

The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON XXIII : GENESIS 4:1-2 – FIRST PARAGRAPH: THE BIRTH AND OCCUPATIONS OF CAIN AND ABEL
GENESIS 4:3-8 – SECOND PARAGRAPH: THE STORY OF THE MURDER

SECTION THREE: THE STORY OF CAIN AND ABEL (Gen 4:1-26)

“Whereas chaps. 2-3 recount the life of Adam and Eve inside the garden, chap. 4 will relate a new episode in the ongoing story of the first couple’s experience – but now outside the garden. The abrupt announcement of Cain and Abel’s birth (vv. 1-2) is told so as to show the linkage between chap. 3’s intimations of continued life and prosperity (3:15-16, 20) and the beginning realization of that hope despite human sin in the garden. Sadly, the optimism of the narrative turns to the sordid account of sin’s continuing encroachment by the murder of Abel at the hands of his elder brother (vv. 3-16). Remarkably, however, the grace of God towards Cain enables Adam’s firstborn to survive and later father an impressive lineage whose members are remembered for notable cultural achievements. Unfortunately these achievements were overshadowed by their wicked accomplishments (vv. 17-24). The ‘tôlê dôth of the heavens and earth’ (2:4-4:26) concludes on the high note of another evidence of God’s grace toward Adam and Eve. Seth, Adam’s third son, replaces the murdered Abel and heads a new lineage that is remembered as the benchmark for ‘when men began to call on the name of the LORD’ (4:25-26).” [Mathews, 1:258f]

First Paragraph – The Birth and Occupations of Cain and Abel:

‘¹ Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the Lord.” ² Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.’ (Gen 4:1-2 NKJV)

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

**v. 1 – Now Adam / knew Eve his wife,
and she conceived / and bore Cain,
saying, / I have created a man equally with the Lord.**

**v. 2 – And again, she bore / his brother Abel.
Now Abel was / a keeper of sheep,
and Cain was / a tiller of the ground.**

A DEPARTURE FROM RABBI CASSUTO’S LAYOUT — Throughout Genesis 1-3 I have followed the layout given by Rabbi Cassuto, each lesson corresponding to a chapter in his commentary. Rabbi Cassuto divided his chapters by the Hebrew paragraphs, which I thought to be a very interesting and clean format to follow. But while he continues to divide his chapters by the Hebrew paragraphs, some of his chapters are too short to be conducive to our studies. For that reason we will be combining several of his chapters for our studies:

Lesson 23	First Paragraph – The Birth and Occupation of Cain and Abel (vv. 1, 2)
	Second Paragraph – The Story of the Murder (vv. 3-8)
Lesson 24	Third Paragraph – The Murderer’s Sentence (vv. 9-16)
Lesson 25	Fourth Paragraph – The Descendants of Cain (vv. 17-22)
	Fifth Paragraph – Lamech’s Song (vv. 23, 24)
Lesson 26	Sixth Paragraph – The Birth of Seth and Enosh (vv. 25, 26)

THE UNITY OF GENESIS 4 — Several comment on the discernable intention of the author to apply a system of numerical symmetry. This is not brought forth as some sort of magic formula but rather as evidence of the unity of chapter four, which is denied by those following the Documentary Hypothesis theory. Note the following:

- the number ‘7’ is emphasized in v. 15; *‘vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold,’* and even more in v. 24; *‘If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.’*
- the reference to Lamech, the *seventh* generation from Adam is especially elaborate (vv. 19-24). The names listed in Cain’s family, counting from Adam to Naamah, total 14, twice times *seven*.
- in the actual narration of the story of Cain and Abel (not including the reminiscences of Lamech, vv. 23, 24, and Eve, vv. 25, 26 at the end of the chapter), Cain’s name is mentioned 14 times (twice times *seven*) and Abel is mentioned *seven* times. In those same verses the word ‘brother’ [’āch] is used *seven* times in relation to Cain and Abel. In the same narration, Seth is mentioned *seven* times.
- within this toledoth (Gen 2-4) the following nouns appear a given number of times conforming to the same pattern: ‘earth’ [’erets] *seven* times; ‘field’ [sādeh] *seven* times; and ‘ground’ [’adāmāh] 14 times, twice times *seven*. The words ‘garden’ [gan], ‘Eden’ [’ēden], and ‘east’ [qidh°māh] occur collectively 21 times, three times *seven*. The Divine name ‘YHWH’ [y°hōvāh], ‘God’ [’elōhīm], and ‘LORD God’ [y°hōvāh ’elōhīm] occur collectively 35 times, five times *seven*, the exact number of times the word ‘God’ [’elōhīm] occurs in the creation story, Genesis 1. Taking all four chapters together, the Divine names occur seventy times, or ten times *seven*; ‘God’ [’elōhīm] alone appears 40 times, ‘LORD God’ [y°hōvāh ’elōhīm] appears 20 times, and ‘YHWH’ [y°hōvāh] by itself occurs 10 times. And precisely at the 70th reference is it solemnly announced: *‘Then men began to call on the name of the Lord.’*

In the words of Rabbi Cassuto (a strong voice against the Documentary Hypothesis theory), ***‘It is inconceivable that all this should be pure coincidence.’*** [Cassuto, 192] He continues by stating, “The parallels and similarities that we discovered between the various paragraphs and the numerical symmetry that was revealed throughout the section provide decisive proof of the unity of the section and the completeness of its structure, contrary to the opinion of the majority of modern scholars, who hold that our section was compiled by a complicated process of culling unconnected extracts from various sources, and of editing that failed to achieve the harmonization of the segments.” [Cassuto, 193; see also Wenham, 1:96]

v. 1 – Now Adam knew Eve his wife, — The word order probably points to a connection between what the text begins to recount and what was narrated earlier. “At the end of the preceding section the Torah focused our attention on the cherubim and the revolving sword-flame, which barred the way to the tree of life, and momentarily, as it were, we were made to forget the man. At this state, Scripture reverts to the man: ‘Now Adam,’ so far as he is concerned, what happened to him? This happened to him: *‘he knew Eve his wife; and she bore,’* etc.” [Cassuto, 197]

ADAM ‘KNEW’ EVE — Like our English word ‘know,’ Hebrew yāda‘ is a very broad term. Primarily, it covers knowledge acquired through the senses, experience that can be passed on to others, and practical knowledge. Here it is euphemistic for sexual intercourse, a usage common to

the OT and other Semetic languages (e.g., 4:17; 19:5, 8; 24:16, etc.). ***It is interesting the Lord uses such a term for the most intimate relationship a man and a woman can share, and reveals at least part of the reason for the sexual act.*** The word is never used of animals for which coitus only fulfills an instinctual appetite. But while in this special sense the word conveys the fully personal level of true sexual union, it may lose this higher content altogether (e.g., it is used of the Sodomites, Gen 19:5, 8; and the incestuous affair of Judah with his daughter-in-law Tamar, Gen 38:26). ***“It is not without significance that often the sexual relationship described in the Bible is one in which the partners fully know each other. One partner does not exploit the other. Rather than being an end in itself, cohabitation is a means to an end, and that end is a deeper, more intimate knowledge of each other. In other words, expressing oneself sexually is not just a glandular function.”*** [Hamilton, 1:220; see also Wenham, 1:100f; Kidner, 74; Mathews, 1:264]

and she conceived and bore — These two words (‘conceive’ [hārāh] and ‘bore’ [yālad]) points us back to the previous section where both words are used together in the judgment upon the woman, ‘*I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children*’ (3:16 ESV). “We are told here that the promise given to Eve that she would bear children in order that the human species might survive even after their expulsion from the garden of Eden and removal from the vicinity of the tree of life was actually fulfilled.” [Cassuto, 197]

Cain, — The paronomasia [a play on words; a pun] relates the name to the verb by sounds (the two Hebrew words are unrelated etymologically) to suggest that this sentiment was the significance of the name. “By a play on the sound of the verb ‘*brought forth*’ (qānîthî), Eve names her eldest ‘*Cain*’ (qayin). The verb has two different meanings that are reflected in the English versions: (1) the more common meaning of obtain, as ‘*acquired*’ (NJB), ‘*gotten*’ (AV, NASB), or ‘*gained*’ (NJPS); and (2) the infrequent sense of create, as ‘*brought forth*’ (NIV, REB) or ‘*produced*’ (NAB, NRSV). When used as ‘*create*,’ God is its subject, but here we have the woman, Eve.” [Mathews, 1:264; see also Kidner, 74]

saying, I have created a man equally with the Lord. [Cassuto]; and said, ‘I have acquired a man from the LORD.’ [NKJV]; saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’ [ESV] — Each word of the reason given for Eve naming him ‘*Cain*’ may be interpreted in several different ways:

- ‘*I have created*’ [qānîthî] could have the sense of ‘*to acquire, buy*’ or ‘*to form, to create, to give birth to;*’ but Wenham says the word means ‘*to acquire, buy*’ (e.g., 25:10; 33:19) more commonly than ‘*to create*’ (e.g., 14:19, 22) [Wenham, 1:101]
- ‘*a man*’ [’îsh] could have the sense of ‘*a male child, a man, a husband.*’ This is the same word used in 2:23, ‘*She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*’ ***This word is not used anywhere else to describe a baby boy,*** one of the reasons for the questions surrounding this verse.
- ‘*with the LORD*’ [’ēth y’hōvāh] could have the sense of ‘*through the LORD, from before the LORD, from the LORD, unto the LORD,*’ or ‘*with the LORD.*’

Forgoing any long discussions (Rabbi Cassuto spends four pages discussing the possibilities), here is a synopsis of those I am using in my studies:

DID EVE CONSIDER HERSELF CO-CREATOR, PUTTING HERSELF ON A PAR WITH YAHWEH AS CREATOR? — “The first woman, in her joy at giving birth to her first son, boasts of her generative power, which approximates in her estimation to the

Divine creative power. The Lord formed the first ‘man’ (2:7), and I have formed the second ‘man;’ [thus] ‘I have created a man with the LORD: I stand together [i.e., equally] with Him in the rank of creators.’” [Cassuto, 201f] Skinner, 102: ‘I have created (or produced) a man with (the co-operation of) Yahweh.’ Currid, 1:143f: ‘I have created a man with the help of Yahweh.’ Currid adds, “Eve’s exclamation appears to place herself in the role of creator.

DID EVE BELIEVE SHE WAS MERELY FULFILLING HER DIVINELY ASSIGNED ROLE ‘WITH THE HELP OF THE LORD’? — Morris: *‘I have gotten a man from the Lord.’* Hamilton: *‘I have acquired a man from Yahweh.’* Mathews, 1:265: *She sees in creating Cain the realization of her divinely assigned role; her exclamation acknowledges that this achievement came only by the assistance of the Lord.*

DID EVE THINK THE PROPHECY OF GEN 3:15 HAD BEEN FULFILLED? — “[There are those who] expound the words, *‘I have gotten the man of the Lord;’* as if Eve understood that she already possessed that conqueror of the serpent, who had been divinely promised to her.” [Calvin, 190]

Vv. 2-5 ARE THREE CHIASTIC SENTENCES — Victor Hamilton points out vv. 2-5 are actually three chiasmic sentences, as is clear from this literal translation:

- A and *became Abel* a keeper of flocks
- A₁ and *Cain became* a tiller of the soil
- B and *brought Cain* from the fruit of the soil ...
- B₁ and *Abel brought*, also he, from the firstlings ...
- C and *looked favorably* Yahweh on *Abel* and his offering
- C₁ and on *Cain* and his offering he did not *look favorably*

v. 2 – And again, she bore his brother Abel. — *From the description of Abel as ‘his brother,’ it is apparent that the story is told with the focus being upon Cain.* Some Jewish traditions consider Cain and Abel to have been twins, but Skinner notes there is a Hebrew word missing which would have been used if it meant they were twins. [Skinner, 102f] **Regardless, certainly Abel is the younger brother which is the significant point in the story.**

Abel — ‘Abel’ [hevel] means ‘breath, vapor, vanity.’ This word usually expresses the brevity of human life (e.g., ‘Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow,’ Ps 144:4; ‘Let me alone, for my days are but a breath,’ Job 7:16). But unlike Cain, no explanation of his name is given and it is best to restrain from making more of its significance. That Abel’s life was ‘cut short, brief’ would have been unknown when Abel was named, and at most the name may be an allusion to the impact of God’s curse on the world and the brevity of life as a result of the fall.

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain was a tiller of the ground. — There are those who use their vocations as the grounds for rejecting Cain’s offerings but Scripture makes no judgment here concerning either profession. Both were honorable and necessary occupations, Cain’s fruits providing food and Abel’s sheep providing clothing for the family.

Second Paragraph – The Story of the Murder:

‘³ And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. ⁴ Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, ⁵ but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. ⁶ So the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” ⁸ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.’ (Gen 4:3-8 NKJV)

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

v. 3 – In the course of time / Cain brought

of the fruit of the ground / an offering to the Lord,

v. 4 – and Abel, too, brought / of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.

And the Lord had regard / for Abel and his offering,

v. 5 – but for Cain and his offering / He had no regard.

So Cain was very vexed, / and his countenance fell.

v. 6 – The Lord said to Cain,

‘Why are you vexed, / and why has your countenance fallen?’

v. 7 – Surely, if you do well, / you shall be upstanding;

but if you do not do well, / sin shall be a rōbhēsh at your door;

its desire shall be for you, / but you will be able to master it.’

v. 8 – Cain appointed a place where to meet Abel his brother, / and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, / and killed him.

v. 3 – In the course of time — lit., ‘at the end of days, at the end of the days,’ which many suggest implies a regular practice of giving offerings, quite possibly on the Sabbath. (*Reminder: as we saw in lesson 13, the sanctification of the Sabbath day goes back to creation and is not something which came out of the law of Moses*). While not here spelled out, the rest of Scripture would force us to believe that the custom of sacrificing was not rashly *devised* by them but was divinely *delivered* to them. The book of Hebrews says Abel’s sacrifice was accepted because it was offered in ‘faith’ (11:4) meaning it was offered according to the command of God. **“That expression, ‘the end of days,’ suggests a proper time in which to worship God, the sabbath day as the appointed time in which to appear before God. Cain and Abel came before God; came to him where he resided, visibly in the symbol of the Shekinah, at the east of the garden of Eden. This is supported by the language of Cain when he says that he was driven forth from the presence of God; and he went away from the presence of God.”** [Carroll, 121]

Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord, [YHWH] (v. 4) and Abel, too, brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. – TO THE LORD —

According to Rabbi Cassuto, YHWH is used here rather than ‘Elōhîm since the verse deals with sacrifices and these are offered up specifically to a personal deity. The following names of God are never mentioned in the Torah in connection with sacrifices: ‘Elōhîm [‘God’], ‘Elōhekhā [‘your God’], Shadday [‘Almighty’], or ts[‘]vā’ôth [‘Hosts’], but only the Specific Name YHWH (the lone

exception to this is Ex 18:12 where it is intended to stress the fact that it was a stranger who brought the offering).

OFFERING — *Some teach the reason for the Lord rejecting Cain's sacrifice was because it was bloodless, but the Hebrew word used here does not bear that out.* The word is *min^echāh* and is translated 'gift, tribute, present, oblation, sacrifice.' When used of human affairs it was a gift of homage or allegiance to superior persons, particularly kings (e.g. 1 Sam 10:27 Saul; 1 Kings 4:21 Solomon). As a ritual term it could describe an animal sacrifice but more often it referred to cereal offerings (e.g., Deut 26:1-11; 1 Sam 2:17; Lev 2:1-16). Bruce Waltke comments that *from the viewpoint of word usage, the unusual element of this story is not that Cain's offering is bloodless but that Abel's is bloody!* [B. K. Waltke, 'Cain and His Offering,' WJT 48, 1986; quoted in Mathews, 1:267] Here in Gen 4 it is used of both Cain's grain offering (v. 3, 5) and Abel's offering from his flock (v. 4).

Cain brought of the fruit of the ground — Some read into this verse a sub-par offering on the part of Cain and that they were not the 'firstfruits' (discussed below). According to Cassuto, rabbinic tradition maintains Cain brought 'produce of the poorest quality' but Scripture itself does not say this.

v. 4 – and Abel, too, brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. — Abel being a keeper of the sheep brought an animal sacrifice. While Cain's offering was simply 'of the fruit of the ground,' the Holy Spirit uses two expressions to emphasize Abel's offering was the best of its kind: 'of the firstlings ... and of their fat portions. This distinction is not made pointlessly (some consider the construction a hendiadys which would be better translated, 'He brought the fattest of the firstlings of his flock'). *The twofold emphasis – on the 'firstlings' which are the best of the flock, and on the 'fat portions' which are their best parts – underlines Abel's desire to gratify his Creator and honor Him to the best of his ability. His oblation is accompanied by good intent. As we will see below, the offerings were indicative of their inner attitudes.*

And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, (v. 5) but for Cain and his offering He had no regard. — *Almost all I have studied do not consider Cain's rejection and Abel's acceptance to have anything to do with their offerings per se, but rather **their offerings represented what was in their hearts.*** "Apparently the Bible wished to convey that whilst Abel was concerned to choose the finest thing in his possession, Cain was indifferent. In other words: Abel endeavoured to perform his religious duty ideally, whereas Cain was content merely to discharge his duty.... **Our passage reflects the view that sacrifices are acceptable only if an acceptable spirit inspires them.**" [Cassuto, 205, 207] "The issue is the attitude, demeanour and faith of the two brothers as they come to worship.... **It is Cain's attitude and heart that are condemned by God.** Cain is a rebellious man who refuses to acknowledge God as one deserving the best of the harvest." [Currid, 1:145f] "**The worshiper and his offering are inseparable.... He looks religious, but in his heart he is not totally dependent on God, childlike, or grateful.**" [Waltke, 97] "**Both giver and gift were under the scrutiny of God.... As Luther noted, 'The faith of the individual was the weight which added value to Abel's offering.' Unlike a human observer, God sees the condition of the human heart and weighs the motive of the worshiper (e.g., 1 Sam 16:7). Elsewhere Scripture shows that the Lord requires of the giver an obedient and upright heart (e.g., 1 Sam 15:14; Hos 6:6; Matt 5:24).**" [Mathews, 1:268] "All that is explicit here is that Abel offered the pick of his flock and that Cain's spirit was arrogant (5b; cf. Pr. 21:27). The New Testament draws out the further important implications that Cain's life,

unlike Abel's, gave the lie to his offering (1 Jn. 3:12) and that Abel's faith was decisive for his acceptance (Heb. 11:4)." [Kidner, 75]

'By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.' (Heb 11:4)

'For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.' (1 John 3:11, 12)

'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with wicked intent!' (Prov 21:27)

ABEL THE RIGHTEOUS ONE vs 'THE WAY OF CAIN' — *From the rest of Scripture we know Cain to be of the evil one, but Abel is the very first mentioned in the long line of men of faith recorded in Heb 11 (Heb 11:4) and he is called 'righteous' and a prophet (Matt 23:35; Luke 11:50, 51).* "In the New Testament, Cain is viewed as the forefather of an unrighteous seed who had drawn first blood in the perpetual struggle between the ungodly and the godly seed first anticipated in 3:15." [Mathews, 1:269] "The 'way of Cain' (Jude 11), then, is unbelief that may manifest itself in envy of God's dealing with the righteous, in murderous acts, in denial of responsibility for one's brother, and in refusal to accept the punishment." [Ross, 153]

HOW DID CAIN AND ABEL KNOW THE LORD'S REACTION TO THEIR OFFERINGS? — According to Theodotion's Greek translation (a revision of the LXX created about 180 BC) fire descended from heaven and devoured Abel's offering but not Cain's. This is repeated in late haggadic Midrashim and a number of medieval commentaries, but there is nothing in Scripture to support that supposition. Others believe the Lord revealed Himself to the two brothers. Cassuto believes the best explanation that after the offerings had been made, the Lord bestowed blessing and fertility upon Abel's flock but not Cain's fields. *But Scripture is more interested in the fact of divine approval rather than how it was shown.*

So Cain was very vexed, and his countenance fell. — Cain's response was two-fold: anger (lit., *'it became very hot to him'*) and dejection (*'his face fell'*); i.e., he hung his head like a man who was grieved and crushed. "Cain's anger revealed his true attitude, which resulted in his despondency. The characterization *'very angry'* is similar to the Hebrew construction at Gen 34:7, which describes the *'fury'* of Jacob's sons upon learning of their sister's abuse (cp. 31:36; Jonah 4:1, 4, 9). Attempts to define Cain's reaction as *'depression'* rather than anger smacks of modern distinctions." [Mathews, 1:268]

v. 6 – The Lord said to Cain, — Here and in the rest of the section the name YHWH and not 'Elōhîm is used because the whole passage speaks of ethical matters.

'Why are you vexed, and why has your countenance fallen?' — These are not words of rebuke but on the contrary an expression of comfort and fatherly counsel, as if to say, *'My son, you have no reason to be grieved and dejected; bear in mind that if you do well...'*, etc. **"In the Lord's repeated 'Why ...?' and 'If ...', His appeal to reason and His concern for the sinner are as strongly marked as His concern for truth (5a) and justice (10)."** [Kidner, 75] "God questions Cain for the same purpose he queried the man and woman in the garden (3:9, 11) – not to scold but to elicit Cain's admission of sin with the view to repentance. The REB's rendering, *'Why are you*

scowling?’ (v. 6) captures the visual grimace etched across Cain’s face. Cain telegraphed by his facial expression the bitterness of his darkened soul.” [Mathews, 1:269]

v. 7 – Surely, if you do well, you shall be upstanding; but if you do not do well, sin shall be a rōbhēsh at your door; [Cassuto] – If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. [NKJV] — Those knowledgeable in the original language agree this is an extremely difficult verse to translate; for details, see the appendix. In general however, the overall sense is as follows: *‘Why, my son, are you grieved, and why do you hang your head? There is no cause for it; you have only to do well and then you will be able to stand firmly on your feet, with upright stature. But if you fail to do well and continue in sin, then the sin will grow in its dominion over you and will crush you to the ground. Nevertheless at this point you are not delivered into its power, and if only you have the desire, you can oppose it and overcome it and free yourself from its influence.’*

SIN WILL ENSLAVE — The practical take-away is that *sin will long for you, to keep you near to itself. If once you start to sin, sin will draw you to itself more and more.* It is similar to the thought expressed by the adage, *‘one transgression will lead to another.’* *“Cain has a choice to make: will he follow the ways of Yahweh, or the ways of sin? God provides the answer: ‘You must rule over it.’” [Currid, 1:146]* *“What is more important here for Cain, however, is what action he will take now that his sin has been found out (v. 7b). The consequences of his reaction to God’s correction are more far-reaching than the initial sin itself, for if he pursues sin’s anger, it will result in sin’s mastery over him. This is his decision. It is possible for Cain to recover from sin quickly if he chooses the right thing....* By this divine analysis we learn that sin has a pervasive power that seized occasion to enslave its victims (cp. Rom 3:9; 1 Cor 15:56; 1 John 5:19). But Cain is urged to repent lest he be consumed; he cannot claim helplessness nor ignorance, for he has divine counsel. The apostle Paul testified to the inner struggle against the power of sin and conceded that the power of Christ alone could liberate him (Rom 7:15-25). Cain’s refusal to deal rightly with his sin permitted his anger to fester into murder (cf. Prov 27:4; Eccl 7:9; Eph 4:26, 31; Jas 1:15).” [Mathews, 1:270f] *“Cain is not to give in to this lurking sin. He is to master it.... When facing the alternatives, he is capable of making the right choice. Otherwise, God’s words to him about ‘doing well’ would be meaningless and comic. Should he so desire, Cain is able to overcome this creature who now confronts him. The text makes Cain’s personal responsibility even more focused by its use of the initial emphatic pronoun: ‘you, you are to master it.’” [Hamilton, 1:227f]*

sin shall be a rōbhēsh — *Note this is the first use of the word ‘sin’ in Scripture.* The Hebrew word used here is *ḥaṭṭā’th* and is the principle word for sin; the basic meaning of the root is *‘to miss a mark, to miss a way.’* For *rōbhēsh*, see the appendix.

at your door; — This remains open as to what exactly this refers (*‘portals of the heart, door of the house, door of the sanctuary, entrance of the grave,’* etc). The *‘door’* is simply an entrance; thus *‘your door’* most generally would be *‘the place through which you are wont to go in and out constantly; i.e., it will always be found in your path.’*

‘Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.’ (Isa 1:17, 18)

‘Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you’ (Amos 5:14)

its desire shall be for you, but you will be able to master it. — The general sense is given above, but we should note the connection of this verse with the judgment upon the woman: ‘yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you’ (Gen 3:16). “The phrase is adapted from 3:16b, on which it throws back a sombre light.” [Kidner, 75] ***As we saw in lesson 21, the ‘desire’ from the fall is a negative desire, a desire for the woman to undermine and overrule the leadership of the man. Here sin’s desire is entirely negative, a desire to rule over Cain.***

v. 8 – Cain appointed a place where to meet Abel his brother, [Cassuto] – Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; [NKJV] — No where in the Lord’s words to Cain is Abel even mentioned, nevertheless Cain does not forget the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering while he and his offering had no regard, and he is jealous of his brother. Note the cause of Cain’s dissatisfaction lies in himself. “God pronounces a dreadful sentence against Cain, if he hardens his mind in wickedness and indulge himself in his crime; for the address is very emphatical, because God not only repels his unjust complaint, but shows that ***Cain could have no greater adversary than that sin of his which he inwardly cherished.***” [Calvin, 201]

AN INCOMPLETE SENTENCE — The sentence is incomplete; literally, ‘and Cain said’ but we are not told what he said. Some translations therefore render it ‘Cain told Abel’ (ASV, NASB 1995, MEV [Modern English Version], NLT [New Life Version]) implying Cain told Abel what the Lord had said to him. Along those same lines other translations understand ‘said’ to mean ‘talked’ and render it something as, ‘And Cain talked with Abel his brother:’ (KJV, NKJV, NASV, ESV, ASV). Skinner [107] says if either of these is the sense then Cain was taking the first step towards reconciliation by communicating to Abel the warning he had received from the Lord, but Skinner then adds that while this is possible grammatically, psychologically it is improbable. Henry Morris [138] is even more imaginative; since Luke 11:51 describes Abel as a prophet, Morris comments ‘Abel was no doubt urging repentance as a prophet to his brother while Cain accused God of favoritism and his brother as self-righteous until the argument became so bitter that Cain rose to kill his brother.’ But Mathews says both of the renderings ‘told’ or ‘talked’ are unlikely from the Hebrew.

Seeing the difficulty in the text, the LXX adds to the sentence: “... said to Abel ... ‘Let us go out to the field.’” Wenham and Mathews note the following also have that addition: Samaritan Pentateuch, Vulgate, Syriac, *Targum Neofiti*, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*. Some modern versions follow in their footsteps, having something such as ‘Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.”’ (NET, RSV, NIV, CSB, NLT, NIV, REV, NAB, NJB, NRSV). If that be the true text, that would make the murder undeniably premeditated.

Cassuto resolves the difficulty by comparing the word usually meaning ‘to speak’ to a similar Arabic phrase which could imply ‘an appointed place, a rendezvous.’ The sense would be then that ‘Cain arranged to meet Abel his brother and while in the field, Cain rose up,’ etc. But however we are to understand the phrase, what follows is unquestioned.

and when they were in the field, — Away from their father and mother, in the open country, a place where no people would see or hear them. In the law of Moses the circumstance that a crime is committed ‘in the field,’ i.e., out of range of help, is proof of premeditation.

Cain rose up against his brother Abel, — Their walk in the field turned into an assault. According to Cassuto, the words ‘Abel his brother’ is emphasized – it was his brother that he slew!

and killed him. — The Hebrew word *hārag* is the common verb meaning ‘to murder intentionally’ and is different than the word used in the ten commandments, *rātsach* which could also include manslaughter (Ex 20:13). “The virus of sin has infected the parent’s children: Adam and Eve do not have to await their own death to experience the devastating effects of their rebellion in the garden. They witness the murder of their youngest and the exile of their firstborn.” [Mathews, 1:273]

Appendix: THE DIFFICULTIES OF TRANSLATING v. 7 – Surely, if you do well, you shall be upstanding; but if you do not do well, sin shall be a *rōbhēsh* at your door; [Cassuto] – If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. [NKJV]

— According to Cassuto, this is one of the most difficult and obscure Biblical sentences in the Torah. Wenham calls this ‘the most obscure verse in Genesis’. The ancient Rabbis counted this among the ‘indeterminate verses’ because of the syntactic relationship of the word *s’ēth* (‘to lift, to carry, elevation, exaltation, dignity, loftiness, uprising’). Some modern expositors consider it beyond understanding and leave part of the verse untranslated. Victor Hamilton gives the following ways in which some have tried to resolve this complex verse:

- some change the MT’s word order, placing the Hebrew word ‘sin’ after ‘to lift up,’ saying this then refers to the forgiveness of sin: ‘look, if you do well, there is forgiveness of sin.’
- some insert words into the passage; e.g., inserting the word ‘face’ after ‘to lift up,’ thus, ‘if you do well, there is a lifting of the (or your) face.’
- some emend the text, both the consonants and vowel points; e.g. Sir Godfrey Rolles Driver, noted Semitic language expert, makes five changes which involve deep Hebrew grammar (for the details, see Hamilton, 1:226) and comes up with the following, ‘if thou does well, dost thou not lift up (thy countenance)?’
- other emend only the vocalized text (vowel points); again, heavy grammar which we will not pursue but Hebraist Mitchell J. Dahood thus translates it as follows: ‘Look, if you have behaved well you will be at ease.’

The issues:

- *s’ēth* is an infinitive which is broad in use, including *forgiveness* (50:17) and *acceptance* (32:21). It could be understood ‘a lifting up, an exaltation’ which could give the understanding ‘if you do well, your countenance will be lifted up.’ Another sense could be ‘accepted,’ referring to Cain and his offering. Mathews [1:270] and Kidner [75] say it is best to be understood as ‘lifting up,’ figuratively referring to the uplifted face which would indicate acceptance from God that comes with a pure heart, a promise of restoration on a changed heart.
- *rābhets* is often used of animals ‘crouching’ or ‘lying in repose’ (e.g., 29:2; Exod 23:5), including wild animals such as a lion (49:9). This pictures sin ‘temporarily at bay and subject to its master but coming alive when stirred;’ thus many translations, ‘sin lays at the door, sin crouches at the door.’ Some connect this word to an ancient Akkadian word denoting a kind of demon, or a specified class of demons; thus, ‘sin is a kind of demon; sin is a demon crouching at the door’ (REB [Revised English Bible]; note: not the same as the

REV [Revised English Version]). If the reference is truly to a demon then the narrative personifies sin as a demonic spirit ready to pounce on Cain once he opens up the 'door' of opportunity. ***Regardless, the imagery is effectively the same and the message is clear: 'sin can be stirred up by wrong choices.' It is a metaphor of taming a wild beast; 'its desire is for you (Moffatt, 'eager to be at you'), but you must master it.***

Cassuto goes into great detail of the different possibilities and their shortcomings (see his commentary for more detail, pp. 208-212; see also Wenham, pp. 104-106). But at the center of it all is a contrast, 'if you do well... if you do not do well...'. Between the two contrasted conditions, the second is the exact opposite of the first: 'if you do well, you will be able to rise up and stand firmly on your feet, but if you do not do well, the opposite will befall you: not upstanding but crouching on the ground.' Thus the overall sense (as given in the notes above) is as follows: ***'Why, my son, are you grieved, and why do you hang your head? There is no cause for it; you have only to do well and then you will be able to stand firmly on your feet, with upright stature. But if you fail to do well and continue in sin, then the sin will grow in its dominion over you and will crush you to the ground. Nevertheless at this point you are not delivered into its power, and if only you have the desire, you can oppose it and overcome it and free yourself from its influence.'*** See the notes in the above lesson for further comments.