

06. Genesis 4:1-26 (Yahwist)

From communion to conflict, from duality to division.



1. Sibling Rivalry Fratricide (Genesis 4:1-16)

- In a world where there are so many differences, it is easy to forget that we are brothers and sisters, from the one stock, and with the one God to whom we are responsible. Differences can easily lead to rivalry and to conflict.
- In his creation narrative the Yahwist dealt with mankind's potential and limits. We find the same again here, with the limits in 4:1-16 and the potential in 4:17-26.

- Human beings, according to the Yahwist, are persons-in-community. They have to provide for themselves. Here he outlines their cultural achievements. Civilisation is a function of the divine blessing, but is presented as the achievement of humans.
- He is interested in reality as experienced, and so reflects here on another dimension of sin: violence exerted by some people against others.

- God is not defined within the limits of piety or cult, but is in everything, intimately concerned for what we do and in dialogue with us, inviting us to face up to our reality and act morally.
- The Yahwist is fascinated by the struggle between creation and destruction, between promise fulfilled and regret at failure.
- There is the apparent paradox that it is God's blessing that leads to human creativity and expansion, which it turn seems to issue in arrogance and sin and the rejection of the blessing.

I. The two brothers, their offering, and Yahweh (4:1-5)

Genesis 4:1-2

- Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bore Cain [*qayin*], and she said: ‘I have acquired [*qânah*] a man with YHWH’.
- ‘know’ = *yâda*‘ (knowing through experience)
 - 3:5,22 for ‘know good and evil’
 - 3:7 for ‘know that they were naked’.
- Then she bore his brother Abel [*hâbel*. הַבֵּל ‘passing breath’; see 2:7]. Abel was a shepherd of flocks, and Cain a tiller of the ground [*’adâmah*].



Genesis 4:3-5

- After some time Cain brought an offering to YHWH of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought from the first-born of his flocks their fat.
- YHWH looked to Abel and to his offering; but to Cain and to his offering he did not look. This made Cain angry and his face fell.

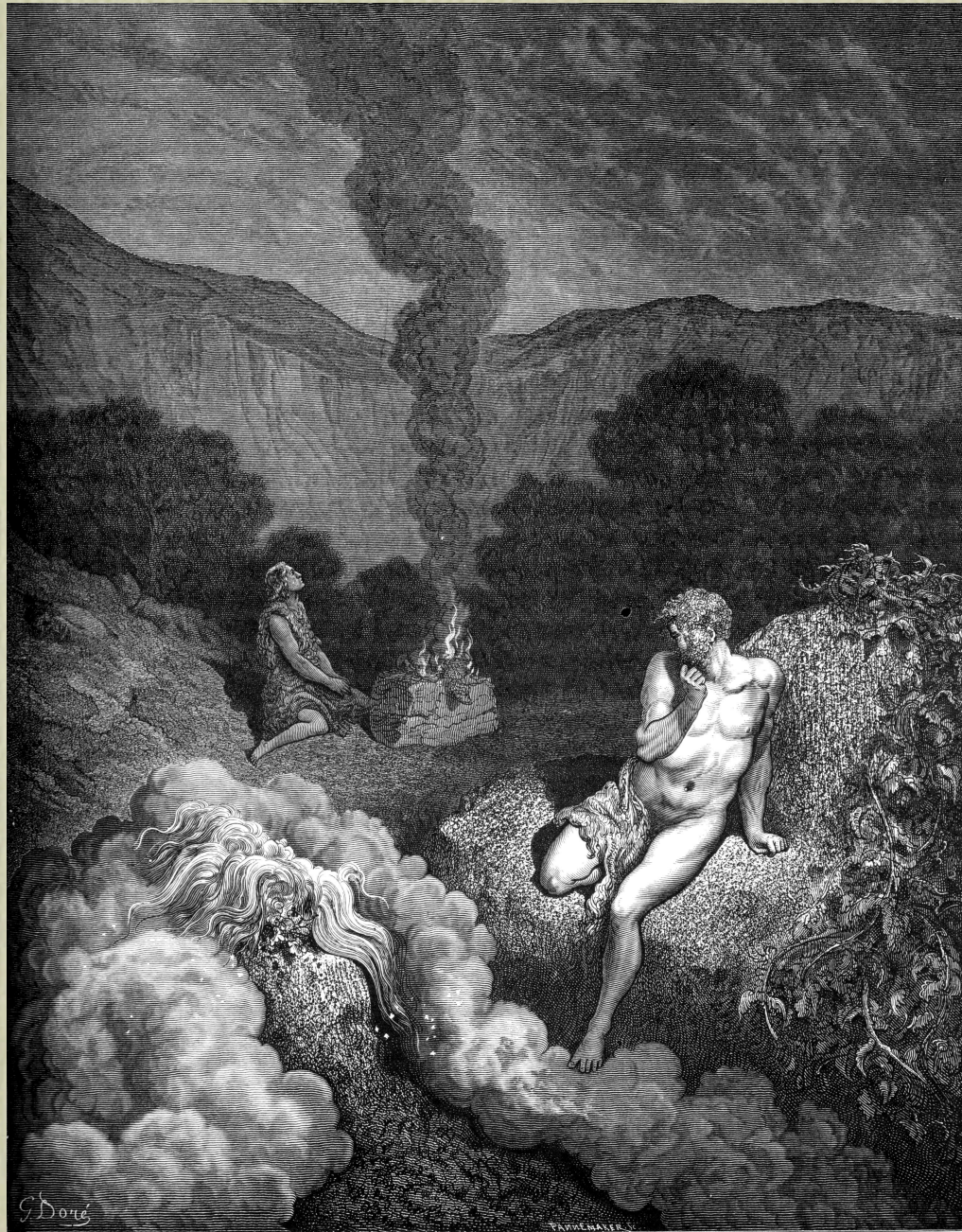
Cain: ownership, power (Baal). Offer some to God to acquire more power. Kill opposition.

‘The earth is YHWH’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it’ (Psalm 24:1).

Life is hard

Gratitude, Adoration

Resentment, envy (Shadow side)



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The importance of true worship

‘Samuel replied: Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king’ (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice, acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings’ (Hosea 6:6).

The importance of true worship

‘Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!’ (Amos 5:22-24).

‘He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does YHWH require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God’ (Micah 6:8).

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says
YHWH; Isaiah 1:11-14

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the suet of fattened beasts;

I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of
goats.

When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?

Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.

Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul
hates;

When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you;

even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes.

Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: right judgment, mercy and fidelity' (Matthew 23:23).

Repentance & Forgiveness (Isaiah 1:18-20)

‘Come now, let us argue it out, says YHWH:
though your sins are like scarlet, they could be like snow;
though they are red like crimson, they could become like wool.

Or

**‘If your sins are like scarlet, do you think they will be like snow?
If they are red like crimson, do you think they be like wool?’**

If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of YHWH has spoken.’

- 2. YHWH challenges Cain to choose (4:6-7)
- YHWH said to Cain: ‘Why are you angry and why has your face fallen? If you are doing right, surely you will be accepted. If you are not doing_right, then sin is lurking at the door. Its longing is for you, but you must master it [Compare 3:16].
- choosing between good and evil (2:9,17; 3:22)

Targum Onkelos of Genesis 4:4-8

‘Abel brought from the first-born of his flock ... and YHWH was pleased to accept Abel and this offering of his. But he was not pleased to accept Cain and his offering. So Cain was exceptionally angry and the expression on his face changed. Then YHWH said to Cain: Why are you angry, and why has the expression on your face changed?

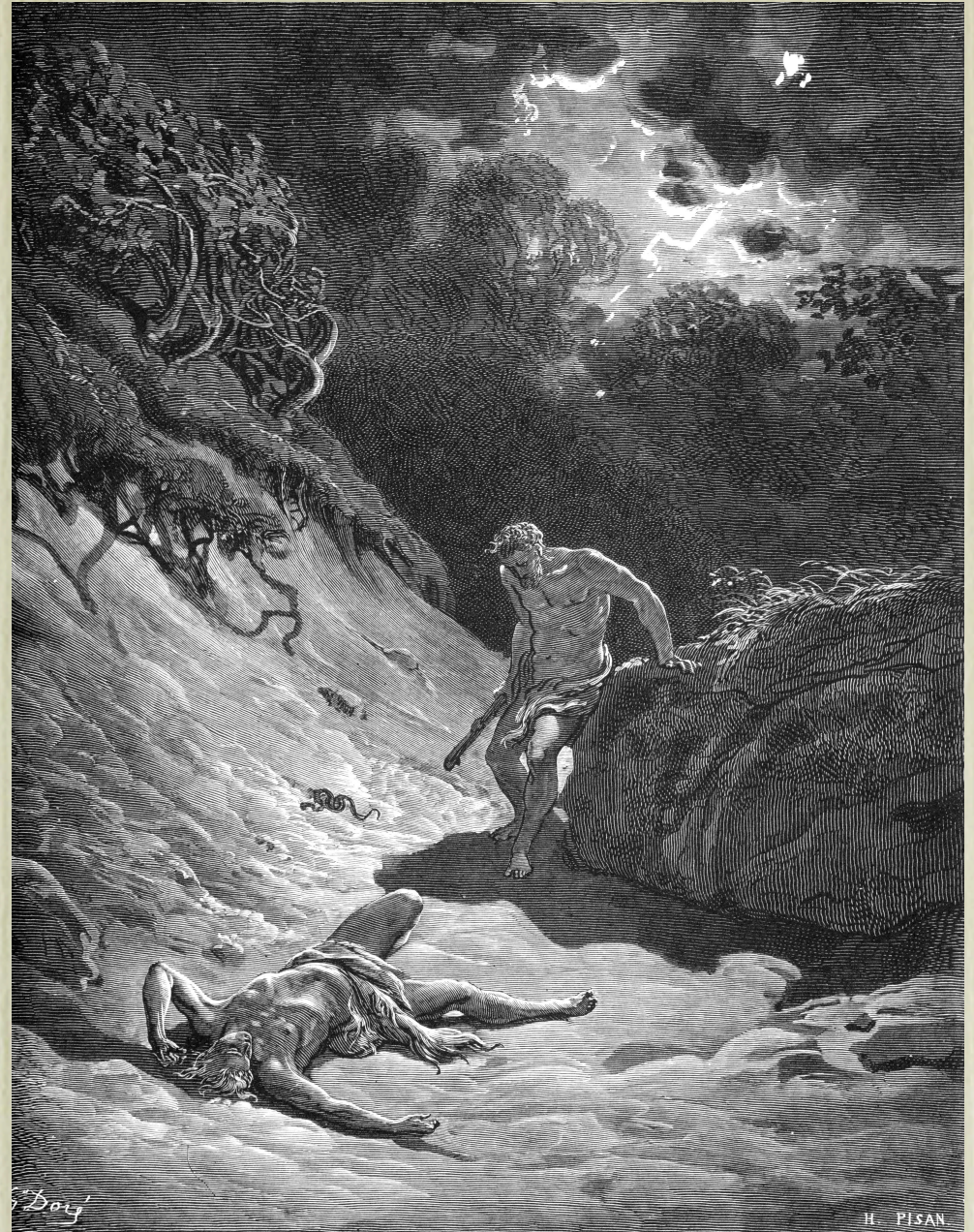
Surely, if you do your works well in this world you will be pardoned in the world that is coming, and if you do not do your works well in this world your sin will be retained.

But sin is lying at the door of the heart. However, I have placed in your hands power over the inclination to evil, and you must be mastering it, choosing between committing sin and being innocent.

And Cain said to his brother Abel ... I can see that the world was created in love and is being governed in love. Why then was your gift received with pleasure from you, while mine was not received with pleasure? Abel in reply said to Cain: Granted that the world was created in love and is governed in love, nevertheless by the fruits of good works it is governed, that is, according as the works from your hands are proper.

3. Cain and Abel: Cain's crime (4:8)

- Cain said to his brother Abel: “Let's go out to the field.” And when they were in the field Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.





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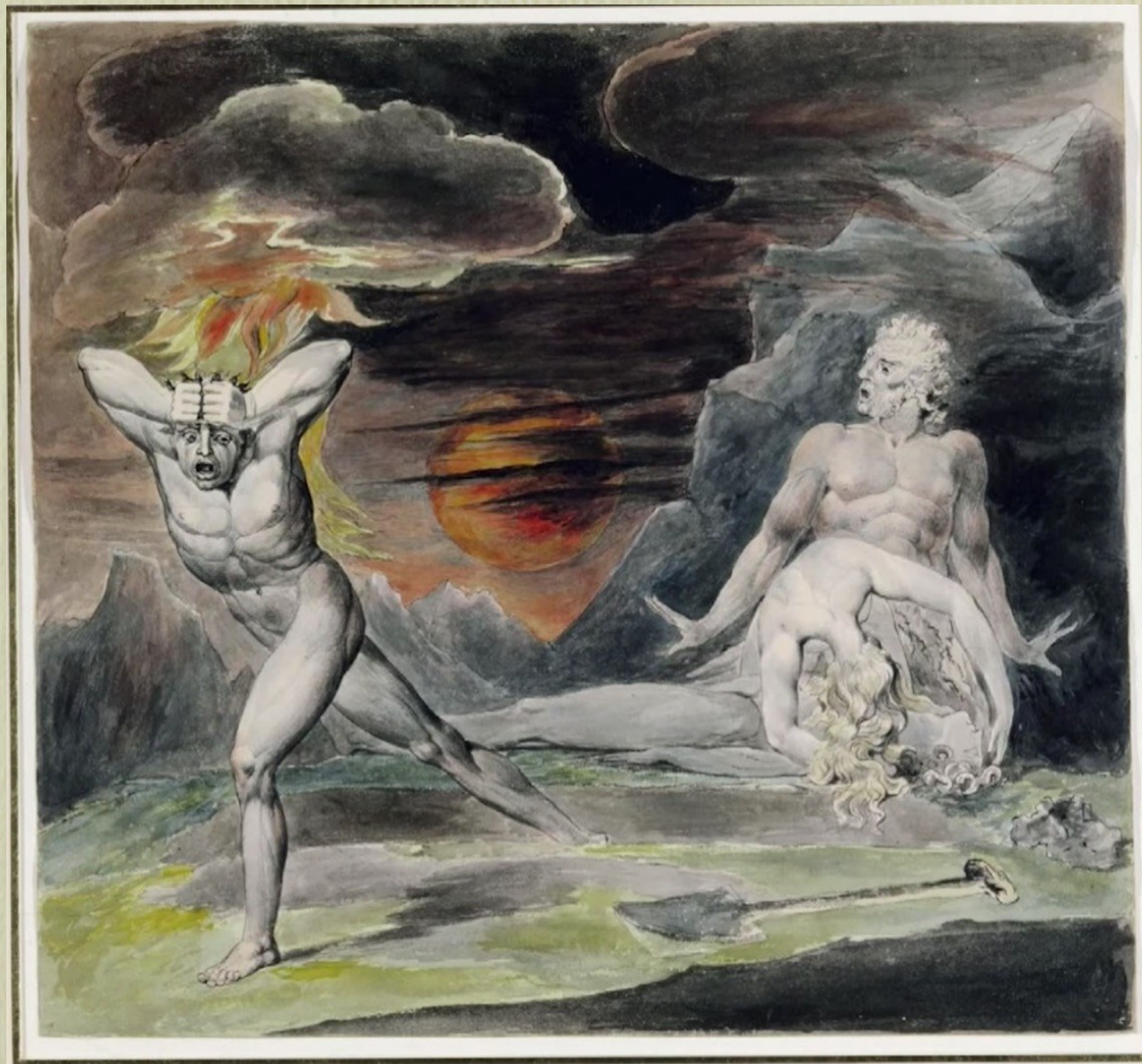


4. Exposure and trial (4:9-10)

- YHWH said to Cain: ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ And he said: ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper? And YHWH said: ‘What have you done? [= 3:13] Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground [*’adâmah*].
- ‘Where is your brother? [*’abîkâ*]
- 3:9 ‘Where are you’ [*’ayyekâ*]

5. Verdict (4:11-12)

- Now cursed are you from the ground [see 3:14 and 17] which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.
- When you till the ground, it will no longer yield up its strength to you.
- A wanderer and a fugitive shall you be on earth.



6. God responds with compassion (4:13-15).

- Cain said to YHWH: ‘Greater is my punishment than I can bear. Look, you have driven me out [3:24] today from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a wanderer and a fugitive on the earth, and anyone who finds me will kill me.
- And YHWH said to him: ‘It shall not be so! If anyone kills Cain, sevenfold will he be avenged. And YHWH put on Cain a mark, so that no one who found him would kill him.

7. The sentence is executed (4:16)

- Cain left the presence of YHWH, and settled in the land of Nod ['wandering', 'restlessness'], east of Eden [3:24].

Cain-Abel in the New Testament

- ‘Upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar’ (Matthew 23:35)
- ‘Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous’ (1John 3:12).

Cain-Abel in the New Testament

- ‘By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead’ (Hebrews 11:4).
- ‘You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel’ (Hebrews 12:23)

2. Cain and the growth of civilisation (4:17-19)

[Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bore Cain [*qayin*], and she said: ‘I have acquired [*qânah*] a man with YHWH’.] (4:1)

Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch [*hanôk*] [4:1]. And he built a city and he named of the city Enoch after his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. [Seventh generation; see 5:9-29]

J traces the line from Cain: handing on of sin!

Genesis 4:19

Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah ['beauty'], and the name of the other Zillah ['sweetness'].

Genesis 4:20-22

Adah bore Jabal who was the ancestor of those living in tents and herdsman. His brother's name was Jubal, who was the ancestor of those playing the harp and the flute. Zillah bore Tubulcain, the ancestor of all who hammer out bronze and iron. And the sister of Tubulcain was Naamah ['pleasing'].

3. a braggart song (4:23-24)

- Lamech said to his wives Adah and Zillah: ‘Hear my voice, you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: «A man I killed for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, Lamech will be avenged seventy-seven fold!»

4. Alternative lineage: the restoration of order (4:25-26)

- The Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and named him Seth [*shêt*], for she said” “God has put in place [*shât*] for me another child in place of Abel, because Cain killed him.” And to Seth, also, was born a son, and he named him Enosh [poetic word for ‘human being’]. It was then that people began to invoke the name of Yahweh.