

When children are born, they are often compared to their parents. Phrases like “You have your mother’s eyes” or “You’ve got your father’s face” are often used to describe children throughout their lives. Being the world’s first children, Cain and Abel are no exception. Throughout Rabbi Fohrman’s writing, he compares Cain and Abel to their parents, Adam and Eve. The rabbi compares their stories, their actions, and their interactions with God in several different lights.

One such comparison Rabbi Fohrman made was how the story of Cain and Abel flows smoothly and organically from the story of Adam and Eve. Other than the obvious fact that, chronologically, these two stories appearing together makes sense, there are other, more obscure factors at play here.

Once examined carefully, we begin to notice specific words and phrases that are repeated in each story. Certain situations appear again. It’s like a biblical case of *deja vu*. Rabbi Fohrman lists at least five instances of recurring themes between the stories of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel. The majority of these similarities were between Adam and Cain. For example, both Adam and Cain were asked “Where are you?” from God. Not only did God ask them the same question, He even used an unusual word when asking, “ayeh.” The word “ayeh” is a more complex version of the simple question of “where?”. This version is less focused physical location as it is about how the subject got to where they are or what happened as a result. When God used the word “ayeh” He was asking Adam and Cain about what had transpired between them and their companions.

To this, each of them had a similar response having to do with hiding. Both Cain and Adam mention something being hidden when answering God. However, Cain says he hid, but in the future tense, while Adam says he was hidden, in the past tense. Rabbi Fohrman says this was a premonition on the part of Cain that he and his successors would be spending their lifetimes in hiding as punishment for Abel’s murder.

On the subject of punishments, Rabbi Fohrman also notes a similarity in Adam and Cain’s punishments. In both cases, the transgressor is forced to leave their home and wander the Earth. In the case of Adam, he leaves the garden of Eden, in the case of Cain, he simply leaves his home. God also punishes them both by cursing them in regards to the land they work. Adam is cursed to work the land in order to get food and Cain is cursed that the earth will no longer lend its strength to him or his descendants. These similarities and comparisons lead to an efficient transition between the stories of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel.

Another topic touched upon by Rabbi Fohrman is the names of Cain and Abel. The text says “Eve conceived and bore Cain....” As with most parts of the Torah, everything appears to be normal, at first glance. Rabbi Fohrman disagrees. He notes a key difference in the wording of the text. In other places throughout the Torah whenever a child is born, the text uses language along the lines of “she bore a child and it was

named something.” In the case of Cain and Abel, they simply were Cain and Abel. There was no naming process. Rabbi Fohrman says Cain is not someone merely named Cain, he is Cain.

The name Cain, or Kayin in text, means acquire. In context, Rabbi Fohrman compares Cain the farmer, who works the land, to Cain the acquirer, who is attached to the physical realm. In contrast, Abel’s name, “Hevel”, means breath. Rabbi Fohrman translates this to mean ephemeral. Basically, Rabbi Fohrman writes that Cain is linked to the ground while his brother is a short-lived wisp of air. Due to his obsession with physical things, Cain was led to murder his brother who outdid his brother at his own game; Cain was jealous.

Chava’s role in all of this is both simple and complex. Obviously she plays, debatably, the most important role in Cain and Abel’s story. She birthed both brothers so therefore, the whole story never would have happened without her. Besides the obvious, Eve also played a major role in the naming of Cain.

Upon giving birth to the first child, Eve exclaims she has acquired a little man with God. Rabbi Fohrman points out the odd language used here. The words “acquired” and “with” don’t seem to fit quite right within the sentence. He continues to say that Eve’s use of the word “acquire” directly corresponds to Cain’s name. This, combined with the unusual form of the word “with” (“et”), denotes a feeling of ownership between Eve and her child.

Rabbi Fohrman writes that there are two reasons for giving a gift: either out of gratitude or in order to further one’s own goals. When ingratiated to someone, we may be prompted to give them a gift as a gesture of thanks. However, in other cases, we may give the same gift not out of gratitude, but instead in order to preserve the relationship to maintain our own personal gain. Eve felt a certain sense of ownership over Cain. As the device with which he was physically brought into this world, Eve may have felt like the creator of the world’s first child, essentially replacing God. When a person creates something, we tend to have powerful feelings towards that creation. When another being encroaches on our creation, we tend to feel provoked or any number of involuntary feelings.

These traits were all passed down to Cain. As the creator of the world’s first sacrifice, he felt a sense of ownership over it. However, since he was Cain the Acquirer and felt attached to the physical realm, he wished to remain on Earth and grow his wealth. Therefore, he brought the first sacrifice out of the desire to maintain his relationship with God in order to further his own desires while his brother, Abel, brought his sacrifice out of gratitude. Abel was able to do so since he had little attachment to the Earth (“breath”). Having encroached on Cain’s territory (i.e. His invention), Cain felt anger and despair about being outdone by his little brother at the very thing that he invented. Despite a warning from God, Cain acting on his feelings of anger and lashed

Josh Mermelstein

11/8/16

Cain and Abel and Their Story

out at his brother. God tried to, in the words of Rabbi Fohrman, “talk him off a bridge.” He was referring to how God tried warn Cain not to act on his feelings or else sin will surely follow. In spite of this ultimatum, Cain continued down his dark path, spawning the world’s first murder.