



DISCOVERING THE BIBLE & OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGES

Providing factual information about the Bibles, beliefs, movements, institutions, events and people of historical Christianity & Judaism.

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The Transformation of Cain's Parents

By Jim Myers

The account of Cain, Abel and Seth has always fascinated me because it has so many important lessons about life. Even people who do not read the Bible know Cain murdered his brother. Almost everyone has heard what he said to God -- "*Am I my brother's keeper?*"¹ Cain's question touches hearts universally because it not only focuses on relationships; it addresses a very important question that we all have – *Who has my back?* This is my midrash about the account.

This account plays an important role in the Jewish culture. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz defines culture as: "*A culture is more than a set of rules to guide behavior; it is a comprehensive worldview and way of relating to one's fellow human beings. Like all complex cultures, Jewish culture does not spell everything out literally, but leaves much to inference. A culture's strength lies not only in what it says, but also in what it chooses not to say, and this too must be learned.*"²

In the Jewish culture, the focus of readers of the Bible is on the actions of people and their relationships -- *not theology*. This is very important, so as you read the following account, keep Steinsaltz's definition in mind. Look for answers to the following questions:

- *What comprehensive worldview is revealed?*
- *What rules that guide behavior are revealed?*
- *What is revealed about the relationships of the characters?*
- *What is spelled out literally in the text?*
- *What can we learn from what is not said?*

The first relationship we encounter in this account is that of a man and a woman. I will call them by their traditional names – **Adam & Eve** (her name was really **Chavah**). I think it is safe to say that their relationship carried some "baggage from the past." I am sure you remember what happened at

their previous residence – *the garden in Eden*. I bet Adam and Eve had some very interesting conversations after moving to their new home -- *which was definitely a step down from "the garden."*

"Why did you listen to that snake?" "You were the one that talked to God and set there like a bump-on-a-log, not me!" "What were you thinking?" "You took the first bite, not me!" "If it hadn't been for you, we would still be living in luxury instead of having to work our butts off to survive!" "If you hadn't offered it to me I wouldn't have eaten it!"

I think most people understand how being driven out of the garden could put some pressure on their relationship. This is one of those lessons we can learn from **what is not said** by the text – **Past actions affect present relationships; current actions can affect future relationships.**

I am sure your will agree with how important this lessons is. So, what do two people with a lot of "baggage" do?

And the man **knew** his woman Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.³

They have sex! When it comes to sex, history proves that people don't usually think about what kind of baggage the other participant may be carrying at that moment. This is the first act of sex recorded in the Bible. This may sound strange in today's world, but how did they come up with the idea to do it? Were they just sitting around the campfire and one of them said, *"Hey! I just had an idea. Want to try something new?"*

The text doesn't provide the answer, or reveal whether this was their first time or not; but I have no doubt that Adam quickly became a willing participant. Eve, on the other hand, had no women around to explain what could happen to her. We live in a culture saturated with information about sex and pregnancy. Eve didn't. Adam and Eve had entered uncharted waters and they were on their own.

We know the origins of Adam and Eve. God created Adam from wet soil and blew His breath into him. God made Eve from one of Adam's ribs. No one else existed when Adam was made. He was in a deep sleep when Eve was made. It doesn't appear that God explained this to them. They began life as adults and their relationship had been "arranged" by God. How did her life change when *"she became pregnant?"* Think about what must have been going through her mind as she experienced pregnancy for the first time without anyone to explain what was happening. According to the American Pregnancy Association the earliest signs of pregnancy are:

- *Feeling fatigued or more tired can start as early as the first week.*
- *Swollen or tender breasts may begin as early as 1-2 weeks.*
- *Nausea/morning sickness show up in weeks 2-8.⁴*
- *Some may not show until 20 weeks.⁵*

The above signs did not happen immediately after having sex. How could she figure out that fatigue, swollen breasts, etc., that happened weeks later had any connection to sex? What do you think Adam thought as he watched her change? And then, one day, the most unexpected thing happened – *she gave birth. You talk about a mind blowing experience that had to be a humdinger for two people who didn't have a clue!*

It is important to be aware of some very important points: they had never seen a baby or a child; they had no childhood memories; they had no parents – *and now they had two babies*. Think about what must have been going through their heads as they looked at the twin boys. What did they do with them? What did the twins learn from them? We are wired to give meanings to things we don't understand. Pay close attention to how Eve interpreted what had just happened to her.

"I have created a man with the help of God."⁶

She believed she was the creator of a new man -- Cain. She believes she didn't create Cain by herself. She had the help of God. Obviously, she hadn't put the dots together and figured out Adam's role in making babies. Her words indicate that they still had some kind of relationship with God outside the garden. How do you think her words affected Adam?

And she gave birth to his brother Abel.⁷

Abel's arrival isn't followed by a declaration like she gave when Cain was born. Abel is introduced as the brother of Cain. The word brother will appear seven times in this account. When a word appears seven times in any account it is no accident. It is a thematic sign embedded in the text that points to an important point the author wants to make. Here, it points to the relationship of brothers – *specifically Cain's relationship with Abel*. Based on the information provided by the text, Cain and Abel were twin brothers.

And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.⁸

It is important to identify and understand the relationships of the characters in this account:

- *Adam and Eve*

- *Eve and God*
- *Eve and Cain*
- *Abel and Cain*

Now let's focus on relationships that are not mentioned.

- *Adam and God*
- *Adam and Cain*
- *Adam and Abel*
- *Eve and Abel*
- *God and Cain*
- *God and Abel*

Keep these in mind as we continue following the text. When the twins grew up, Able became a shepherd and Cain a farmer. Adam was a tiller of the ground, so it would seem that he taught Cain how to be a farmer. But Abel was the first shepherd in the Bible. Did someone teach him or did he learn how to be a shepherd all by himself? Since his mother was the only other person around, then she is the likely candidate for being the one that taught Abel. This would suggest that *Adam was closer to Cain, while Eve was closer to Abel.*

At the appointed time Cain brought an offering to God of the fruit of the ground. Abel, for his part, brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.⁹

This is very important revelation, because it means that it was a planned event, not a spur of the moment decision.¹⁰ It is the first cultic ritual act recorded in the Bible. It was probably observed at the same time every year and was a harvest ritual. Apparently, after being driven from the garden and forced to work land that had been cursed by God, they learned to give thanks to God for what the ground produced. It also indicates that they had a relationship with God after leaving the garden. This may indicate that Eve's words were meant as a prayer of thanks to God that He had made her body fruitful too. This event was different from the times before.

And God gazed toward Abel and toward for his offering; but toward Cain and toward his offering He did not gaze.¹¹

This is a very interesting scene. Pay close attention to the relationships described in it.

- *God did not look at Cain or his offering.*
- *God looked only at Abel and his offering.*

- *We do not know what Cain and Abel looked at.*
- *We do not know what Adam and Eve saw or knew.*

This had to be a special day in their lives, a holy day. Put yourself in the shoes of Cain and Abel. Think of all the work you had done to produce the offerings you brought to God that day. Abel must have been overjoyed when he realized God was giving him His full attention. But, how do you think Cain felt when he realized that God not only failed to look at his offering, but He didn't even look at him! How would you have felt? No reason is given for why God ignored Cain or even how Cain knew that God was ignoring him.¹² But the Bible clearly records Cain's reaction:

And Cain burned exceedingly and his face fell. And God said to Cain, "Why are you burning? And why has your face fallen?"¹³

God may have ignored Cain and his offering, but He did not ignore Cain's reaction -- *anger*. Now Cain had God's full attention. Before we continue, let's define what anger is:

*Anger is a normal emotion with a wide range of intensity, from mild irritation and frustration to rage. It is a reaction to a perceived threat to ourselves, our loved ones, our property, our self-image, or some part of our identity. Anger is a warning bell that tells us that something is wrong.*¹⁴

Anger is a reaction to a perceived threat. Take another look at what the perceived objects of a threat are:

- *a threat to ourselves*
- *a threat to our loved ones*
- *a threat to our property*
- *a threat to our self-image*
- *a threat to some part of our identity*

I think we can eliminate the first three as the cause of Cain's anger. I think the problem was related to Cain's self-image and identity:

- *Cain is the first born.*
- *Cain was declared to be the creation of his mother and God.*
- *Cain is the son following in the footsteps of his father.*
- *Cain is the older brother.*

The bottom line is probably that Cain is used to being number one! He had a position of status. But now, for the first time in his life, he was being ignored

and God had placed his brother ahead of him. This was a new experience for Cain. He perceived it to be a threat to his self-image and identity. The next question is whether his anger simply be mild irritation and frustration, or will it turn into rage? The question that must be answered now is who is Cain angry with? Pay close attention to the question God asks Cain:

"Why are you angry? Why has the expression of your face fallen?"¹⁵

God asked "why" not "who." The text contains important clues that will answer both questions.

*". . . and Cain brought from the fruit of the ground."¹⁶
"and Abel brought from the first-born of the flock, and their fat."¹⁷*

The terms "first-born" and "their fat" indicate that Abel brought God the best from his flocks. *He chose his most valuable property to give to God.* Cain just brought "an offering." He didn't bring his best and most valuable property as his offering. *God recognized the difference -- and apparently so did Cain.* Why did God ignore him? Cain's decided that it was his brother's fault! If Abel hadn't given God his best, then God would not have ignored his offering and him. God apparently knew what Cain thought, as can be seen by the instructions He gave:

Surely, if you do well, you shall be upstanding; but if you do not do well, sin will be a crouching at your door; its desire shall be for you, but you will be able to master it."¹⁸

The Hebrew word **YTV** is translated "do well." It is an alternative form of **TOV**,¹⁹ which is the most important word in the first creation account of the Bible. *TOV appeared seven times in that account, just like the word brother does in this one.* (For a detailed discussion of **TOV** see the January 2013 issue of this newsletter.) God's words remind readers of the account about the garden in Eden. God gave Cain's father the same instructions, but he failed to do **TOV**. He did an act of **RA** (evil). Cain's choice will be the same. Anger is his forbidden fruit and he must rule over it or sin will be waiting like a wild animal crouching at the door ready to spring on him.²⁰

And Cain appointed a place to meet Abel his brother.²¹

God appointed the time and place for Cain and Abel to meet Him, now Cain appoints a time and place for Abel to meet him. We are not told how long Cain waited before he acted, whether Abel was aware of what had taken place between God and Cain, or if Abel even knew Cain was angry. But Abel met his brother at the appointed time and place.

And it was when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.²²

Cain rose up against his brother like a wild predatory animal. He acted like the serpent in the garden. *The first murder in the Bible was committed by brother against brother.* It is also the first death recorded in the Bible.

And God said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?"²³

This is where Cain's gives his famous response:

And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"²⁴

God ignored it.

And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's bloods (plural) is crying to Me from the ground."²⁵

Why is the plural, "bloods," used here? The rabbis say that it was because Abel's "bloods" contained all of the lives of the descendants that would have been born if Abel had lived. *Cain not only murdered Abel; he also murdered all of Abel's descendants too.*

When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and wander on the earth."²⁶

God banished Cain from his homeland. He could never return and be with his parents again. The day Cain left was the day his parents also lost their second son. *How did this affect their relationships with each other -- and with God?* The text provides an important clue and answer to that question. But first the text has another lesson to teach.

So Cain went out from the presence of YAHWEH and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. And Cain knew his woman; and she conceived, and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch.²⁷

We do not know who the woman that became Cain's woman was or where she came from. Some say it was his sister, but since the text says nothing about him having a sister and because it says "Cain left," not "they left," it would seem that she was someone he met as he traveled. The important thing, in regards to this discussion, is that it adds another relationship to our study – *Cain and "his" woman.* They both brought their life experiences,

ideas, and values with them to the relationship. As the mother of their son, she would have been the primary influence in his early life.

After being a wanderer, Cain made the decision to settle down and change professions. He became a builder of cities. Nothing further is revealed about Cain's life. The focus shifts to his descendants. But as we will soon learn, Cain was not forgotten. Below are his descendants: **Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methushael, and Lamech.**²⁸

The focus of the text turns to Lamech. His children were creative. They introduced musical instruments and made bronze and iron tools. Lamech, however, is known for something new he did. He was so proud of what he did that he composed a song and sang it to his wives. This is the first song recorded in the Bible:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech.
For a man I slew, as soon as I wounded *him*,
Yes, a young man, as soon as I bruised *him*.
If sevenfold Cain shall be avenged,
then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."²⁹

Lamech's song glorified the violent act of murder he committed. This was against a blood-brother. Lamech murdered a complete stranger. His song emphasizes his superiority over his victim by stressing that he was a young man, a man in his prime, not a weak old man. Lamech didn't even know his name. He was simply a nameless stranger who happened to cross his path. Lamech's self-identity is clearly revealed in this song, and he linked it to the legend of his ancestor that had been glorified and passed from generation to generation – *from Cain to Lamech*.

Lamech's words echo the songs sung by victors as they returned from war. It also elevates his superiority above his famous ancestor Cain. How did Abel's murder become a glorified legend in Cain's lineage? One option is that Cain was not repentant about the murder and he bragged about it to his son. Another option is that Cain's wife glorified violence and murder and she was the one that instilled it as one of her highest values in her son. Of course, they may both have been involved. Regardless of created it, the story was passed from generation to generation.

Let's don't forget Cain's parents. They lost two sons and there is evidence in the text that the loss of their only children changed them. They must have thought about this and discussed it a lot. They may have also turned to God for understanding. The way we know they changed is found in the account of

their next son. When Eve gave birth to him she announced that God had given him in the place of Abel. She named him **Seth**. Nothing is said about Seth except his lineage, which also has an Enoch and Lamech in it: **Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, and Lamech**. The spotlight in Seth's lineage is also on one of his descendants who did something new: "**And Enoch walked with God.**"

What was different about Seth's childhood from than of Cain and Abel? The first thing is that Adam and Eve had experienced the loss of their children. They were alone again and had time to reflect about that loss. The second is that Seth received the attention of both parents, not just one. And the third is that they were both involved in teaching Seth a different set of values.

Based on the context that began with Genesis 1, we know what God's highest value is – **life!** He judges His work by the **TOV Standard**. *For an act to measure up to that standard it must protect and preserve life, and increase the quality of life*. This is the wisdom that was passed from generation to generation in Seth's lineage. *Cain's highest value was death; Seth's highest value was Life! Choose Life • Do TOV!* **BHC**

¹ Genesis 4:9b

² *Teshuvah: A Guide for the Newly Observant Jew* by Adin Steinsaltz © 1982 The Domino Press, Jerusalem, Israel; Translation © 1987 The Free Press, New York, NY; p. 10

³ Genesis 4:1a

⁴ <http://americanpregnancy.org/gettingpregnant/earlypregnancysymptoms.html>

⁵ <http://www.parents.com/advice/pregnancy-birth/pregnancy-stages/when-do-pregnant-women-usually-start-to-show/>

⁶ Genesis 4:1

⁷ Genesis 4:2a

⁸ Genesis 4:2b

⁹ Genesis 4:3-4a

¹⁰ *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part One From Adam to Noah* by Umberto Cassuto; p. 205.

¹¹ Genesis 4:4b-5a

¹² *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel*; p. 28.

¹³ Genesis 4:5b

¹⁴ <http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/anger/what-anger>

¹⁵ Genesis 4:6

¹⁶ Genesis 4:3

¹⁷ Genesis 4:4

¹⁸ Genesis 4:6-7

¹⁹ <http://www.nnqs.org/sollamo.html>

²⁰ *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*; 211-212

²¹ Genesis 4:8a

²² Genesis 4:8b

²³ Genesis 4:9a

²⁴ Genesis 4:9b

²⁵ Genesis 4:10

²⁶ Genesis 4:12

²⁷ Genesis 4:16-17

²⁸ Genesis 4:17-22

²⁹ Genesis 4:23-24

March Memorials

In Loving Memory

**DOVA
IDA
GREGORY**

March 14, 1907
March 7, 1997

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**MINNIE
KRAUTH**

March 22, 1998

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us
to seek those qualities of mind
and heart which we shared as
we walked life's journey
together.*

*May we help to bring closer to
fulfillment their highest ideals
and noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our
loyalty to those things which we
valued -- kindness, faith,
love and peace.*

*As long as we live, they too will
live; for they are now part of
us.*

*It is an honor to speak their
names and remember their lives
again.*

In Loving Memory

**ROBERT
DEAN**

March 22, 1996

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**JOHN W.
"JACK"
NELSON**

October 25, 1932
March 21, 2008

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

(Inspired from prayers found in
Yitzhor Reflections - The New
Mahzor - The Prayer Book Press)

Remembering those who came before us is a very important part of the Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is our privilege to honor them by the BHC Memorial Garden and Memorials which are printed in this newsletter. The Memorial Garden is on the website at <http://www.biblicalheritage.org>. Please visit the next time you are on the Internet and stop back by often. If you would like to add your loved one to this section, send the information to us. There is no charge, but donations are accepted. Remember those who have meant so much to you with a BHC Memorial.

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