HEKHAL · READER'S EDITION



בראשית ד

Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:1–16 · Kayin ve-Hevel

Hekhal Targum Project (machine-assisted draft; pending scholarly review)

PROVISIONAL EDITION · MACHINE-ASSISTED · NOT YET REVIEWED BY A CREDENTIALED EDITOR

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About this edition

King James Version of 1611, public domain. The Hebrew text follows the Masoretic textus receptus. The narrative of Cain and Abel is among the densest in the primeval history; the Hebrew column is provided so the reader can track the wordplay on hevel (breath/vapor), the verb teshukah (desire), and the figure of the crouching beast at the door.

TRADITION	christian-mysticism
LANGUAGE	Hebrew
PERIOD	compiled c. 6th c. BCE; final form Persian period
ATTRIBUTION	Composite (P/J/E source critical analysis); received as Mosaic in both Jewish and Christian canons
TRANSLATION	Hekhal Targum Project (machine-assisted draft; pending scholarly review)
LICENCE	Public domain
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> What this is: a machine-assisted, provisional translation. Every rendering choice and every unresolved reading is recorded in the apparatus beside the text. If you read the original and something looks wrong, write to community@hekhal.org; corrections are credited.

The first murder follows the first encounter. Two brothers bring offerings; one is accepted and one is not. The text gives no reason for the difference, and the refusal of the reason is the point at which the story turns. Before Cain raises his hand, God speaks to him. The speech is the divine address held out in the same register Jacob will receive at the Jabbok and Job will receive from the storm. Cain receives it and refuses it.

The patristic tradition reads Cain as the type of the unredeemed will. Augustine's *City of God* XV opens the narrative of the two cities at this scene: Cain is the founder of the earthly city, Abel the figure of the pilgrim church. Ambrose's *De Cain et Abel*, two books composed around 375 CE, develops the psychological reading: Cain is the soul that has been spoken to and has refused. The medieval Glossa Ordinaria consolidates these readings. The fourteenth-century English *Cloud of Unknowing* takes the figure of the crouching sin at the door as one of its standing emblems for the work the contemplative must refuse.

Hekhal hosts this passage as the dark inverse of Jacob at Peniel. The throughline thesis line of the Christian Corpus, that God will sometimes come to you in the dark and the question is whether you will hold on, cuts both directions. Jacob holds on. Cain does not. The same divine address is extended; the response is refused; and the refusal becomes the founding act of the cycle of violence the rest of the primeval history will trace. The bilingual text preserves the Hebrew so that the reader can track the standing terms: *teshukah* (desire), *rovetz* (crouching), and the bitter pun on Abel's name, *hevel*, breath or vapor, the same word that opens Ecclesiastes.

CROSS-REFERENCES

- Jacob at Peniel, the throughline pole. The encounter held; here, the encounter refused.
- Typos (*τύπος*), Cain as patristic type of the unredeemed will, Abel as type of the suffering just.
- Quadriga, the four senses, applied here in lighter touch.
- Apophasis (*ἀπόφασις*), the unspoken reason for the rejection, read as deliberate gap rather than absence.

Cain and Abel

GENESIS 4:1–16 · HEBREW · HEBREW BIBLE · RECEIVED TEXT

CANONICAL

GENESIS 4:1–7 · THE OFFERINGS AND THE WARNING

1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

בראשית ד · א-ז

וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ

וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי

אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה׃

וַתֹּסֶף לָלֶדֶת אֶת־אָחִיו אֶת־הָבֶל

וַיְהִי־הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד

אֲדָמָה׃

3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.

4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?

7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי
אֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה׃

וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא גַם־הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת
צֹאנוֹ וּמֵחֶלְבֵהֶן וַיִּשַׁע יְהוָה אֶל־
בֶּל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ׃

וְאֶל־קַיִן וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה
חַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו׃

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־קַיִן לָמָּה חָרָה
ךְ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָּנֶיךָ׃

הֲלוֹא אִם־תֵּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא
יטִיב לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ וְאֵלֶיךָ
שׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל־בּוֹ׃

1

2

GENESIS 4:8-12 · THE KILLING

בראשית ד · ח-יב

AND THE CURSE

8 And 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 slew him.

9 And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי
הִיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל
אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ׃

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־קַיִן אֵי הֶבֶל
אָחִיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר
אָחִי אָנֹכִי׃

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי
אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן־הָאֲדָמָה׃

וְעַתָּה אָרוּר אָתָּה מִן־הָאֲדָמָה
אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת־פִּיהָ לָקַחַת אֶת־
דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ מִיָּדֶךָ׃

כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לֹא־תֹסֵף
תֵּת־כֹּחָהּ לָךְ נָע וָנָד תִּהְיֶה בָּאָרֶץ׃

3

GENESIS 4:13-16 · THE MARK AND THE WANDERING

13 And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

14 Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

15 And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

16 And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

בראשית ד · יג-טז

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־יְהוָה גָּדוֹל עֲוֹנִי
מִנְּשׂוֹא׃

הֵן גֵּרַשְׁתָּ אֹתִי הַיּוֹם מֵעַל פְּנֵי
הָאֲדָמָה וּמִפָּנֶיךָ אֶסָּתֵר וְהָיִיתִי נָע
וָנָד בָּאָרֶץ וְהָיָה כָּל־מֹצְאִי יַהַרְגֵנִי׃

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יְהוָה לָכֵן כָּל־הֹרֵג
קַיִן שִׁבְעָתַיִם יֻקָּם וַיָּשֶׂם יְהוָה
לְקַיִן אוֹת לְבִלְתִּי הַכּוֹת־אֹתוֹ כָּל־
מֹצְאוֹ׃

וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּשֶׁב
בְּאֶרֶץ־נוֹד קִדְמַת־עֵדֶן׃

6

5

A reading

The same divine address is extended; the response is refused. The throughline thesis line cuts both directions, and Cain is its dark inverse.

The narrative is constructed with extraordinary economy. Sixteen verses, two brothers, two offerings, one rejection, one warning, one murder, one judgment, one mark, one exile. Within the sixteen verses Genesis lays out, at compressed scale, the architecture the rest of the primeval history will unfold: the human capacity to be addressed by God and to

refuse the address, and the consequences the refusal sets running. The Christian patristic tradition reads this scene as the founding counterexample to the figure Jacob will later inhabit at the Jabbok. The literal register first.

Two brothers bring offerings. The text says nothing about why one is accepted and the other is not. The narrator's silence on this point is conspicuous and deliberate. The Hebrew uses two different verbs for the offering: Abel brings *mibekhorot tzono u-me-chelvehen*, the firstlings of his flock and their fat, language drawn from the later sacrificial vocabulary; Cain brings *mi-peri ha-adamah*, the fruit of the ground, in unspecified portion. The rabbinic tradition reads the difference as one of quality: Abel brought the best, Cain brought what was at hand. The text does not say so. It withholds the reason, and the withholding is the literal sense's first move toward the allegorical. **The withheld reason** mirrors the withheld name at the Jabbok and the unanswered *why* in Job. In each case the scene constructs a register in which the asked-for explanation is not given, and what is given instead is the direct address.

Cain's countenance falls. The Hebrew, *vayipelu panav*, "and his face fell," is the same idiom Jacob will use when he meets

Esau at the close of his own encounter (33:10) and the same idiom that recurs in the Joseph cycle. The face is where the inner state shows. Then the divine address comes. *Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?* The voice asks Cain a pair of questions of exactly the kind the storm will later ask Job. They are not requests for information. They are interrogatives that hold the addressee in place and invite him to recognize what he already knows. **The address is the encounter.** Cain has been spoken to in the same register Jacob will be spoken to. The encounter is offered.

Then comes the warning, in two of the most dense verses in Genesis. *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.* The Hebrew is harder than the English. *La-petach chatat rovetz*, "at the door, sin is crouching." The participle *rovetz* (רֹבֵץ) is the same verb used elsewhere of an animal lying in wait, a beast couched at the threshold. Sin is figured here not as an abstraction but as a creature with intent. Then: *ve-elekha teshukato ve-attah timshal-bo*. "And toward thee is its desire, and thou shalt rule over it." *Teshukah* (תְּשׁוּקָה) is the same rare noun the previous chapter used of Eve toward Adam (3:16): a fierce inclination,

a pull. The verbs of the warning are constructed against the noun: the desire is coming for Cain, and Cain is told he is to master it. *Timshal* (תִּמְשָׁל) is the language of dominion.

Augustine reads this passage in *City of God* XV.7 as the diagnostic moment of the unredeemed will. Cain is told, before the murder, that his condition is not fixed. The address holds two registers at once: the question that asks Cain to see his own state, and the warning that names what is at the door. The Augustinian reading is unsentimental. Cain has the encounter Jacob has; the resources of the encounter are available to him; the same divine speech is extended into his ear that will later be extended into Jacob's grip. What Cain refuses is the holding-on. The next verse opens with the murder, and the murder is registered in the text as a refusal to remain in the address that has just been offered.

Ambrose, in the two books of *De Cain et Abel*, reads the passage psychologically. For Ambrose, Cain is the soul that has converted the divine question into the human grievance. The voice asked him *why is thy countenance fallen?* and Cain interpreted the asking as accusation rather than invitation. The misreading of the address is what permits the violence. Ambrose's reading gives the figure its tropological force: **the**

soul receives the divine address in the register in which it is prepared to receive it, and the preparation can be refused. Cain is not unable to hear; he is unwilling. The crouching beast at the door is, in Ambrose's reading, the soul's own posture toward the address, not an external tempter.

Then the murder. The Hebrew of verse 8 is famously truncated; the Masoretic text has *vayomer Kayin el Hevel achiv*, "and Cain said unto Abel his brother," and what Cain said is not given. The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint supply "let us go out to the field," but the Masoretic gap is the older reading. The text refuses to record what was said. **The unspoken word** inside the field is the dark counter to the unspoken name at the Jabbok. Where the wrestler refused to give his name and the refusal was the gift, here the speech that should have prepared the encounter is withheld and the withholding is the cover under which the murder happens.

The post-murder dialogue completes the figure. *Where is Abel thy brother?* The question is the same form as the question to Adam in the previous chapter, *where art thou?* (3:9). The divine address is the same; the human response, in Cain's case, is a lie compounded by the refusal of relation:

Am I my brother's keeper? The Hebrew, *ha-shomer achi anokhi*, plays bitterly on the word *shomer*, keeper, the same root the priestly literature uses for the keeping of the covenant and that the gospel of John will later use of the good shepherd. Cain refuses the shepherd's word for himself in the moment he has destroyed the shepherd, his brother who kept the flock.

Abel's name carries the closing irony. *Hevel* (הֶבֶל), the Hebrew for breath, vapor, mist, is the same word Ecclesiastes will open with: *hevel havalim*, vanity of vanities. Abel's name names what he is in the narrative: a breath, a brief presence, a vapor swept aside. The patristic tradition reads Abel as the type of the suffering just one, the first of the line that will run through the prophets to Christ. Hebrews 11:4 makes the typological reading explicit: Abel by faith offered a more excellent sacrifice, and being dead yet speaks. The blood crying from the ground in Genesis 4:10 is read in Hebrews 12:24 against the blood of Christ, which speaks better things than that of Abel. The figure runs.

The judgment that follows is severe and incomplete at once. Cain is cursed from the ground that has drunk his brother's blood; he becomes a fugitive and a vagabond, *na va-nad*; he

goes out from the presence of God to the land of Nod, east of Eden, and the name Nod is itself the substantive of the verb *nad*, wandering. Cain is exiled into his own state. Yet the mark is given. The text does not specify the mark; the patristic tradition reads it as the figure of mercy persisting inside the judgment. Cain is the type of the refused encounter, but he is not abandoned by the one whose address he refused. **Anagogically**, the mark is the trace inside the dark inverse of the same divine constancy that gives Jacob the new name and gives Job the presence. The encounter is not retracted because the response was wrong. What is set is the consequence; what is not retracted is the address.

The throughline cuts. The same God who comes to Jacob in the dark and to Job in the storm comes to Cain in the field. The figure of the divine address that refuses to be domesticated is constant. What varies is the human posture. Jacob holds on. Job holds out. Cain refuses. The Christian Corpus reads the three scenes together, and the figure of Cain sits in the corpus not as a marginal case but as the necessary dark pole, the negative space against which the holding-on of the others is read. The encounter offered is the

encounter that can be refused. That the refusal is possible is what makes the holding-on, when it happens, the thing it is.

The Hebrew of Genesis 4 turns on a small set of charged terms. *Hevel* (הֶבֶל), Abel's name, is the noun for breath, vapor, mist, and is the keyword of Ecclesiastes; the name itself encodes the brevity of the figure. *Teshukah* (תְּשׁוּקָה), the rare noun for fierce desire or inclination, occurs in the Hebrew Bible only three times (Gen 3:16, 4:7, Song of Songs 7:11); its appearance in the warning to Cain links his struggle with Eve's posture toward Adam in the previous chapter and to the erotic pull of the Song. *Rovetz* (רֹבֵץ), the participle for crouching, is the verb used of cattle lying down (Gen 49:14) and of the beast couched at threshold; the figure makes sin a creature with intent. *Shomer* (שׁוֹמֵר), keeper, is the priestly term for the one who keeps the covenant; Cain's refusal of the term in 4:9 is the linguistic shape of his refusal of relation. *Na va-nad* (נָע וָנָד), fugitive and vagabond, is alliterative and self-rhyming; the land of Nod (נוֹד) is the substantive of the verb. Cain's exile takes its name from his own condition.

Colophon

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