

Commentary on Genesis (3)

The Story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4.1 - 5.1a)

4.1 - 16. The Sin of Cain TABLET III continued

It is quite clear that this section once existed separately from Genesis 2-3. The immediate and lasting change from 'Yahweh Elohim' (Lord God) to 'Yahweh' (Lord), after the almost pedantic use of the former in the previous narrative, suggests this, as does the rather abrupt way in which the connection is made between the two accounts. The account is in covenant form being built around two covenants, so that there were originally two 'covenant' histories, that with Cain and that with Lamech, but as the former at least was in the days before writing it would have been remembered and passed down among the Cainites in oral form, not just as a story but as sacred evidence of a covenant with God. Later the covenant with Lamech would receive similar treatment. Thus the record in 4.1-16 originally stood on its own. Remembering this can be basic to its interpretation. It is too easy to read it as though it was simply a direct continuation of chapter 3.

On the latter assumption it is regularly assumed that Cain and Abel (Hebel) were Adam's first two sons, but that assumption is made merely because of the position of the present narrative. There is no suggestion anywhere in the text that this is so, and had Cain been the firstborn this would surely have been emphasised. It demonstrates the reliability of the compiler that he does not say so.

Thus in another record we are told 'when Adam had lived 130 years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters'. This is in ['the histories of Noah'](#) (Genesis 5.1 - 6.9). We note that in this section there is no mention of Cain and Abel, even though Cain is still alive (for Seth was born after Abel - Genesis 4.25), and if we did not have chapter 4 we would have assumed that Seth was the firstborn. The reason for this is that chapter 5 wishes to put the emphasis on Seth because he is the 'father' of the line that leads up to Noah. All Adam's children other than Cain, Abel and Seth are always totally ignored, probably because no reliable information about them had been passed down.

Two points emerge. One is that Adam and Eve had 'other sons and daughters'. Notice that that is a refrain that follows the birth of each son mentioned in the line. It is of course possible that each son mentioned in the line was a firstborn son, but there appears to be nothing apart from the phrase that suggests so. Probably, in the list in Genesis 11, Arpachshad is not the eldest son, for in 10.21-22 he is listed third out of five, yet the list in chapter 11 gives no hint of this. Thus the phrase 'had other sons and daughters' is stressing the patriarchs' fruitfulness, not saying that the patriarch in question had had no previous children before the one mentioned. In Genesis 5 it is the line leading up to Abraham that is being emphasised.

Adam was 130 years old when he bore Seth (if we are to take the age literally, and even if not it certainly means 'of good age'). It is extremely unlikely then that before that date he would only have had two sons (compare the fruitfulness of Cain (4.17)). It would therefore be reasonable to assume that before that date Adam and Eve also had other sons and daughters, and one of them may have been the firstborn.

The story of Cain and Abel specifically acts as the background to God's covenant with Cain, and speaks of the first shedding of man's blood. This is why it was recorded and remembered. But, as has been often noted, it does in fact assume the existence of daughters of Adam (Genesis 4.17) and of other relatives, for Cain says 'whoever finds me will kill me' (4.14). So

Cain and Abel should be seen as two among many sons, mentioned simply because of the incident that occurred, not because of their priority. They were not the only ones on the earth at the time.

(Note: Furthermore it must also be considered that they (and Seth) may not actually have been direct sons of Adam and Eve. The Bible (and other ancient literature) often refers to someone as being 'born of' someone when the former is a descendant rather than the actual son (this can be seen by comparing genealogies in the Bible, including the genealogies of Jesus). It could well be that the depiction is made to stress the connection of Cain and Abel with Adam by descent.

The ancients were not as particular in their definitions of relationship as we are. They would find no difficulty in saying 'so and so bore so and so' when they mean 'the ancestor of so and so'. Indeed, this narrative must have been originally put into Hebrew when Hebrew was a very primitive language, and words would have had an even greater width of meaning than they had later, and would not at that stage have been so closely defined. As T C Mitchell in the New Bible Dictionary (1st ed.) entry on Genealogy comments - 'the word 'ben' could mean not only 'son', but also 'grandson' and 'descendant', and in like manner it is probable that the verb 'yalad' could mean not only 'bear' in the immediate physical sense, but also 'become the ancestor of' (the noun 'yeled' from this verb has the meaning of descendant in Isaiah 29.23)'. The main thing that militates against this interpretation here is 4.25 where Seth is regarded by Eve as replacing Abel, but even this may have been put on her lips as having been 'said' by her through her descendant who bore Abel and Seth).

As the compiler of Genesis 1.1 to 11.27 (which probably once existed as an independent unit) had no other suitable information with which to link the expulsion from the Plain of Eden with the genealogy of Seth, and as he wished to depict the growth of sin, he used this narrative about Cain and Abel, which would have been especially preserved by the Cainite line because of the covenant. It was possibly the only one available to him which would enable him to emphasise the beginning of the new era, as well as to demonstrate how one sin leads to a worse one, until at last it results in murder. He has two strands in mind. The line of Adam's descendants up to Noah, and the growth of human wickedness from rebellion to murder, to further murder, to engaging in the occult, which result in the Flood.

We shall now look at the record in more detail.

4.1 'And the man knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain (qayin from the stem qon), saying, "I have obtained (qanithi from the stem qanah) a man with Yahweh."'

'Knew' is a regular euphemism for sexual intercourse. Eve's words are interesting. Notice that she does not say 'I have borne a child' but 'I have obtained a man'. There may possibly be the thought here that here is someone to help them with their hard labour (the birth of a boy in agricultural areas in many Eastern countries is still looked on as a special joy because he will be able to share the work burden), compare Genesis 5.29 where Lamech rejoices in Noah's birth because he will help with the work. It may even emphasise that she felt she had already had too many daughters and had wanted another son.

'Cain' - 'qayin' - later meaning spear. It may be that his mother was hoping he would be a hunter to bring meat to the family and that the original word translated qayin meant a throwing instrument of some kind. Instead he becomes a hunter of men. But in Arabic 'qyn' equals 'to fashion, give form'. Thus it could mean 'one formed'.

'With Yahweh' - this is an unusual use of 'with' ('eth'). We must probably translate 'with the help or agreement of Yahweh', the point being that she feels that this is one more step in her

reinstatement, which is with Yahweh's approval. Akkadian 'itti' is used with this meaning as is sometimes the Hebrew 'im ('with' - 1 Samuel 14.45). It could thus mean 'in participation with', acknowledging that Yahweh gave life in conception. For this idea see Psalm 139.13, 'for you formed (qanah) my inward parts'.

There is an indirect play on words between qayin and qanah but it is not drawn out, and there is no similar word association with Abel. (The original account would be passed down in a primitive language. The translator is seeking to express the pun in his translation as best he can).

4.2 'And again she bore his brother Abel (Hebel). And Abel was a keeper of sheep while Cain was a worker of the ground.'

Abel was a keeper of 'sheep' (the word strictly means what we might call 'small cattle' i.e. including goats). We must not read into this the suggestion that he was a shepherd in its later 'advanced' form. The sheep and goats were there and he took an interest in them and herded them for clothing and milk, and possibly for food.

So God in His mercy had made available in the area animals that were not difficult to hunt down and were mainly placid. This raises interesting questions which were of no concern to the writer. Does this mean sheep and goats were eaten at this stage? In view of the fact that Abel offered them in sacrifice it would seem probable.

'Hebel' - 'Abel' - could mean a 'breath' or 'vapour', indicating man's frailty and unconsciously prophetic of the fact that he will have his life cut off before it is fully developed. It is often used to suggest the brevity of human life, see for example Psalm 144.4. But another possibility is that it is from a word similar to Akkadian 'aplu' and Sumerian 'ibila' meaning 'a son'. No significance is given to it in the account.

'Cain was a worker of the ground.' We avoid the word 'till' as being too advanced, but some kind of primitive assisting of 'herbs of the field' is in mind, possibly by tearing away the thorns and thistles, although it may only have in mind gathering the plants. Thus man is fulfilling his functions to have dominion over the animals (1.28) and to 'work' the ground (3.17-19). It has been suggested that the story reflects growing ill feeling between one who feeds animals from the ground (shepherd) and one who uses the ground for production (agriculturalist). Later times would see this as a common cause of antagonism, but this is not the idea behind the story here.

4.3 'And after a certain amount of time had passed Cain brought to Yahweh an offering of the fruit of the ground.'

The cereal offering was an acknowledgement of God's blessing and an expression of human gratitude. It would later be quite acceptable to God, so that there is no reason here to assume it was unacceptable here. It was what Cain had laboured for. Why then was it not accepted?

It is noticeable that Cain's offering is described very blandly in comparison with Abel's. There is no mention of the first fruits, and it is described as 'after a passage of time'. Thus there may be a hint that Cain's offering was somewhat half-hearted. And this gains backing from verse 7 where it is suggested that Cain has not 'done well', and has 'sin crouching at the door'. Certainly there appears to be the idea of a late and careless offering.

However, his not having 'done well' may also indicate a number of other factors. It could indicate his not having been so diligent over his work, which would help to explain a possible meagre level of production (see below), and indeed it may relate to his general behaviour and

attitude. What seems sure is that the problem was related to Cain's overall attitude of mind and heart.

4.4 'And Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.'

We are not to read into this any cultic requirements. The cult is not established until 4.26. It is specifically intended to bring out Abel's attitude of heart. His first thought was to show his gratitude to God, and thus he gave of his best. He gave of the firstlings of the flock, in other words he thought of God first, and he especially selected the best portions. This is in contrast with the abrupt way in which Cain's offering is described.

4.4-5 'And Yahweh had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.'

But how did they know that one was accepted and the other not? The answer would seem to lie in the fact that Abel prospered, whereas Cain was having a difficult time in some way. This would certainly explain why Cain was so angry. In the Old Testament prosperity is regularly seen as a sign of the approval of God.

4.5 'So Cain burned with anger, and his face fell.'

He was clearly extremely furious (the description is powerful), and the more he thought about it the more the anger showed on his face. No doubt he went about for some time with a face like thunder, and his anger grew and grew.

4.6-7 'Yahweh said to Cain, 'why are you angry, and why does your face express such disapproval? If you do well, is there not a lifting up? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door. It longs to grab you, but you must overcome it.'

We do not know how God communicated with Cain. Possibly it was in his heart. But Cain well knew, as we so often do when we would rather not, what God was trying to tell him. His problem lay in not 'doing well'. There was something wrong with his attitude and behaviour, and he knew it. Note how 'doing well' is compared with the value of worship in Isaiah 1.17 and Jeremiah 7.5. If a man does not 'do well' his sacrifice is unacceptable.

The phrase 'is there not a lifting up' is translated 'will you not be accepted' in RSV and NIV, understanding it as meaning a lifting up of the face and therefore an acceptance, but the verb when not qualified by other words usually means a lifting up of the spirits, and therefore probably here means 'will you not feel good?' Cain's very failure to feel good was, as God reminds him, because of his own behaviour. Thus he is promised that joy will return with obedience. Either way the assumption is the same in the end, the consciousness of being accepted.

Perhaps it was because he had not worked diligently that the produce had dwindled. Or possibly there was something else. But if he would but behave rightly, then his offering would be accepted, and he would prosper. But if he continued as he was, then sin, which sat couching outside his tent like a wild animal waiting for its prey (a vivid picture), would seize him and carry him off.

Right from the start then we learn that 'to obey is better than sacrifice' (1 Samuel 15.22 compare Isaiah 66.3). But Cain let his grievance fester in his heart until finally he came to his ultimate decision, and allowed sin to 'carry him off'. What an important lesson there is here for us. If we allow a grievance to fester in our hearts, who knows what it can lead to?

4.8 ‘And Cain said to Abel his brother, and when they were in the field Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.’

The passage appears abrupt and ungrammatical. AV possibly has it correctly when it translates ‘talked with Abel his brother’ although the actual phrase is as abrupt in Hebrew as we have translated it (compare similarly in Exodus 19.25). Alternately we may add ‘it’ (i.e. ‘told it to Abel’), signifying that Cain discussed his thoughts with his brother. We may then even see Cain deliberately taking his brother out to his ‘field’ where he grew the ‘herbs of the field’, so as to expatiate further, then, as he does so, being seized with murderous fury, possibly at something Abel says, and carrying out his dreadful act. There is no one more annoying to a sinner than someone who is in the right. Either way Cain takes his brother to the site of his grievance, and the dreadful deed was done.

Did he see this as a suitable place to show how he felt because it was its lack of growth that had infuriated him? Did he in his blind fury even see Abel’s blood as replacing the rain that had not come, or as a viciously conceived alternative ‘sacrifice’ basically saying to God ‘if you want blood, here it is’? Whatever his reason, for the first time of which we have a record a man’s blood is shed by his fellow kinsman. The eating of the fruit in Eden has indeed produced bitter fruit.

4.9 ‘And Yahweh said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?”’ The question parallels the ‘where are you?’ of 3.9. Again God is giving the man an opportunity to express his repentance. Cain’s reply demonstrates how far he has fallen. Unlike Adam and Eve he does not run to hide. He tries to brazen it out. ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s guardian?’ There is little remorse and something surly and unfeeling in what he says and the way he says it. The answer to his own question should, of course, be ‘yes’, as all the readers would immediately accept. But his use of the term ‘guardian’ demonstrates his sense of guilt. Why should he think that his brother needs a guardian?

4.10 ‘And Yahweh said, ‘What have you done?’ (compare 3.13. These parallels suggest that the story of the Garden of Eden was known to the original author in some form). ‘The voice of your brother’s bloods (literally) is crying to me from the ground.’

The plural for blood is intensive, referring to shed blood. It may also vividly suggest the different rivulets of blood that are staining the ground, sown by the ‘worker of the ground’. It is not said to be the dead body that cries out, but the blood soaking the ground. Is this ironically seen as Cain’s latest ‘offering’ of his fruits? And it is an offering of blood. By these words God makes clear that nothing is hidden from Him. Even the blood of a victim cries to Him in a loud voice, for the blood is the life, and the life belongs to him (Deuteronomy 12.23).

4.11 ‘And now you are cursed from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive the blood of your brother from your hand.’

What dreadful seed Cain has sown, and what dreadful consequences it will bring. Cain will no longer be able even to ‘work the ground’, that pitiful alternative to the fruit of the garden. He will be driven out into the desert to survive as he can. So as man’s sin grows, so do the benefits he receives from God decrease. Note that it is Cain who is cursed directly in contrast with the curse on the ground in chapter 3.

4.12 ‘When you work the ground it will no longer yield to you its fruit, you will be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth.’

He is to be banished to a place where the ground is totally unfruitful, driven as a consequence of his own sin. There will be nowhere for him to go, for his blood will be sought by the whole

family of men. The only safe place will be the 'land of wandering (nod)', the desert where nothing can be grown and a man must be constantly on the move in order to find food and water. This is confirmation that there are many children of Adam and Eve by this time.

4.13 'And Cain said to Yahweh, "My punishment is beyond bearing." '

Cain can only think of the consequences for himself of his sin. There is no repentance, only regret over what he has lost. How can he cope with a life of loneliness and wandering, ever afraid of every kinsman he meets? Living in terror that he will be hunted down in vengeance.

4.14 "See, this day you have driven me away from the face of the ground, and from your face I will be hidden, and I will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me."

He has lost his two most treasured possessions. The 'face of the ground' on which he has laboured, which has been his interest and has mainly looked kindly on him, and the face of God which has meant protection. Now his food has gone and his protection has gone. God will not look when men seek him out and kill him. He must for ever avoid the places where men dwell for fear of what they will do, for God will not watch over him or take account of his death.

'The face of the ground' clearly refers to cultivable ground, in contrast with the barren ground on which he must now live. It may well be a technical term for that land to which God had assigned man after his expulsion from the Eden (compare 'the place of Yahweh' - v.16).

Cain has slain a kinsman and knows that the family will not rest until he too is dead. Even at this stage 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth', man's natural sense of what is just and right, applies. But notice how he blames God. It is as though God is to blame for all that he faces, when it is mainly the consequence of his own wrongdoing. He shows not a jot of regret or sorrow for what he has done, he only regrets what it will mean for his future. How typical of the natural man in his approach to God.

4.15 'Then Yahweh said to him, "It shall not be so. If anyone slays Cain vengeance will be exacted on him sevenfold".'

Note that these words are in the form of a pronouncement. Cain is mentioned in the third person and not as 'you'. This is God's covenant, a unilateral covenant given in a theophany, that protects Cain and is the reason why the story was so vividly remembered and so carefully passed down. This is no promise made to Cain alone, but a public statement of Yahweh's intent. As such it would need to be communicated to the remainder of the family. So verse 15 is not so much the direct response of God to Cain but His final response in a theophany. Here we leave the scene of Cain's pleading before Yahweh and the theophany may well have taken place before important members of the family.

Notice the reference to 'sevenfold'. In antiquity seven meant uniquely the number of divine perfection and completeness. Sevenfold vengeance was the totality of divine retribution. So in exacting His justice, God yet again shows mercy. In the end it is He who will determine the sentence on Cain, and no one else.

We are so used to the fact that man's sin brings him into conflict with God, and that it is only through God's mercy that he is able to go on, that we do not realise what different ideas there were in the ancient world. There the gods were seen as mainly not too concerned with man's behaviour, unless it affected their interests, and their 'mercy' was purely arbitrary. Genesis is unique in constantly establishing this vital relationship between sin, judgment and mercy. (In

the translations 'Not so' is per the Septuagint, the Syriac and the Vulgate. The Massoretic text has 'therefore').

'And Yahweh put a mark upon Cain that whoever found him might not kill him.'

It is futile to discuss what kind of mark it was for we can never know. But it must have been something that was quite distinctive, possibly some distortion of the features or disease of the flesh, brought on by guilt, or possibly his hair went white or fell out through the greatness of his stress, but whatever it was, it was something that men would recognise and defer to. When they found him they would back away, for they would acknowledge the mark of God (this would suggest something very unpleasant or awe inspiring to the primitive mind).

4.16 'And Cain went away from the place of Yahweh, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.'

The land of Nod (nod = 'wandering') refers to the desert, the 'land of wandering'. Man moves ever onward, eastwards from Eden, driven by sin, getting further and further away from Paradise. Leaving 'the place of Yahweh' suggests that the writer has in mind that Cain has now lost even that place where food could be obtained, the place that Yahweh had allowed man (the 'face of the ground'? - v.14). Now he would have to search out for himself whatever he ate.

4.17-24. The Line of Cain

The following account was probably originally a second covenant record. It is built around the covenant recognised between Lamech and Yahweh, but in view of its reference back to Yahweh's covenant with Cain it may well have been conjoined with the previous record immediately. It is, however interesting to note that neither God nor Yahweh is directly mentioned in this section. 4.17 'And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch (Chanokh), and he established an encampment, and called the name of the encampment after his son Enoch.'

All this would take a process of time. First he obtains for himself a wife, one of the daughters of Adam. Did he kidnap her, or did the aura of mystery that surrounded him make her willing to leave everything to be with him? As a result of this he has a son, Chanokh, meaning 'dedication' or 'beginning'. He sees this as a new beginning which he dedicates, presumably to Yahweh, or at least to 'God'. Then he establishes his encampment, which he names after his son Enoch.

The word 'city' can later refer either to an encampment of tents or to a regular city (Numbers 13.19 and see v.20 below). It refers to people gathered together in some form of organised society. This may indicate that others who have offended against the family, or who were particularly adventurous and envied his life of wandering, may have joined him, or it may be that his setting up of some kind of shelter is seen as the first beginnings of what grows into a larger encampment, thus 'he built a city' means 'he established what would become a large encampment'.

4.18 The line of Cain is then outlined. In accordance with ancient genealogies only important descendants would be listed and the length of time to Lamech may have been considerable. The similarity to names in the line of Seth need not surprise us. They came of the same family roots and similarity of names is to be expected over time. The only name which is the same in both cases is Lamech, and the Lamechs are clearly distinguished. Besides we have here only the Hebrew forms of the names. Originally they would have been in some primitive language. Thus the similarity may be due to the translator's licence in order to suggest kinship.

The list is deliberately made up of seven names in order to show completeness and acceptability to God, for seven indicates divine completeness. It is noteworthy that whatever Cain's past there appears to be a determination to establish his family's continual trust in God - Enoch is 'dedicated'; some of the line include El in their names (in a name El can be short for God); seven, the divine number, are listed in descent, and Lamech appeals to Yahweh's covenant with Cain. Furthermore Mehujael means 'God blots out' while Methushael means 'man of God' (Akkadian 'mutu-sa-ili') suggesting a moving back to a conscious hope of acceptability before God. The fact that these covenants are incorporated into Genesis 1 - 11 show that some connection between the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth was established so that they were considered part of the family history. The former covenant would certainly have to be communicated in order to be effective.

4.19 'And Lamech took two wives, the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah.'

Here we have the first suggestion of someone having more than one wife. It may have been a boast to Lamech, but the compiler of the Genesis 1-11 epic probably saw it as another downward step in man's continuing fall.

4.20 'Adah bore Jabal, he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have domesticated animals.'

This is looking from the Cainite point of view. It may suggest that he invented the tent as opposed to more primitive shelters, but more probably that under him domestication of animals by the nomads of the line of Cain now began for the first time. Possibly, in view of Cain's actions, the domestication of animals had been taboo, but now at last they feel it is time the result of the curse was over.

(4.21) 'His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.'

The wandering life of the family would encourage the need for diversions. Perhaps he invented these musical instruments, or perhaps he was the first one to introduce them to the tribe. Either way he was remembered for it.

4.22 'Zillah bore Tubal-Cain, he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah.'

Tubal-Cain was the one who shaped metals. Mitchell (NBD) suggests that perhaps 'he discovered the possibilities of cold forging native copper and meteoric iron, a practise attested archaeologically from prehistoric times'. We do not know what Naamah (meaning 'pleasant') did but she must have been very outstanding or notoriously beautiful to be named at all.

Notice that three sons are named, as with Noah (5.32) and Terah (11.27), in their case instead of 'other sons and daughters'. Three was an indication of fullness and completeness (in ancient Sumerian literature the numbers three and seven were used almost exclusively because of their significance as meaning 'complete'). They may have had others but they are not named.

So Lamech's family built up an enviable reputation for invention from which the line of Seth would benefit. The Flood would wipe out their family but their inventions would be preserved and are remembered with gratitude. Yet probably the compiler considers that it brings out the contrast between these 'worldly' men and the line of Seth, conveying the lesson that achievement means nothing without obedience.

4.23-24 'And Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice, you wives of Lamech listen to what I say, I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me, if Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and seven fold".'

Lamech has killed a young man and claims that it was in self-defence. But he fears vengeance from the young man's family. Now he is claiming the protection of God. God had promised to avenge Cain, who did not act in self-defence, sevenfold. In fairness He must, if necessary, avenge Lamech seventy and seven fold. Thus does he lay claim to a covenant relationship with God, and to God's protection.

Yet it is noteworthy that he does not mention the name of Elohim or of Yahweh, nor does either appear in this section. This may suggest a deliberate avoiding of either name by those who are of the family of Cain, possibly because it was considered too sacred to name and as such taboo. Desert dwellers have often been the most religiously conservative. Interestingly such an indirect way of referring to God by using the passive tense is paralleled in the teaching of Jesus (e.g. 'blessed are the poor in spirit').

Some see this rather as a boasting song. They consider that he is exulting in having obtained vengeance over and above that which God would have allowed in respect of Cain. They thus see this as a further increase in the level of man's sinfulness. But while the idea is attractive and would agree with increasing viciousness and violence on the earth (Genesis 6.11), where however it is not limited to Cain's descendants), it does not tie in strictly with his words. Cain had not been avenged sevenfold, the vengeance was potential only, therefore Lamech is speaking of potential vengeance. Nor would it give his words the value of a covenant. And all these early records are in respect of covenants. It is always possible, of course, that it may have been preserved as a tribal assertion of superiority.

It is interesting to note that the intensification of sevenfold is 'seventy and seven' fold. In later times it would be 'seventy times seven'. This is an indication of the antiquity of his words.

4.25 - 5.1a The Birth of Seth

This section may have been written (from source material) specifically to connect the Cainite records with the following record of Seth's genealogy, and also to interconnect the Cainite records with chapters 2 and 3. This probably occurred at the stage when all these records were incorporated on a tablet as ['the book of the histories of Adam'](#).

4.25 'And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said "God (Elohim) has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain killed him."'

This is the first use of the name Adam without the definite article. Up to and including 4.1 it always has the definite article. (This suggestion assumes an acceptance, probably valid, that earlier prepositions were wrongly pointed by the Massoretes). This would confirm that the section is a connecting link, with usage different from the previous records, a usage introduced by the writer of the 'the book of the histories of Adam' (5.1) to whom Adam is now a proper name.

Adam appears as a name in tablets from Ebla in the third millennium BC and also in early second millennium Amorite sources, but not later (although these do not refer to the Biblical Adam).

The play on words between Seth and sath (appointed) parallels that with Cain. Possibly Seth is seen as especially important because he replaces the first man to die. He is the evidence that life will replace death. It may be this grave realisation that results in what happens next.

Note that Eve uses the name Elohim. In 4.1 she used Yahweh. This suggests that Eve has in mind here Elohim as Creator, producing life out of death, rather than Yahweh as the Covenant God (in the case of Cain she used Yahweh for she rejoiced that the covenant held).

4.26 ‘And Seth, to him was born a son and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of Yahweh.’

Enosh is another word for ‘man’. It stresses the frailty of man. The phrase ‘call on the name of Yahweh’ does not mean that men have not acknowledged Yahweh before, but that the worship of Yahweh was now regularised (compare 12.8; 13.4; 21.33; 26.25). Some kind of systematic worship was introduced. Thus from the beginning the systematic worship of Yahweh is clearly linked with the family of Seth. We notice the use of the name Elohim and the name Yahweh within two verses, with their distinctive emphases. The writer of the tablet wishes us to see that the two refer to differing aspects of one God.

We note also the contrast between the lines of Seth and Cain. Cain’s begins with fleeing for murder and ends with a plea for protection following a further death. Seth’s begins with the institution of official Yahweh worship, continues with a man who walks with God (Enoch) and ends with the man who walks with God (Noah). But we must note that it is only Noah and his family, not the wider family, who are saved from the Flood. (Some of ‘the sons and daughters’ must still have been around).

5.1 ‘This is the book of the history of Adam.’

This [colophon](#) would be at the bottom of the tablet indicating what the tablet was about. Notice the specific reference in this case to the fact that it refers to ‘a book’ (written record).