

Genesis: Genesis 4-5: Cain and Abel

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Abstract

This lecture examines the biblical narrative of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 and 5, focusing on the first death as an act of fratricide. It contrasts the sacrificial theories of B.B. Warfield, who emphasized the offerer's faith-based attitude (piacular vs. homage theory), and John Murray, who stressed the physical conformity of the offering itself. The analysis also explores the linguistic interpretations of Genesis 4:7 regarding sin crouching at the door, the nature of Cain's curse, and the early developments of antediluvian technology. Finally, it addresses the historical questions of where Cain found his wife and why formal capital punishment was not instituted by God until after the flood in Genesis 9.

Outline

I. The Death of Abel and the First Murders

- A. Character of the first death: Not natural, but murder and fratricide
- B. Motivation: Hatred occasioned by God's acceptance of Abel's offering and rejection of Cain's

II. Offerings of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-7)

- A. Textual description of offerings and God's response
- B. Genesis 4:7 and the role of internal attitude ("If you do well, shall you not be accepted?")
- C. New Testament Commentary (Hebrews 11:4): Offering made "by faith"
- D. Speculation on the origin/institution of sacrifice (Gen 3:21 coats of skin)

III. Theological Interpretations of the Offerings

- A. B.B. Warfield's View (Piacular vs. Gift/Homage Theory)
 - 1. Gift/Homage theory: Simple expression of homage and creaturely deference (Cain's mind)
 - 2. Piacular theory: Consciousness of sin, contrition, cry for pardon, and expiation (Abel's heart)

3. Focus on the offerer's attitude and faith as the sole distinguishing factor

B. John Murray's View (Type of Offering and Attitude)

1. Dual emphasis: Both attitude and type of offering are significant
2. Belief that God previously revealed specific requirements for worship
3. Interpretation of Hebrews 11:4 ("more excellent sacrifice") as referencing the physical conformity of the offering

IV. Linguistic Analysis of Genesis 4:7 ("Sin Lies at the Door")

- A. The standard view: "Sin" as a crouching animal ready to spring and control
- B. The alternative view (Atkinson): "Sin" interpreted as a "sin offering"
 1. God provides a propitiation (bleeding lamb / Lamb of God)
 2. Explanation of "his desire" as Abel's desire toward Cain (firstborn right)
 3. Vannoy's Critique: Atkinson's view is structurally awkward; the crouching sin interpretation is superior

V. God's Confrontation and the First Curse on a Human (Genesis 4:9-12)

- A. God's inquiry ("Where is Abel your brother?") met with Cain's outright denial ("Am I my brother's keeper?")
- B. The Curse on Cain
 1. Cursed from the earth (intensification of the general curse on agricultural work)
 2. The ground will yield no harvest, making him a wandering scavenger

VI. Antediluvian Technology and Early Civilization (Genesis 4:16-17)

- A. Cain's departure to the land of Nod
- B. Marriage and building of the first city (Enoch)

VII. Historical and Anthropological Questions

- A. Origin of Cain's Wife
 1. Natural assumption of other unnamed children of Adam and Eve
 2. Multi-generational expansion during the ~100 year span before Seth's birth
- B. Capital Punishment and Divine Protection
 1. Judicial capital punishment instituted later in Genesis 9 (blood revenge)
 2. Divine preservation of Cain: God's sevenfold vengeance warning and protective sign to prevent blood revenge