

A SIN OFFERING LYING IN THE DOORWAY? A MINORITY INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 4:6–8

Chris Burnett, Th.M. Candidate
The Master's Seminary

Several key interpretive problems emerging from the text of Genesis 4:6–8 have received exegetically unsupportable treatment. It is essential that the expositor revisit the text in order to grasp the intent of the passage. Furthermore, the narrative is laden with theological significance as to Yahweh's intervening mercy toward the unworthy sinner. In this text, God Himself has provided an animal fit for sacrifice in order to put an end to Cain's sin. Failure of the first brother to accept the offer of atonement leads to further sin with irreparable consequences.

* * * * *

Introduction

Genesis 4:6–8 presents in two scenes the tragic fall of the first family's firstborn son into sin, despite Yahweh's interaction and intervention. Many problems emerge from this short narrative section. These can lead expositors to exegetically unsupportable conclusions. Many of these are built upon questionable assumptions as to the nature and relation of the brothers' sacrifices in verses 3–5. Such problems in the current passage include the emotional state of Cain resulting from divine disregard, Yahweh's intent for questioning Cain, the identity and meaning of the "sin" positioned "at the door," and the pathos and circumstances which led to fratricide. A clause-by-clause exegesis of Genesis 4:6–8 will help resolve perceived problems and approach a more accurate and faithful understanding of this rich text. Furthermore, this study provides deeper insight into the grace and mercy of Yahweh for the sinner.

Hebrew text¹ with translation² is presented below as a guide to the exegetical discussion:

¹ Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.

² This translation is the product of the ensuing exegesis and represents an admittedly minority position, particularly at verse 7.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קַיִן לָמָּה תָרַה לְךָ וְלָמָּה נִפְלִי פָנֶיךָ: 6
 So Yahweh said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why are you downcast?”

הֲלוֹא אִם-תֵּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רִבְךָ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁוֶקְתּוּ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשַׁל-בּוֹ: 7
 “Surely, if you do well, won’t there be a lifting up? On the other hand, if you do not do well, a sin offering is lying at your door. Its will is yielded to you, but you must rule over it.”

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בַּהֲיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקְרַם קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ: 8
 Therefore, Cain proceeded to speak to Abel his brother, and while they were in the field, Cain attacked Abel his brother and slew him.

In the first phrase of verse 6, וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קַיִן (*wy'mr yhw' el-qāyin*), the *wayiqtol* verb (אמר) and subject (יהוה, “Yahweh”) followed by definite direct object marker (אֶל-) and object (קַיִן, “Cain”) signal the primary protagonists of the narrative. They continue as the main characters of the story through verse 16.³ God is referenced by the divine name Yahweh, the God of Israel.⁴ Yahweh’s direct speech to Cain begins with two questions, לָמָּה תָרַה לְךָ (*lmh hārā lāk*) and וְלָמָּה נִפְלִי פָנֶיךָ (*wlmh noplū pānēkā*). Both questions use the interrogative pronoun with attached proposition,⁵ echoing Cain’s animus in verse 5.⁶ In the first divine question, the third person perfect

³ See Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. by Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 43. Gunkel finds the appearance of Yahweh here a “very strange” obscuring of the clear narrative forms with regard to divine speeches, as if there were a missing introduction (typified by Gen 3:8; 16:7).

⁴ See D. N. Freedman, “יהוה, YHWH—IV. Meaning,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 15 vols., eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. by David E. Green. 5:500–21 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 513–16. Hereafter referred to as *TDOT*. This name previously occurs followed by the divine name אֱלֹהִים (12x chap. 2; 9x chap. 3), but stands alone in Chapter 4 (9x). Derivatives of אֱלֹהִים are added appositively from chapter 24, most notably in direct speech (e.g. יהוה אֱלֹהֵי in 24:27).

⁵ See William D. Barrick, and Irvin A. Busenitz, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, rev. ed. (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Books International, 2011), 41. This longer form of the interrogative pronoun מַה which creates *Mil’el* accentuation is used when either connecting to the following words by *Maqqeph*, or by a *conjunctive accent*, as here (see Wilhelm Gesenius and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, eds. E. Kautzsch, and Sir Arthur Ernest Cowley, 2nd English ed [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910], § 37e). The pronoun inserts the *dagesh forte* because it is followed by the strong guttural ה (Gesenius, *Grammar*, § 1021), which refuses doubling by the strong *dagesh* (Barrick & Busenitz, *Grammar*, 29). A *dagesh* is expected in לָךְ, but instead the text gives לְךָ because the tone is thrown back from the ultima of תָרַה on to the penultima, the syllable which otherwise would have *Metheg*, a secondary accent which forces its syllable to remain open (Barrick & Busenitz, *Grammar*, 45), because the penultima of תָרַה could not have *Metheg*. See Gesenius, *Grammar*, § 20f; Franz Delitzsch, *New Commentary on Genesis*, transl. Sophia Taylor (T&T Clark, 1888; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), 182; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 282.

⁶ See Gordon John Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*. Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David Allen Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1987), 104. Westermann finds the repetition of words

verb הָרָה in the qal reflects having become hot or angry, an outbreak of wrathful, burning emotion.⁷ The masculine singular of the perfect is often used impersonally such that Yahweh's question, "Why does it anger you?," is more aptly translated, "Why are you angry?"⁸ The second divine question, "Why are you downcast?," is literally, "Why has your countenance fallen?"⁹ Here the perfect verb נָפַל functions like the English perfect to denote a completed action with continuing results in the present¹⁰—Cain's face became downcast and so remained at the time God questioned him.¹¹ Therefore it may be concluded that in verse 6, Yahweh questions Cain with the intent of bringing him to self-examination and repentance over his anger and dejection.¹²

Verse 7 poses for the expositor an array of problems as to translation and meaning. There is also the added difficulty that proper translation may not immediately reveal the intended meaning. The first clause of verse 7, $\text{הֲלוֹא אַמִּיתִיבָּ שְׂאֵת}$ (*hālō' m-tytyb šē'ēt*) leads with the interrogative הֲ and strong negative לֹא to mean "surely," expressing the conviction that the contents of the statement are unconditionally and

and phrases from v. 5 to potentially indicate that the material in v. 6 is not original to the text, though such a view reflects the bias of redaction criticism rather than sound exegesis. See Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 299.

⁷ So Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 5 vols., revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, ed. and transl. M. E. J. Richardson (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999), 351; William L. Holladay, ed. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 116 (Hereafter referred to as *HALOT*); John C. Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 192; Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 181; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 93. Less forcefully, Mathews prefers "scowling" for the meaning of הָרָה to reflect Cain's grimaced face in relation to his downcast פָּנָיו in v. 5 (see Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*. New American Commentary 1A [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996], 269). Barrick prefers "irritated" (see William D. Barrick, *Genesis 4—Translated and annotated* [unpublished notes, 2013], 2); Westermann, *Genesis*, 299, recognizes an air of "resentment." These choices presumably aim to reflect the relationship between הָרָה and the fallen פָּנָיו in the next clause, with the result that an angry response seems downplayed, and a state of emotional dejection made most prominent.

⁸ Gesenius, *Grammar*, 144b; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 282.

⁹ "Face" or "countenance," פָּנָיו , is an example of *plurale tantum*, in which only the plural form of the noun is used, such as מַיִם for water. Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed, transl. and rev. Takamitsu Muraoka (Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 1996), § 90f.

¹⁰ A. B. Davidson, *Introductory Hebrew Grammar Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 39b.

¹¹ For discussion on Cain's emotional state as one of depression, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 224. Though some translators in n. 7 show greater continuity between the emotions of הָרָה and נָפַל , Hamilton understands them as essentially one in the same, translating Yahweh's two interrogations as, "Why are you depressed and why are your crestfallen?" There seems to be no hint at irritation or anger in Hamilton's translation, though such seething emotion is lexically significant for הָרָה . Merrill unites both clauses by expressing that Cain's countenance had fallen with anger. See Eugene Merrill, *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study, Genesis–Deuteronomy*, (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications), 55.

¹² So Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 269; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 104. Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 182; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 299, delves more negatively, finding in these questions a kind of moral condemnation which "implies a reproach" for incorrect conduct, a line of questioning which deems Cain's resentment unjustified. He admits however that such a conclusion is in light of verse 7 rather than strictly found in verse 6.

unequivocally certain.¹³ The rhetorical question, “Surely, if you do well, won’t there be a lifting up?” is axiomatic. It is dependent upon Cain taking right action to reverse his current animus.¹⁴

A significant debate exists over the use of נָשָׂא , the infinitive construct of נָשָׂא , since there is no successive word with which to create a construct relationship. The *nomen rectum* has not been supplied after the *nomen regens* of the construct state. The term is viewed as a substantivized infinitive. However, this is admittedly very rare—especially when a literal translation would read, “if you do well, a lifting up of . . . (?)”¹⁵ The strongest solution for the missing object of נָשָׂא comes from the context itself: it is Cain’s פְּנֵיָו (face) which may be held high with right action.¹⁶ Cain’s downcast face may be lifted up by a sense of encouragement, because proper conduct would restore God’s favor. Furthermore, Cain himself would be lifted up to a favored position. Thus, נָשָׂא may mean encouragement, confidence or acceptance, an exaltation or elevation akin to “favor” with Yahweh.¹⁷

The following clause $\text{וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב} \text{ (} w\ddot{e}'im \text{ l\ddot{o}' t\ddot{e}f\ddot{i}b \text{)}$ employs a *waw* adversative to mark the opposite circumstance to the previous clause: “On the other hand, if you do not do well.”¹⁸ The contrasting circumstance will bear a contrasting consequence, exposed in the highly problematic phrase $\text{לִפְתָּח הַדְּעָאֵר רֹבֵעַ} \text{ (} lph\ddot{t} h\ddot{t}' r\ddot{o}b\ddot{e}s \text{)}$. The preposition לְ attached to the noun פְּתָח with an elided article¹⁹ is spatial,²⁰ marking the point at which a consequential action is performed: at Cain’s door.²¹ While the identity of

¹³ Gesenius, *Grammar*, 150e. The protasis with אִם is durative and frequentative, to be translated in the present tense such that results are understood to continue (Jöüon, *Grammar*, §167h).

¹⁴ So Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 270; Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 198–99; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 299. Delitzsch recognizes that the intrinsically transitive hiphil imperfect תֵּיטִיב speaks equally of good external action and internal attitude (see Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 182), whereas HALOT (408–09) and Holladay, (*Concise Lexicon*, 133), emphasize correct behavior. The latter seems more in line with the context of performing a sacrifice.

¹⁵ HALOT, 1301; Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 225; Gesenius, *Grammar*, § 113a.

¹⁶ Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 225–227; Barrick, *Genesis 4*, 2; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 269; HALOT, 1301; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 299.

¹⁷ HALOT, 1301; Holladay, *Concise Lexicon*, 348. The concept of “forgiveness” for נָשָׂא is presented by Barrick, *Genesis 4*, 2; Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 227; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 269 n. 268; Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 192 n. 10. Collins sees a parallel usage of נָשָׂא in verse 13, where Cain cannot “bear” forgiveness for his sin. Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 182, does not agree with the concept of forgiveness here, noting that specific to verse 7, “Wherever נָשָׂא is used without an addition, it means neither *oblatio* nor *acceptio*, still less *remissio peccati*, but *elatio* . . .”

¹⁸ Barrick, *Genesis 4*, 2. Both NASB and ESV translate the *waw* “and,” not sharply delineating the contrast in situations and results. This clause is not equally axiomatic to the preceding, however. Rather, it is a specific statement which is understood in light of the treatment of the following clause.

¹⁹ The simple *shewa* of לְ is replaced by a *pathach*. Barrick & Busenitz, *Grammar*, 56–57.

²⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 11.2.10.a. Hereafter referred to as *IBHS*.

²¹ The definite article is used possessively (see Frederic Clarke Putnam, *Hebrew Bible Insert: A Student’s Guide to the Syntax of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. [Ridley Park, PA: Stylus Publishing, 2002], §1.4.3b, hereafter called *HBI*). The term פְּתָח refers to a spatial opening or entrance exclusively in the Pentateuch (75x in Pentateuch; 165x in the OT; figuratively only in Ps 119:130 and Hos 2:15). The verb form most frequently means “to open,” in an outside/inside context; the noun “door” or “gate” is most frequently its object (21x), almost equally to “mouth” (22x). See Victor P. Hamilton, “פתח,” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren

the door raises questions, much of the debate centers on the meaning of the following two words, commonly translated as “sin crouching,” where the seemingly feminine noun *חַטָּאת* relates to the masculine participle *רֹבֵץ*.²² The noun *חַטָּאת* occurs 271 times in the Hebrew OT, 109 times meaning “sin offering,” 89 of which occurrences are found in the Torah. The other occurrences of *חַטָּאת* refer to the abstract concept of “sin.”²³

Reasons supporting a translation and meaning of the abstract “sin” rather than “sin offering” for *חַטָּאת* here include the following: (1) If *חַטָּאת* serves as the missing *nomens rectum* of *שָׁאָה*, then “lifting up” can connote “forgiveness” in a sin context: “if you do well, there is forgiveness for *חַטָּאת*.” (2) This forgiveness concept may parallel the *נְשָׂא* of verse 13, as the bearing away of the guilt of Cain’s *חַטָּאת*.²⁴ (3) If the masculine participle of *רָבַץ* refers to the lying down or resting of flocks of sheep and goats or beasts of burden,²⁵ and adjectivally refers to the thing crouching or lying, then here it may relate to the relentless haunt of sin, figuratively crouching in the doorway like a wild animal or a mythical demon waiting in ambush for its prey.²⁶

Taking the view that *חַטָּאת* refers to “sin” presents several difficulties, however, especially in relation to *רֹבֵץ*: (1) In Scripture, the participle never refers to anything crouching in ambush to hunt, but only in a state of repose.²⁷ (2) A resting position is

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1997), 3:716–18 (hereafter referred to as *NIDOTTE*). Therefore, here the preposition and noun are best read spatially, referring to the doorway to the room in which Cain is standing. Mathews contrarily takes *פֶּתַח* as figurative for a “door of opportunity,” (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26, 270*), and Delitzsch understands this as the “door of the heart” (Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 183). Bartelmus makes improper analogy between the literal door in Prov 5:8 and what he considers a figurative “breach or boundary incursion” in Gen 4:7. Rüdiger Bartelmus, “פֶּתַח,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 12:186.

²² The gender disagreement between female *חַטָּאת* and male *רֹבֵץ* does not mean the terms are unrelated. While *חַטָּאת* appears feminine because of the *ת* ending, it is considered a common, non-gendered noun which joins appositively to the masculine *רֹבֵץ*. The *ת* ending of *חַטָּאת* is thus not the reason for the construct relationship, but rather the conjunctive accent joining the terms appositively (Barrick & Busewitz, *Grammar*, 81).

²³ For example, Gen 18:20; 31:36; 50:17.

²⁴ Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 198–99.

²⁵ *HALOT*, 1181; Holladay, *Concise Lexicon*, 331.

²⁶ Mathews translates the participle as “crouching” or “lurking,” giving the metaphorical sense of an animal resting temporarily in a doorway, ready at any moment to pounce if stirred (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26, 270*). Speiser develops the position that *חַטָּאת* means “sin” and accords with *רֹבֵץ* in gender only if the participle functions as the predicate: “Sin is a *רֹבֵץ*,” or “a lurker.” On this basis he suggests *רֹבֵץ* is an Akkadian loanword with a common gender representing a legendary demon who lurks into doorways for his next unsuspecting victim (see E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964], 32–33). While Westermann dismisses the doorstep demon theory (though he toys with the theory that the lurker is Abel’s ghost), his tradition history bias forces a simplistic response: the relationship between *חַטָּאת* and *רֹבֵץ* is difficult because of textual corruption (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 299).

²⁷ Consistently *רָבַץ* denotes an animal in a position of rest on all four legs, even an apex predator such as a lion or wolf (cf. Gen 29:2; 49:9; Exod 23:5; Ps 23:2; Isa 11:6). Assigning a unique usage in Gen 4:7 is highly improbable and exegetically irresponsible, as it would force the term to incorporate the temporary rest of a hunting animal “at bay,” which is not supported in any other context in Scripture. Furthermore it would impose a sense of predatory volition which is also foreign to any other context.

not an attack position.²⁸ (3) The abstract concept of “sin” cannot perform physical action.²⁹ (4) Sin is not outside of the sinner, in a doorway.³⁰ The preferred translation by the majority of commentators, that “sin is crouching at the door,” therefore presents an unsupportable and unsatisfying solution.

It is more exegetically compelling to recognize תָּעָאָה as a sacrifice for sin rather than “sin” itself, such that “a sin offering is lying in [Cain’s] doorway.” Supporting evidence for this preferred view includes the following: (1) The context of Cain’s unacceptable offering (מִנְחָה)³¹ provides the framework for a “re-do” sacrifice.³² Whereas Cain’s offering was rejected, a sin offering may be made which both lifts his downcast face and restores Yahweh’s favor to him. The תָּעָאָה therefore serves as a second attempt at the ineffective and damaging מִנְחָה. A proper מִנְחָה, however, must this time cover Cain’s sin, which may include guilt incurred by improper worship, or the resultant anger which burned within him, or both. Now he must “do well” with a sin offering (תָּעָאָה) in order to experience “a lifting up” emotionally and spiritually. (2) The means by which Cain may “re-do” his offering is understood by the masculine participle רָבַץ which is in apposition to תָּעָאָה.³³ Only an actual animal befits the action of the participle, whose gender may reveal it to be a male animal in accordance with later prescriptions of Torah.³⁴ (3) As the doorway (דָּלֶת) is not figurative, neither can be the תָּעָאָה lying in it.³⁵ It is illogical that one of these objects would physically exist while the other to which it is related is only metaphorical or conceptual, and therefore not actually present.

Another particularly challenging problem concerns the desire and rule concepts of the final statement of verse 7, וְאֵלֶיךָ תִשְׁתַּקְּחוּ (wə’elēkā tšqtw), translated as “Its will is yielded to you.” This translation differs in wording from the common “Its desire is for you,” or “Its desire is against you,” and the meaning is wholly different. According to the minority “sin offering” view of תָּעָאָה, the “desire” of which Yahweh speaks

²⁸ With the variety of “lurking” and “prowling” verbs available in Hebrew and used in direct relation to predators (e.g. אָרַב in Ps 10:9; יָשַׁב in 17:12; רָמַשׁ in 104:20), it is a wonder that none other was chosen for an attack stance than the diametrically-opposed position of “lying down.”

²⁹ There is no Scriptural example of the evil nature of sin directly personifying an animal in order to seek out a person or lay in wait for its prey. Likewise, no clear simile is presented here using the expected צָ in order for an abstract concept to metaphorically typify an actual being (Joüon, *Grammar*, §133g), as in Isa 64:6, “And our iniquities, like the wind (כְּרִיחַ יִצְאָנוּ), carry us away.” Neither is it textually relevant to find mythical demons or ghosts personified in this way (see n. 27).

³⁰ Sin is in the heart of every man, not external to him (cf. Jas 1:13–14).

³¹ Verse 5 does not specify the function of the “offering” (מִנְחָה), whether it was expiatory or a gift of homage and thanksgiving, neither does the text reveal in what way the offering was unacceptable to Yahweh. For a brief discussion, see Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 199–200, 215–16.

³² This view is also held by Josiah Blake Tidwell, *Genesis—A Study of the Plan of Redemption* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1924), 77; and Barrick, *Genesis 4*, 2.

³³ The common, non-gendered תָּעָאָה accentuates the masculine רָבַץ, drawing the reader’s attention to the gender of the thing which lies at the doorway. See *IBHS*, 6.1.b.

³⁴ Male animals made suitable sin offerings according to Levitical law, the context in which Moses recorded this early account by divine revelation (cf. male bulls and goats in Lev 16).

³⁵ See discussion in footnote 21 on דָּלֶת as the doorway to the room in which the narrative scene is set. Because the דָּלֶת and the תָּעָאָה are related in the phrase, they must both be related in the physical realm—the spatial aspect of the doorway, the location in which the תָּעָאָה lies.

reflects the positive desire of the animal crouching in the doorway, who submits his will (תְּשׁוּקָה) as a sin offering unto Cain.³⁶ Among the reasons for this understanding: (1) The nearest antecedent for the masculine pronominal suffix is the masculine participle רָבִיץ which modifies the non-gendered אַתָּה, that is, the animal which is to be offered.³⁷ “Desire,” more commonly associated as a product of human cognition, must be applied to the animal. So as not to anthropomorphize emotion, a submitted volition or a yielded will is the preferred concept in this instance of תְּשׁוּקָה.³⁸ (2) Yahweh provides the means by which Cain’s favor with God may be restored—a second chance at an offering has now been divinely submitted to him, lying at the doorway so that the sinner will not be hindered from “doing rightly.” Yahweh Himself has facilitated restoration. Thus the animal’s divinely decreed volition ensures that it will remain in a state of rest until the time that Cain will come and take it. (3) Desire is an inherently positive feature of a God-ordained relationship. This is established in Song of Solomon 7:10 and contextually applied to Gen 3:16.³⁹ The positive aspect of the term lexically carries over to Genesis 4:7 *a priori* despite the fact that the relationship between the offering and the one offering is not the same as the other passages.

A negative reading for תְּשׁוּקָה, warged by proponents of the “sin” view, forces a hermeneutic foreign to the context, especially with regard to the following clause, וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹן (w’th tmšl-bw), “But you must rule over it.” Cain is again emphatically addressed by the personal pronoun in the leading position, and the adversative use of the *waw* is warranted to nuance opposition in the disjunctive clause⁴⁰—Cain must make a choice whether he will rule over the רָבִיץ (בּוֹן once again introduces the object

³⁶ אֵלֶיךָ, emphatically placed at the beginning of the clause, refers to Cain. See *IBHS*, 16.3.1.b; Putnam, *HBI*, 1.5.1a.

³⁷ The more remote antecedent, Abel (“Hebel”) in v. 4, is less likely grammatically and contextually, and thus rejected. It does, however, present an interesting case: Cain is to rule over his brother as firstborn son, but his conduct spiritually so far may result in loss of preeminence in the family, much as it did Esau (Gen 25:19–34; Heb 12:16–17), Reuben (Gen 49:1–4), and Manasseh (49:22–26).

³⁸ In ANE literature, the nuances of “urge,” “craving,” and “impulse” encapsulate the idea of “desire” or “longing” for תְּשׁוּקָה. Most scholars transfer this meaning here, as well as at 3:16 and Song 7:10, and the Septuagint (LXX) uses ἡ ἀποστροφῆ (hē apostrophē) summarily (see discussion in David Talley, “תְּשׁוּקָה,” in *NIDOTTE*, 4 vols., edited by Willem VanGemeren [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1997], 4:341–342). That no nuanced definition of the term until now incorporates the submission or yielding of the will, per sé, poses little difficulty since (1) desire, longings, and impulses inherently involve volition; (2) only here is an animal’s “desire” in view, and since the majority of translators do not recognize אַתָּה as such, there has previously not been the need to nuance תְּשׁוּקָה so as to avoid overly anthropomorphizing the otherwise emotionally-charged term with regard to an animal; (3) the will of all creatures, highly cognitive or not, is submitted to the divine will of the Creator, such that the animal’s “desire” to submit itself as a sin sacrifice to Cain reflects the will of an animal to obey the dictates of its Creator to both lie down in the doorway and lay down its life in submission to man, who is the highest order of earthly creation.

³⁹ Song 7:10 establishes the role of desire in the love relationship, and Gen 3:16 shares that context. Though the application of desire may, like any emotion, run outside of its proper godly confines along a gradient of sinful application, the concept of desire is itself not negative, especially in the marital union established by God. For a detailed rebuttal of the negative attribution of desire within the context of the curse section of Genesis 3, see Irvin A. Busenitz, “Woman’s Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered,” *Grace Theological Journal*, 7.2 (1986): 211.

⁴⁰ Joüon, *Grammar*, §172b; Putnam, *HBI*, 3.2.2b–c.

lying in the doorway). The cohortative verb in the subjunctive mood, מִשַׁל, is Yahweh's call to Cain to slay the animal and be accepted; but the ensuing narrative silence on the matter implies that Cain will not do it, and does not do it.

Much of the reason for the view that תַּטְאֵה refers to the abstract concept of sin rather than to an animal ready for sacrifice depends in large part on the textual proximity and parallelism of Genesis 3:16 to 4:7, where “[the man] will rule over [the woman].”⁴¹ There are striking textual similarities in word choice and order. Nevertheless, no matter how closely paralleled the passages may seem, neither word choice nor order are sufficient measures of cross-interpretation, since lexical meaning is not guaranteed to be similar in both contexts.⁴² In fact, there are significant differences often overlooked between 3:16 and 4:7. These include: (1) The genres of the passages are different, leading to different uses of the imperfect of מִשַׁל.⁴³ (2) The marriage relationship of 3:16 is foreign to 4:7, creating different contexts for desire.⁴⁴ (3) The negative understanding of the woman's desire in 3:16 is overstated and therefore problematic, superimposing an irrelevant pathos on 4:7.⁴⁵ (4) In the “sin” view, “desire” is literal language in 3:16, but must be figurative in 4:7 because the former subject (the woman) is actual while the latter (sin) is abstract; this is hermeneutically inconsistent and contradicts the proposed parallelism.⁴⁶ (5) Cain is the object of sin's

⁴¹ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 300, believes 4:7 is taken directly from 3:16 by later redactors.

⁴² Textual alignment does not necessarily imply semantic parallelism. For greater discussion, see Busenitz, “Woman's Desire,” 209–10.

3:16	וְאֶל-אִשָּׁה	תִּשְׁקָהּ	וְהָאָדָם	יִמְשָׁל-בָּהּ:
4:7	וְאֶת-רֵי	תִּשְׁקָתוֹ	וְאֶת-הָאָדָם	תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ:

⁴³ In 4:7 the genre is hortatory, such that מִשַׁל is a cohortative imperfect—God exhorts Cain to prevent him from sinning. In 3:16 the genre is not hortatory, and so מִשַׁל must be understood as an explanatory statement which is continuative in the present (Chisholm, 103; Gesenius, *Grammar*, § 107a).

⁴⁴ Genesis 4:7, though textually proximal to 3:16, relays a different context than the human relationship (see n. 40), and so one must draw fewer inferences from one's findings on 3:16 (see Busenitz, “Woman's Desire,” 211).

⁴⁵ Busenitz appeals for more appropriate hermeneutics when evaluating the three passages in which תִּשְׁקָה is used. Though תִּשְׁקָה in 3:16 is often understood as a curse statement, it falls outside of the curse formula of the passage, where each of the three culprits receives one punishment and one explanation. To understand the woman's desire as a negative result of the curse is to disregard the pattern of pronouncement and explanation, giving the woman two punishments, but really causing the man to bear the brunt of the woman's overreaching תִּשְׁקָה. (Busenitz, “Woman's Desire,” 206–07). Furthermore, overstating the parallelism between 3:16 and 4:7 has led Mathews to see in Cain the battle between the “two seeds” of 3:15 (Mathews, 270–71). Foh reads 4:7 into 3:16 incautiously, understanding the woman's marital desire as matching Cain's contentious struggle with sin. She writes, “Sin's desire is to enslave Cain.... An active struggle between Cain and sin is implied.... The woman has the same sort of desire for her husband that sin has for Cain, a desire to possess or control him.” See Susan T. Foh, “What is the Woman's Desire?” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1974/75): 380–81.

⁴⁶ There is no scriptural precedent for assigning volition directly to an abstract concept (see n. 30). To do so requires a hermeneutical shift from the tangible desire of a living being (the woman) to the figurative desire of a metaphorical being (sin). Forcing textual parallelism between 3:16 and 4:7 leads to the forcing of meaning, creating an incongruent which fails to resolve how an actual figure and a metaphorical figure may share similar negative emotion without sharing similar qualities of being. Does sin's proposed ability to desire one's demise relegate it to the status of a conscious being? Assuming semantic parallelism between the passages leads to contradiction: real desire from a real character cannot be the same as figurative desire from an abstract concept (were such a thing possible).

desire, as well as the one who is cursed, whereas the man is the object of the woman's desire, but she is the one who is cursed. The problems associated with הַטָּאָה being "sin" are therefore great enough to warrant adopting the term as a "sin offering." Such a shift in translation and meaning is not only textually viable, but theologically rich. Yahweh, after having been offended by Cain's improper offering, not only encouraged the sinner to make a sacrifice for the offense, but He Himself has provided the animal fit and ready for slaughter. Oh, that Cain might have received the grace extended toward him, finding mercy in his time of need!

Verse 8 brings the cliff-hanging end of the sacrifice scene to a tragic plummet in which Cain murders his brother Abel. The first clause, וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו (wy'mr qayin 'el-hebel 'āhîw), may be translated "Therefore, Cain proceeded to speak to Abel his brother." Cain and Abel are mentioned as brothers 7 times in this narrative to emphasize the horrors of fratricide in the first family.⁴⁷ Cain's unrecorded speech to Abel marks the climax of the narrative, employing the *waw* correlative with the imperfect of אָמַר.⁴⁸ The verb leaves much to the imagination.⁴⁹ The following phrase adds to the expositor's difficulty in understanding the transition from the divine offer of a re-do sacrifice in verse 7 to the violent act of verse 8. The phrase וַיְהִי בְהִיטָם בַּשָּׂדֶה (wayhiy bhywtm bsdh), "While they were in the field," may suggest that Cain plotted to take Abel outside in order to kill him.⁵⁰ This is conjectural and based on hypotheses as to the variant readings of the LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch which do not conclusively reveal a long-forgotten text.⁵¹ The reader, therefore, must not elaborate upon, or fantasize beyond the text as it stands today, and must resist the urge to fill in the perceived narrative holes.

⁴⁷ Verses 2, 8 (twice), 9 (twice), 10, 11; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 106.

⁴⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 301. Throughout Chapter 4, changes in speaker are marked by וַיֹּאמֶר, then dialogue (4:6, 9, 10, 13, 15), except here since no dialogue is recorded.

⁴⁹ Nothing of the conversation prior to the murder can be known from the text itself. Scribal error (paralepsis) is assumed by many scholars because וַיֹּאמֶר is syntactically clause-initial six times in the narrative of 4:1–16, leading to direct discourse which is conspicuously absent in verse 8 (see Ronald S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11*, Textual Studies and Critical Edition [New York: Oxford University Press, 1998], 46–47; Mark William Scarlata, *Outside of Eden—Cain in the Ancient Versions of Genesis 4.1–16* [New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2012], 111–12). Silence however does not admit textual emendations, though commentators often expect them here (e.g. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 229–30; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 302). Nor does silence point to a textual omission (see John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series Number 35 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993], 56), though it does point to narrative brevity (see Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 183; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 106).

⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 22:25–27 may evidence premeditation on Cain's part by virtue of the fact that attacks in fields were absolutely incriminating if not worthy of death, because it is violence away from the public eye. Moses may have had this passage in mind as an intertextual link.

⁵¹ Wevers, Mathews and Kidner posit that direct discourse between the brothers is missing. They agree that such speech may have included the phrase, "Let us go out to the field" (see Wevers, *Notes*, 56; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 273, and Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973], 75). Such phrase is present in the LXX and its contemporary recension of the Hebrew text, the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP). The LXX's "Let us pass through (διέρχουμι + εἰς) into the field," differs from the SP's "Let us go to the field," a notable difference since Hebrew does not have a consistent equivalent of the verb + preposition. The use of the phrase in LXX and SP appears to be due to independent scribal additions, filling in what seemed to be lacking discourse in the Hebrew text, rather than translating Hebrew Vorlage lost through time (see

The final phrase of verse 8 vividly brings the narrative to its close: וַיִּקַּם קַיִן אֶל־אָבֶל (וַיִּקַּם קַיִן אֶל־אָבֶל וַיַּחַדְלֵהוּ וַיִּבְרַח) (wyqm qayin 'el-hebel 'āhîw), “Cain attacked Abel his brother and slew him.” Cain commits murder in two phases, attacking then slaying. Assonance in Hebrew is employed when vocalizing וַיִּקַּם קַיִן, “Cain attacked,” which literally means, “he rose up.”⁵² The sure result of his rising against his brother is the wayyiqtol of הָרַג with the masculine singular pronominal suffix—he slew him.⁵³ Though premeditation may be hinted at lexically, it is not possible to discern any of the following: (1) the exact motive for the murderous act; (2) the lapse of time between Cain’s failed offering and the brothers entering the field; (3) the time between the fomenting of anger and the forming of a murderous plot; or (4) any role which Abel might have played in inciting Cain to rise against him once they were in the field. It seems clear, nevertheless, that in the end Cain vented his anger on the only available scapegoat—his brother.⁵⁴

Conclusion

This article has reconsidered the exegetical assumptions of many scholars with regard to several key problems emerging from the text of Genesis 4:6–8. While this study affirms the prior treatment of certain clauses, a fresh evaluation of others proved necessary. A summary of the new minority interpretation of the passage is as follows: Genesis 4:6–8 presents two harrowing scenes in which Yahweh’s intervening grace is ignored by Cain in his anger and dejection over an unacceptable sacrifice. Yahweh has provided a male animal in Cain’s doorway which waits in obedient submission for the offender to slay it for the purposes of atoning for his sin. Rather than correct his conduct before Yahweh by sacrificing the animal, Cain took no action

Scarlata, *Outside of Eden—Cain in the Ancient Versions of Genesis 4.1–16*, 111–14). A scribal addition to the MT here is not surprising given that the LXX-Torah on the whole evidences frequent divergences—two to three times as many attempts to harmonize like narratives than SP, often by adding text which is not understood to pertain to the original Hebrew Vorlage (see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012], 82; 136 n. 227, 229). SP as an authentic Hebrew witness is not without its differences to the MT, registering more than 6,000 grammatical changes, among which are some significant semantic (ideological) changes (see *Ibid.*, 75, 87–88; also see Bryan Murphy, “Genesis 1:1–2:3—A Textual And Exegetical Examination As An Objective Foundation For Apologetical And Theological Studies” [Th.D. diss., The Master’s Seminary, 2008], 59 n. 9). The presence of the “missing” phrase in either LXX or SP therefore does not constitute an objective textual or contextual challenge to the MT reading.

⁵² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 106. HALOT, 1086; Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, eds., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 877 (hereafter referred to as BDB). The idea may be that Cain rose over Abel in a stance permitting him a violent advantage. The verb קוּם is used of both standing and rising up to attack (cf. Num 23:24; Deut 22:26; 32:43; Ps 68:1).

⁵³ הָרַג is used of bloody violence by individuals—intentional murder. See BDB, 255. This verb differentiates from the “murder” of the Decalogue, Exod 20:13, רָצַח, in that רָצַח also includes unpremeditated homicide (HALOT, 1283). See Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 230.

⁵⁴ So David W. Cotter, *Genesis*. Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 42. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 230 adds that envy and jealousy must be at the center of Cain’s emotional decision. No textual clues in the narrative, however, suggest either that the brothers were aware of each other’s offering, or that they discussed Yahweh’s responses toward them when they spoke. The text’s reticence leaves such insights unresolvable.

whatsoever. Rather, at some point after speaking with his brother Abel about an unknown topic in the field, he violently attacked him and ruthlessly killed him.

The passage is a theological treasure house, displaying divine condescension toward a sinner with otherwise no recourse for restoration. At the opportune time, God Himself extended the offender grace by means of a “re-do sacrifice.” Cain, however, would not accept this grace by slaying the animal. Ultimately he rose up and killed the wrong object—his brother Abel.

Further investigation on the narrative in verses 3–5 may shed clearer light on the reason(s) for which Cain’s offering was not done well and led him to fall from Yahweh’s favor, as well as how the divinely presented animal of verse 7 would serve as the means to reverse Cain’s spiritual condition. New Testament references to this narrative also await further study in order to provide much-desired insight as to the dynamics of the relationship between the brothers from verses 3–8. Among the questions to raise: (1) Hebrews 11:4—In what way was Abel’s sacrifice better, obtaining righteousness for himself? (2) 1 John 3:12—What made Cain’s deeds evil, and what was the dynamic interplay which led to murder? (3) Jude 11—What does it mean to “go the way of Cain?” and thus to one’s destruction?