abel offered a lamb, which was a picture of God's Son, The Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Cain offered only the fruit of his own toil, his own achievement. God would not, never has, and never will accept anything or anyone but his own Son, for all that God counts as real righteousness is in His Son. Anyone outside of Christ is unrighteous in God's sight.

2. According to the more moderate NIV Study Bible, ed. Kenneth Barker (Zondervan, 1985): "*Cain brought some of the fruits . . . But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.* The contrast is not between an offering of plant life and an offering of animal life, but between a careless, thoughtless offering and a choice, generous offering (cf. Lev 3:16). Motivation and heart attitude are all-important, and God looked with favor on Abel and his offering because of Abel's faith (Heb 11:4).

3. From *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. Gunther Plaut (Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981): "Much of Israel's early history is connected with shepherds [and] the nomadic life. . . . The nomad looked upon all settlers, urban as well as rural, with contempt: They were slaves to possession and therefore prone to corruption and idolatry. ¶ Cain is a farmer, a settler, [and later the founder of cities,] and Abel is a shepherd. One reading of the story suggests that the brothers represent man's two original cultures in tension. It is interesting to note, however, that Cain is condemned to be a nomad. . . . ¶ Some commentators [as in # 2 above] maintain that the key to God's preference may be found in the intent of the two worshipers. While Cain brings merely 'an offering,' Abel brings 'the choicest' of his flock. One performs outward motions, the other offers the service of his heart. . . . ¶ A better interpretation, however, is that God's rejection of Cain's offering is inexplicable in human terms. God acts in accordance with His own wisdom: 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious' (Exod. 33:19)."

OR DID GOD REJECT ABEL & REDEEM CAIN?

II. A MIDRASH

At first, the Man and the Woman would speak together of what had happened to them. He would accuse her of betraying him with the snake, and she would reply that God had tricked her: “Who knew that the snake was lying when it said she would not die? Indeed, are we not still living? And did not you name me yourself, calling me Chavvah, Giver of Life?”

As time went on the Man and the Woman stopped talking to each other and spoke instead to their children, telling them their stories about how things came to be as they are. The first-born, whom his mother had named Kayin, was his father’s favorite; he called him Kiddo. The father taught Kiddo how to bring forth the blessing of crops from the cursed earth as he had learned to do, toiling by the sweat of his brow. And he taught Kiddo to fear the God he called Father. He would tell the boy about how his mother had betrayed his father with the Snake, and how God in his anger had cast them out. He also taught Kiddo that his brother was born to serve him, as his mother had been made to serve his father.

Chavvah named her next son Havel, ‘Whisper.’ His father called him Wimp. Whisper’s Mother would tell him how things had been in the beginning, how she had been tricked by the smooth-talking Snake, who was also God and her Lover. She would speak about the terrible deception that had been practiced on her, and about how she had been deflowered and then rejected by his Father. So Whisper also learned to fear the God whom he called Father. And he became a shepherd, caring for the small flock of sheep and goats that provided wool for clothing and milk to satisfy thirst.

The day of reckoning came. Kiddo and Whisper were told they must offer up the best that they had to satisfy their Father. Kiddo said: “I will yield up what the earth has yielded to me.” And so he offered the first-fruits of his harvest. The Father was silent, and Kiddo was full of doubt.

Whisper was deeply troubled and cast down in spirit. He feared that he must give up what was most dear to him. As his Mother had loved and nursed him, so had he loved and nursed his flock. And there was one Kid, a firstling, that was his special favorite. Because its mother had died in giving it birth, Whisper had nursed this Kid from its infancy, giving it suck as if it were his own child. And now it seemed to him that God demanded the Kid from him as a sacrifice. So he built an altar of stones, and placed the Kid on the altar, and weeping bitter tears, he took out a stone knife, and slit its throat, so that its blood mingled with his tears and soaked into the earth.

The Father looked upon Whisper and spoke to him, saying:

Whoever sheds the blood of a Kid,
by a Kid shall that person’s blood be shed;
for in my own image
I made both goats and sheep.

(Cf. Genesis 9:6)

The rest is history.