

מדרש

Midrash

Bereshit Rabbah 22:9

ON GENESIS 4:9

Cain's evasive response to God—"Am I my brother's keeper?"—is exposed through parables as a transparent lie, much like a thief caught with stained hands or a bleating goat behind his back; the evidence of the crime speaks for itself. The sages further note that Scripture uses "bloods" (plural) rather than "blood," teaching that Cain was held accountable not only for Abel's death but for the loss of all his potential descendants. Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai adds a bold, troubling image: Abel's blood cried out because his soul, newly severed from the body, could neither ascend to a Heaven never yet entered by a soul nor descend into a ground never yet used for burial, leaving it suspended upon the trees and stones—an unresolved cry for justice. AI SUMMARY

Rabbi Yehoshua of Sikhnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: It is written, "The wicked draw their swords [and stretch their bows to topple the poor and the needy, to slaughter those who are upright in conduct]" (Psalms 37:14). "The wicked draw their swords and stretch their bows" – this is Cain. "To topple the poor and the needy, to slaughter those who are upright in conduct" – this is Abel. "Their swords will come into their own hearts" (Psalms 37:15) – "restless and itinerant you shall be on the earth" (Genesis 4:12).

"The Lord said to Cain: Where is Abel your brother? He said: I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). "The Lord said to Cain: Where is Abel your brother?" This is analogous to a governor who was walking in the middle of a highway. He found a slain corpse with someone standing over him. He said to him: 'Who killed him?' He said to him: 'I am inquiring about him from you, and you are inquiring about him from me?' He said to him: 'What you have said is of no consequence.'

"He said: What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to Me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10). This is analogous to one who entered a garden, picked berries, and ate them. The owner of

the garden pursued him. He said: 'What is in your hand?' He said to him: 'There is nothing in my hand.' He said to him: 'But your hands are stained.'

So, Cain said to the Holy One blessed be He: "Am I my brother's keeper?" The Holy One blessed be He said to him: 'Wicked one, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying out..."' (Genesis 4:10). This is analogous to one who entered a pasture, abducted a goat, and held it behind him. The owner of the pasture pursued him. He said to him: 'What is in your hand?' He said: 'There is nothing in my hand.' He said to him: 'But it is bleating behind you.'

So, the Holy One blessed be He said to Cain: "The voice of your brother's blood..." Rabbi Yudan, Rabbi Huna, and the Rabbis, Rabbi Yudan says: "Your brother's blood [dam]" is not written here, but rather, "Your brother's bloods [damim]" – his blood and the blood of his potential descendants. Rabbi Huna said: "The bloods [demei] of Navot" (II Kings 9:26). "The blood of Navot and the blood of his sons" is not written here, but rather, "the bloods [demei] of Navot and the bloods [demei] of his sons" – his blood and the blood of his potential descendants. The Rabbis say: "For the blood of [the sons of] Yehoyada...he died" (II Chronicles 24:25) is not written here, but rather, "the bloods of Yehoyada" – his blood and the blood of his potential descendants.

Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai said: It is difficult to say it, and it is impossible for the mouth to enunciate it: This is analogous to two athletes who were standing and wrestling before the king. Had the king wished, he could have separated them, but the king did not wish to separate them. One overpowered his counterpart and killed him. He [the victim] was screaming and saying: ‘Who will demand justice for

me before the king?’ So, “the voice of your brother’s blood is crying out to Me from the ground.” It [Abel’s soul] could not ascend On High because no soul had ever ascended to there yet. And it could not go down [into the ground] and remain there, as no man had ever been buried there, so his blood was cast upon the trees and upon the stones.