

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [1]



What Did They Quarrel About? (Insights into Genesis Rabbah 22: 7)

Background to Our Story: The Biblical Narrative: Genesis 4:1-9

¹ Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gained a male child with the help of the Lord." ² She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. ³ In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil; ⁴ and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord paid heed to Abel and his offering, ⁵ but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. ⁶ And the Lord said to Cain,

"Why are you distressed,
And why is your face fallen?"

⁷ Surely, if you do right,
There is uplift.
But if you do not do right
Sin couches at the door;
Its urge is toward you,
Yet you can be its master."

⁸ Cain said to his brother Abel ... and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ The Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

? Look carefully at Genesis 4:8. *What piece of information is missing in verse 8?*

Midrash: Transforming a problem into an opportunity

What did they quarrel about?

(Insights into Genesis Rabbah 22: 7)

"And Cain spoke to Abel his brother," etc. (Genesis 4: 8). *What did they quarrel about? "Come," they said, "let us divide the world." One took the land and the other the movables. The former said, "The land you stand on is mine," while the latter retorted, "What you are wearing is mine." One said: "Strip"; the other retorted; "Fly [off the ground].'* Out of this quarrel, "Cain rose up against his brother Abel..."

Rabbi Joshua of Siknin said in Rabbi Levi's name: "Both took land and both took movables, but what did they quarrel about? One said, 'The Temple must be built in my area,' while the other claimed, 'It must be built in mine.'" For thus it is written: "And it came to pass, when they were in the field." Now, 'Field' refers to nothing but the Temple, as you read, Zion [i.e. the Temple] shall be plowed as a field (Micah III, 12)¹ Out of this argument, 'Cain rose up against his brother Abel...'"

Judah ben Rabbi said; "Their quarrel was about the first Eve."² Said Rabbi Aibu: "The first Eve had returned to dust. Then what was their quarrel about?" Said Rav Huna; "An additional twin was born with Abel, and each claimed her. The one claimed: 'I will have her, because I am the firstborn', while the other maintained 'I must have her, because she was born with me.'"

? How can you summarize in one word the three rabbinical answers to the question: *What did they quarrel about?*

Bonus ? *Our text attempts to answer the question "What did they quarrel about?". What is the big question our text isn't interested in answering?*

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! Nothing has changed since the dawn of humanity and yet....

! Knowing who started the fight usually doesn't help to put an end to it.

¹ Cf. Pesachim 88a.

² V. Supra, XVIII, 4. Th., however, thinks it unlikely that the reference is to the Eve mentioned there, but thinks that in the Midrashic view there was yet another.