

The Bible in Context Ep 16: Cain and Abel Gen 4:1-17

Transcription provided by AI Transcriptions by Riverside. This transcript is auto-generated and may deviate slightly from the audio.

00:00

Welcome back to the Bible in Context. Hey Nate. How you doing Caleb? Doing good. Doing well. See if we can get through this. I got a little bit of a cold. I'm sure you all can hear it, but I think we'll get through this all the same. So last time it was just me and I'm glad to have Nate back with us. We went through the end of chapter three. We went through the pronouncements on the man and the woman and the curse on the serpent.

00:30

we're going to pick up with their kids with Cain and Abel. Genesis chapter 4. Yeah. So this one actually starts out with Cain being born and Eve says, I have gotten a man with the help of Yahweh.

00:45

Now that's going to be a lot of the standard translation. I just kind of want to point out here that that word help is not actually in the Hebrew. It's literally just I have gotten a man with Yahweh. And so you could take this one of two ways and I think either way makes sense. I don't know which one it is. It's just I think it's worth pointing out. So it's literally I have gotten a man with Yahweh. That either means that she has gotten a man with the help of Yahweh as our translations

01:15

a man alongside Yahweh. I am his rival in the sense he's created a man, I've created a man. So this could be a statement of pride which would just make this whole story ironic that Cain is such a failure of the seed of the woman. He's not the promised seed of the woman, clearly. So it could be that she's boasting in a sense. Right. Gotcha. Yeah. And it may very well be. I think it makes sense to say that it's a statement of

01:45

See, Adam makes some statements of faith. There's these priestly and recreation aspects of the story. So this could just be another statement of faith. I'm not sure which one is definitive, but it's one I'll put out. I like to think of the best of people. So yeah. Maybe she, yeah. I don't know. She may have been leaning on the Lord in that moment. Yeah. That's an interesting point that I had never thought about it that way. Yeah. Well, so these two.

02:12

Kids are born and then they go on to bring sacrifices through time.

02:17

And this really just gets to be a weird story that is often it's hard to make sense of. It seems like Abel brings a sacrifice, Cain brings one too. They've not been given any instruction that we know of and so maybe God just kind of arbitrarily chooses the one that he likes better and bestows his favor on one and says, I don't like you to Cain. I've heard it talked about like that before. I don't think that's quite right. I think there's something really – there's actually something really significant in this

02:47

story, but you have to know the rest of the Torah to understand it, to really think like an Israelite. And another important thing that you have to do is look at the translation of Genesis 4-7. And I think that this verse becomes a linchpin in this story, and so we're going to look pretty close at it. So Genesis 4-7 in the ESV says, if you do well...

03:11

will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." Now, there's actually several words in this verse that have been confused or can be confusing. And so we need to look at a few different words. I'm going to try to make this as audio-friendly as possible. So the first word here is we see sin crouching at the door. That word sin.

03:38

is the same Hebrew word for sin offering. The consonants of those words are the same. And so whenever you see the word sin in the Old Testament, you let the context tell you whether or not it's talking about sin or a sin offering. So it's very possible that here this word sin is actually there is a sin offering at the door instead of sin crouching at the door.

04:02

which means the next word we have to look at is that word crouching. The word crouching in Hebrew is rovates. And I think it occurs 40 or 50 times in Hebrew. I don't remember the exact number, but I've gone through all of those instances. And there is nowhere that it appears as a predatory animal prowling around. It is always peaceful lying down. He makes me lie down by still streams of water, things like that. It's never a term of hostility as it is here.

04:32

So what we might have instead of this animalistic anthropomorphism of sin prowling at Cain's door, whether that's his tent or something else, what we might have is a sin offering lying down at a door. Now what's this door? The word door here can be translated as door or it can also be entrance or opening.

05:00

Whenever you bring a sin offering in Israelite culture in the Bible, you bring it to the opening or the entrance of the tabernacle or the temple. Now where are they? They are outside of Eden. They have been exiled immediately east of the garden. And then there's been cherubim put in front of the way into the garden.

05:21

And remember we talked about how the garden mimics the temple and the tabernacle in many ways. And so here we could have again a sin offering lying at the opening of this temple.

Yahweh is inviting Cain to come take a sin offering that is waiting for him ready to be used at the door of the temple, at the entrance to Eden, or to the garden. So okay, let me kind of summarize what I think you're saying here then.

05:51

is there's a sin offering that Yahweh is saying that I will provide at the doorway of the temple garden that will be lying there, not crouching like a lion ready to attack, but lying there waiting for you submissively, but you must rule over it. Is that what you're getting at? That's, yeah. Yeah, there's one more step we've got to take, but that's exactly it. Oh, yeah, yeah, the desire part. Yeah. So that part.

06:20

If it were a peaceful animal, why is its desire towards Cain? Well, we've actually already talked about this in the previous podcast. We talked about the word tshuka. This same phrase appears in the pronouncement on the woman. Your tshuka will be for your husband and he will rule over you. Now this phrase here mirrors that.

06:41

We already talked about how the word teshukah, based on the work of A. A. McIntosh in his article, The Meaning of Hebrew Teshukah, he shows using the occurrences in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls and some ancient translations, that this word means something more like one's giving overness or submission. And that's my translation that comes out of his work.

07:08

So ultimately we have Yahweh providing Cain with a sin offering that will cleanse him and it is lying at the entrance to the temple garden. Its submission is to Cain, but Cain must go and take it. He has to use it. So this is really a...

07:27

a verse of grace, Yahweh's grace towards this brother who is offered something that is insufficient and he wants him to come and cleanse himself and make himself prepared for sacred space, prepared for communion with Yahweh. Yeah, and I think that makes sense where it says, God's talking to Canaan, so why are you angry? Why does your face fall on? I mean, if you do well, will you not be accepted? And I think that implies that God wants him to...

07:56

be able to do this right and wants Cain to come back with a proper offering. Right. And I've seen where people don't want to let the old translation go because that'll preach. Sin is crouching at the door. It's going to get to you, you know, which it kind of piggybacks a little bit on, is it Peter where he says the devil's like a lion prowling around? Yeah.

08:21

Which I do want to point out too that that image is about the devil prowling around like a lion. Sin portrayed as an anthropomorphized never occurs again in Scripture. And Scripture really likes to reuse its previous motifs and themes. So again, that's just another thing that we should point out that we don't see...

08:41

Sin as a predatory animal, again, in Scripture, if there's an alternate translation here that makes more sense, it's probably the case that it's correct. Yeah, I'm trying to think if there's other places in Scripture where we see Satan described or the adversary described as like a crouching lion. I mean, he's described as a dragon. I guess there's other predatory animals or creatures. Yeah, in that sense, I mean, he is the dragon. Yeah, the snake, dragon.

09:11

Yeah, and so we never see like sin itself as the serpent or something like that. Yeah Yeah, that's a point. So in this narrative first Cain brings vegetables I'm not sure about this But I think this could be playing off of a theme of vegetation being used where blood is needed We saw in the last section where Adam and Eve use fig leaves to cover themselves But Yahweh uses animal skins now

09:41

Cain brings vegetables and he needs to use a sin offering, a living offering. I'm not sure, I don't know where that picks up again in scripture, but it could be a possible interpretation of why does he bring vegetables the first time. But in either case,

09:58

When we see the word sin offering, we need to remember that this is being written and read by Israelites. They're going to understand this immediately and this was just part of their culture. They weren't going to ask, well this was back before the Levitical code was written, so why is he offering a sin offering? That shouldn't mean anything. They're going to immediately recognize this language.

10:19

Because sacrifices, even though they may not have been called sin offerings, they happened before the code was given. And in this story, they're going to immediately pick up on what this sin offering is and what it means. I think that interpretation makes sense, especially in light of the way that we're looking at verse 7. If that is truly a sin offering that...

10:40

God is telling him, would be waiting at the door. It makes sense that he should have brought that in the first place, which would be an animal rather than vegetation. So his vegetables were no good. Right. Yeah, so he brings vegetables. Abel, on the other hand, he brings a fitting sin

offering, a fitting sacrifice. And so Yahweh, we're going to see, he chooses him to be the one who bears the promise of the seed of the woman, carries that forward.

11:10

That's not said explicitly, but we see at the end of chapter 4 that Seth replaces Abel and he is called a seed of the woman. He is said, he is my seed.

11:21

So we see that Abel, he is this expected seed of the woman and he is given favor by Yahweh. He is basically chosen to be the firstborn of the family. And the firstborn doesn't mean the eldest brother. He's obviously the younger brother. But the firstborn is in this culture the one who leads the family. So Abel is chosen to be the firstborn, to lead the family, to carry the promise of the seed of the woman, the snake crusher, the redeemer. In Cain, he doesn't do well.

11:51

He is actually given the opportunity to to purify himself and then he will be exalted

11:59

But instead, he decides, I'm going to go kill my brother and take the position of firstborn. So he fails in that. And this is going to be a theme played out throughout Genesis over and over and over. Where the younger brother is chosen, he carries the promises and the blessings of the garden. And then the older brother gets jealous of the firstborn position, and then he does something against that brother in order to obtain it. Now Cain in this case, we see that he gets exiled.

12:29

bears his punishment. In verse 13 he says, my punishment is greater than I can bear. And then he is exiled, east, given a sign of protection, and he becomes fruitful and multiplies into a city that we'll see in a couple chapters, becomes wicked. Now, I'm bringing out all these steps because

12:58

that links to the two goats of the Day of Atonement. And it's also linked to the brothers that are found throughout Genesis. I just really want to highlight that this climaxes at the Day of Atonement. So how do these brothers link to the two goats of the Day of Atonement?

13:14

Well, the two goats of the datatoment, they are chosen by Yahweh, by Lot. Whenever you cast lots, you know, basically you're rolling dice. But that decision, the decision that comes from those lots is understood as Yahweh's decision. This isn't just, you know, a random throwing dice so that you can select the goats by chance. It's actually surrendering the decision to Yahweh.

13:37

Now one goat that is chosen is slaughtered, taken into the tent, and his blood is sprinkled on the tabernacle and inside the tabernacle in order to cleanse the tabernacle so that Yahweh can dwell there. The blood purifies. Man, I feel like I'm going to do a whole thing on Leviticus when we're talking about this, but for now, in Leviticus we're told that the life is in the blood. We'll see that again in Genesis 9 actually, and that is given so that the Israelites can make atonement for them.

14:07

I won't go into how all that works that it's probably very foreign and confusing but essentially blood is Spiritual soap and the ancient Near East it cleanses it purifies from the impurities of death the The world that we live in and also from sin both of those things make unclean sin and just elements of death sickness mold or what have you so

14:35

This one goat, again, is selected, goes into the tent, his blood purifies the tent, he is the sin offering that purifies the tabernacle, and then the other is selected to have the sins of Israel put on that goat and he is sent out into the wilderness bearing the sins of Israel. So we can see some similarities here with Cain and that other goat. That's the goat for Azazel.

15:03

that is exiled out into the wilderness with the sins of the people. Cain here, after he sins, he bears his punishment. He doesn't bear his sin, but he bears his punishment, and then he is exiled into the wilderness. Now, Abel, on the other hand, how is he associated with the goat for Yahweh, the one that is a sin offering? Well, and this is where we come back to the word the fat of his flock.

15:30

There's a literary technique that, you don't have to remember this word, but a literary technique called metathesis that the ..

15:38

biblical authors will use where it's basically inverting words or swapping letters inside of a word. Nat. To make a play on words. John. Yeah, to make a play on words. Trying to think of one. It'd be like if Nate went to go get a tan. That's a way to use metathesis. You got the N-A-T in Nate and the T-A-N in tan. That's kind of how it works. And it's going to be seen throughout the Hebrew Bible. There's a really good book called Metathesis in the Hebrew Bible by a guy named Isaac Kalimi.

16:08

So it's like Adam and ground? Yes. One of those in the example? That's not a metathesis but it's, that is a wordplay where it's Adam and Adamah. There's no switching of letters there. Oh, okay. So this one here actually...

16:21

Abel is associated with the sacrifice because Abel's name in Hebrew is Hevel. And the fat of the offering, which is in very close proximity on the page that he was writing, is Helev. So you've got Hevel chose the Helev of his flock for the offering. Interesting.

16:43

And now, I'll admit here, this does seem a little loose at the beginning of Genesis. Like okay, you're saying just because of these small connections that these are now the goats of the Day of Atonement. Well as we build through the Book of Genesis, this pattern gets played over and over and over to the point that it's kind of hard to miss. And then when you get to the Day of Atonement, you see it a little more clearly. So here we have the, we have Cain.

17:11

who is the goat for Azazel, the one who bears the sin and is banished out into the wilderness and then Abel who is chosen, he is brought closer into Yahweh and associated with a sin offering.

17:24

And throughout Genesis we're going to see several steps that highlight this pattern. We're going to see a younger brother that is elected as firstborn and he is bearer of the seed of the woman promise and the Edenic blessings, the blessings from the garden. Then there is the older brother who acts with jealousy against the elect. The older brother is given some form of protection from Yahweh. The older brother is then exiled into the wilderness and then he is multiplied into a nation.

17:54

people, then the elect brother is brought closer to Yahweh's dwelling or exalted in some way and the elect brother is sometimes associated with a offering, like here.

18:08

So I think there was a lot in there. Big picture summary real quick. Is Abel, he is chosen, he is accepted.

18:17

through his offering at the Garden Temple. He is associated with the sin offering through that wordplay. Then we have Cain who fails. He is given a chance, a grace to purify himself and still come to Yahweh, but he has to take the sin offering. And he also has to submit to his brother who's now been chosen as firstborn. He doesn't want to do that. So he fails. He kills his brother. He is given a sign of protection. He's exiled into the wilderness. He becomes a great nation that we will later see. He becomes a wicked people.

18:47

Yeah, so this is one of the things that I've started to observe more and more in the Bible is that if, and you kind of said it before, it's like to understand certain parts of scripture you almost have to get through, like after you've read the whole first five books of the Bible, the Torah, the...

19:13

the stuff in Genesis starts to make a little bit more sense because it's almost what you see in Genesis is just giving you a hint, a foreshadowing of a pattern or something greater that's going on. Another example that I've seen of this just recently as I've been studying is just this idea of like an offering offered up to the Lord will...

19:43

cause God to respond with mercy towards everybody. And that's a, like when you come to the New Testament, Jesus and obviously you've got that same thing going on. And I know a lot of people struggle with wondering, okay, how does the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?

20:03

saved the whole world. Well, that's a theme that started way back in Genesis. And if you start in Genesis and you see that theme happen over and over and over and over, by the time you get to Jesus...

20:13

That's just normal. That's part of the way that God works. Yeah, and I mean we're going to get into this really quick because in the next genealogy that shows up, there's been some people who have tried to show how if you put all the names in order and then you translate them, it spells out the gospel very explicitly in those names. That's not true. They botched those translations pretty bad to try and squeeze it in there. Just make it fit, right.

20:43

the end of Genesis and then especially by the end of the Torah is you don't have Jesus died on the cross to save everyone from their sins. But what you do have is you have this person who is going to bear away the sins of Israel or the sins of his people. He's also going to be the sin offering. He's going to be the firstborn brother who is going to lead his people. You have this very defined shape of what this person should be like and then Jesus steps into it. Right, right, right.

21:13

And even that idea of you talk about the two goats or the two brothers and like with Cain and Abel, it's not the firstborn biologically that becomes the one who carries out the or brings back the blessings or carries on the offspring of the woman. And with Jesus, we see Paul seeing him as the second Adam, like the second. The firstborn of all creation. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

21:43

after John the Baptist. I mean he was in the New Testament. He wasn't the first major character in the New Testament. John the Baptist came first and then Jesus and John the Baptist had to convince people that he wasn't the Messiah. But that it was somebody that was coming that would be greater than him. It's like there's this pattern that starts all the way back in Genesis that the second is better than the first. Yeah.

22:08

Hmm, I haven't quite put it like that. I like that. Because it really is in Genesis. Throughout the story, it's always the younger brother that's chosen. Yeah, yeah. Not necessarily the second one, but it's the younger. It's not the firstborn that everybody in their context would have thought was the most important and the one that would receive the birthright and the blessing and carry on the promise of Genesis 3. But that's not the case. God flips everything upside down.

22:38

Trust me. Absolutely. So yeah, I mean, you start with Abel, which moves on to Seth, and then you get Shem, and then you go down to Abraham. You've got... Isaac. Isaac, and then you got Jacob, and then Joseph, and then you get to, like you said, David. Judah within that whole thing would be another example. He wasn't the first born. Yeah, and then Gideon was one. Anyway, yeah, Scripture is littered with these...

23:05

the exaltation of the lesser. You even have the lesser being used to save the greater. In the book of Daniel, you have Nebuchadnezzar who at the end of the book he says, you know, I know Yahweh is God of all gods. He confesses that Yahweh is king. And so, you know, it's not to exclude the greater. And even here, Cain was supposed to submit to his brother and come back.

23:30

So the plan is not just only the poor and everybody else is, you know, you're on your own, but it's I'm choosing the lesser. I'm exalting them. They're going to be the means of salvation and the ones who are honored. I want everybody to come. Right. Yeah, that's a good point. That's a good point. So we've covered a lot of ground in this episode. So before we sound off here, let's give a quick summary of everything that we covered since it is a lot.

24:00

if we look at the retranslation of Genesis 4-7 that a sin offering is lying at the door of the garden or the opening of the garden as a sin offering for Cain and it is submitted to him, then we see the Levitical context of this passage. And this becomes a story that's a little less confusing. We can feel the tension here where Cain is supposed to...

24:25

return to Yahweh and not go down the path that he does. Instead, he kills his brother after Abel's been chosen. Seth takes his place, carrying the promises of the garden, and they fit into this motif that runs throughout Genesis of what we're calling the two goats.

24:42

And I do want to say real quick that the Two Goats motif, the reason that I'm calling it that is because I want the link to the Day of Atonement to be in the name. I want that to be clear because this could very easily just be like the Brothers motif in Genesis. But I think it's helpful to

remember that this climaxes at the Day of Atonement. And maybe we'll talk about how that climaxes some of the time. But.

25:06

That's where we're at. Seth is now carrying these promises. Kane has been exiled out into the wilderness and we'll see his genealogy in the next section. Alright, sounds good. Looking forward to next time. And we'll walk through Seth's genealogy and then are we going to also get into Kane's genealogy at all?

25:32

Yeah, we're gonna look at both of them, which I'm sure everybody's really geared up and excited to go through. Genealogies. They're the best. Oh yeah. Actually, there's a lot of cool stuff in here. So, looking forward to it.