

AT THE DOOR OF PARADISE.
A CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF GEN 4:7

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הלוא אִם־תִּשֵׁב שאת ואם לא

תִּשֵׁב לִפְתַּח הַמַּעַתָּה רֶבֶץ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁקָתוּ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשַׁל־בּוֹ

Some linguistic problems seem to overshadow the understanding of Gen 4:7, such as: the congruence of Gen 4:7 to the whole narrative; the misunderstanding of the gender agreement concerning the suffixed pronouns in relationship to their antecedent; the meanings of the word הַמַּעַתָּה generally translated as “sin” in Gen 4:7; the masculine participle of the verb רֶבֶץ “to lie stretched out, to couch”¹ in relationship with the feminine noun הַמַּעַתָּה; and the importance of the expression לִפְתַּח “at the door” to the whole narrative.

The purpose of this article is to attempt a meaningful translation of Gen 4:7 based on its contextual setting and against its Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) background. The understanding of the difficulties listed above is crucial for translating Gen 4:7. The data to be based on is the final literary form of the Hebrew text, rather than debatable discussions of source criticism and transmission of the text. Although I have perused all the material of which I was aware on this subject, I do not intend to present a summary of the historical interpretation of this passage.²

I have divided this article into . . . ee sections. The first section deals with the discourse linguistics of the text, which is the first linguistic problem listed above; the second section deals with the remaining linguistic problems listed above. The third section presents the parallel of

¹ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 296, 871.

² For further discussion on this subject see: M. Ben Yashar, “Sin Lies for the Firstborn” (Heb), *BMik* 7 (1963): 116-119; G. R. Castellino, “Gen 4:7,” *VT* 10 (1960): 442-445; M. S. Enslin, “Cain and Prometheus,” *JBL* 86 (1967): 88-90; S. Levin, “The More Savoring Offering: A Key to the Problem of Gen 4:3-5,” *JBL* 98 (1979): 85; E. Levine, “The Syriac Version of Gen 4:1-16,” *VT* 26 (1976): 70-78; L. Ramorosan, “A Propos de Gen 4:7,” *Bib* 49 (1968): 233-237; B. K. Waltke, “Cain and His Offering,” *WTJ* 48 (1986): 363-372; E. A. Mangan, “A Discussion of Gen 4:7,” *CBQ* 6 (1944): 91-93; A. Dillmann, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897); John Skinner, *Genesis*, in *International Critical Commentary*, vol. 1 (New York, N.Y.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, in *Anchor Bible*, vol. 1 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1987).

Paradise account (Gen 1-3) to later Levitical Sanctuaries and to its ANE mythological background.

I. The Congruence of Gen 4:7 to the Whole Narrative

A discourse linguistics of the text is appropriate at this point to clarify the literary congruence of Gen 4:7 to the entire pericope. I have divided this section into two parts. The first one is at the text level delineating the story according to the tagmemic model. The second part is at the sentence level following Both functional grammar.

Text Level

At the surface structure level of the text one can observe where this verse can be placed in the context of the entire pericope (4:1-16). I will delineate this as follows:

(1) The pericope lacks the **aperture** tagmeme.

(2) **Stage:** (Gen 4:1-2) The initial background clause *w [x] qatal*³ construction of Gen 4:1 (וַיֵּדַע אָדָם “and the man had known . . .”) marks the border of a new paragraph with a new setting and characters rather than a pluperfect construction.⁴ In this case even though אָדָם “the man” is signaled in the pragmatic position (P1), it is not a contextualizing constituent, for the author proceeds writing about Eve and her two sons, rather than about Adam “the man.” The implication here is: who was the firstborn? and no doubt was left about that matter (see 4:1). Therefore, in this case the *w [x] qatal* construction marks the beginning of a new paragraph besides signaling the pluperfect tense (Both, p. 89, he also recognizes this function for the *w [x] qatal* construction concerning Gen 4:1).

³The symbol [x] stands for a clause constituent such as subject, object, or any modifier in the initial position.

⁴ Randall Both, “Functional Grammar, Hebrew and Aramaic: An Integrated, Textlinguistic Approach to Syntax,” in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers*, ed. Walter R. Bodine (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 89: According to Both, “quite often in Hebrew narrative one encounters nouns in the P1 [pragmatic] position which do not provide specifically topical organization for the following clauses, but simply serve to set the clause off from the sequence of on-line foregrounded-continuity clauses. They are used as a discontinuity structure to break up and mark off time, paragraph, or episode divisions”; Peter J. Gentry, “The System of the Finite Verb in Classical Biblical Hebrew,” *Hebrew Studies* 38 (1997): Regarding discourse grammar and pragmatics Gentry argues that “the Sequential forms, *wayyiqtol* and *weqatal*, are employed to encode continuity or to foreground information in the discourse. By definition, the forms require initial position for the verb; hence the foreground of a narrative is the chain of events. Non-Sequential signals a break in the event-line indicated by both a clause constituent preposed to the verb and a different pair of verbs marking aspect and tense, that is, [x] *qatal* and [x] *yiqtol*,” 13 p.

Regarding Abel's and Cain's work, Gen 4:2 states that *ויהי הבל רעה צאן וקין היה עבד*, אדם "and Abel was a shepherd, but Cain had been a worker of the ground." The use of *w [x] qatal* construction (preperfect according to Zevit, p. 22), in this instance, indicates that Cain was an agriculturalist long before Abel had engaged in pastoralism.⁵ According to Niccacci, "if the author had continued [in Gen 4:2] the series of WAYYQTOLs, the two characters would have been introduced next to each other, like links in the same chain."⁶ The case here is different, the emphasis is on their contrast. Their type of earning a living plays an important role in the story, for it is from that that they brought their offerings.

(3) **Episode:** (Gen 4:3-7) It is introduced by the sentence *ויהי מקץ ימים* "and it happened in the course of time. . ."⁷ The contrast between Abel and Cain, initiated in the preceding tagmeme, continues here linking and developing both tagmemes—stage and episode—into a build-up of succeeding events that will culminate in the climax of the plot.

Notice Gen 4:3-5 *והוא הביא גם הוא* "And it was in the course of time, that Cain brought a gift for Yahweh of the fruit of the ground, but Abel also had brought (*w [x] qatal* construction, marking preperfect) from the firstlings of his flock. . ." In this case Abel was the one who brought an offering first and then Cain brought his. Thus the bitterness of Cain was even worse when he saw his younger brother's offering being accepted and his being rejected, even though he had more experience (in his work), was older, and above all was the firstborn (the legal future patriarch). These contrasting *w [x] qatal*

⁵ Ziony Zevit, *The Anterior Construction in Classical Hebrew*, The Society of Biblical Literature, Monographs Series vol. 50 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 15. "When the author of narrative prose wished to indicate unambiguously 1) *pluperfect*, i.e., that a given action in the past had *commenced and concluded* before another action in the past, or 2) *preperfect*, i.e., that a given action in the past had *commenced but not necessarily terminated* in the past prior to the beginning of another action, they employed a particular construction to express this sequencing, a type of circumstantial clause. . . The structure of these clauses is *we + S (subject) + qatal*. However, the necessary condition for their realization is a past tense verb, (*w*)*yqtl* or *qtl*, in the narrative of the preceding clause."

⁶ Alviero Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, supplement series vol. 86 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 31.

⁷ R. E. Longacre, *Joseph, A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Gen 37 and 39-48* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 70, 71: Longacre stated that "in general, [impersonal] *wayhi* with temporal phrase marks an episode break in Hebrew narrative prose," and "the introduction of any such temporal expressions into the streams of preterits can indicate a paragraph or episode break. . ." A. F. den Exter Blokland, *In Search of Text Syntax: Towards a Syntactic Text-Segmentation Model for Biblical Hebrew* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1995), 47: According to Blokland "expressions like *ויהי מקץ ימים* and *ויהי אחר הדברים האלה* are singled out as episode markers, because they are more regularly involved in marking paragraph or episode breaks than other cases of *ויהי* with temporal expressions."

constructions present background information fleshing out the succeeding climatic event.

Gen 4:6-7 may be classified as the pre-peak. It is a direct speech, a monologue involving Yahweh and Cain. Verse seven introduces the solution for Cain's loss of authority and hierarchic *status quo*. Cain's silence, however, shows his determination that is consumed in the peak of the plot, namely, fratricide (see 4:8).

(3) **Peak:** Gen 4:8 introduces the peak or climax. Cain put to an end the life of his rival for "his" firstborn right.

(4) **Post peak (episode):** Gen 4:9-10 introduces the descending final events of the story. Only here the silence of Cain is broken by words loaded with hatred, avoiding himself as the criminal.

(5) **Closure:** Gen 4: 11-15 contains a hortatory discourse (moral) describing the consequence of Cain's act.

(6) **Finis:** Gen 4:16 ends the pericope with the departure of Cain away from the door of Paradise.

The discourse linguistics of the entire narrative indicates that Gen 4:7 may be classified as a behavioral paragraph (pre-peak).⁸ As such, Cain receives an exhortation to correct his actions. This implied that he, Cain, should go back and follow after the similitude of his younger brother, which seemed to be too humiliating for Cain.

Sentence Level

Focusing now on verse seven, several elements of discourse linguistics can be analyzed at the sentence level in order to cast light on the understanding of this passage: (1) Since Gen 4:7 is a monologue involving two characters, both—speaker and listener—are living the event, consequently some elements of syntax can be taken as given, or, in other words, known by both, e.g., the subject is usually known and the predicate is the one that contains the new information unknown by one of the characters.⁹ In Gen 4:7 the noun חַטָּאת is known or accessible to Yahweh and Cain. This noun reactivates in Cain's mind what had just taken place

⁸The tagmemic model defines eight notional text-types: NARRATIVE (prediction and story), PROCEDURAL (how-to-do-it, and how-it-was-done), BEHAVIORAL (exhortation and eulogy, and EXPOSITORY (futuristic essay, and scientific paper). See David Allan Dawson, *Text-Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, JSOT Supp. Series 177 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 98.

⁹Wallace Chafe, *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), chap. 6, and pp. 85, 108, 145.

some time before (his noncompliance with the prescribed sacrificial ritual and the loss of his firstborn right), so there is no need for further specification of the subject.¹⁰ The participle רבץ introduces what possibly Cain was not aware of, or something that he was refusing to acknowledge. (2) For default, in an if-then conditional clause, the if-clause (protasis) introduces the condition (either negative or positive) and the then-clause (apodosis) the result of its protasis.¹¹ In Gen 4:7 this normal structure is broken. The protasis (negative) is found in the expected slot, but a nominal clause (לפתח חטאת רבץ) is introduced between it (the protasis וְאִם לֹא תַיִטִּיב, “but if you do not do right”) and its apodosis (וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ, “then his desire will be to you and you will rule over him”). Functionally, that break (the nominal clause) implies an indirect imperative.¹² In other words, “if you do not do what is right, fix it with the sacrificial offering lying at the door of Paradise, then his desire will be to you and you will rule over him again.” Thus the apodosis is the consequence of the implied indirect imperative rather than of its protasis, which would be the expected consequence. (3)

Regarding the inner structure itself of the nominal clause, the prepositional phrase (לפתח “at the door”) occupies the initial pragmatic position. The marking of this prepositional phrase may signal a contextualizing constituent, linking the entire conditional sentence to the topic of this pericope, namely, noncompliance with the ritual duty “at the door of paradise” and as a consequence the loss of the firstborn right.¹³ The feminine noun חטאת, however, seems to be the focus of the sentence and not the contextualizing constituent. It is due to the fact that חטאת implies a correction of ritual procedure, which is the focus of the entire conditional clause (or

¹⁰Jacob Neusner, *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 36: A common linguistic device used in the Mishnah, which is a text transmitted by oral tradition, regarding cognitive units as completed statement of thought is that “in which the subject of the sentence is cut off from the verb, which refers to its own subject, and not the one with which the sentence commences, e.g., he who does so and so. . . , it [the things he has done] is such and such.” In this case Gen 4:7 may be translated as “a purification-offering. . . it is lying down at the door [of Paradise].”

¹¹For further types of conditional clause, regarding discourse linguistics, see Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb*, 138.

¹²Regarding functional grammar and pragmatic, Both states that “a statement like ‘It’s cold here’ may function as an imperative ‘Turn on the heater.’” Both, 79.

¹³“In FG [Functional Grammar] a topic is a constituent of a clause that has received a special marking (either by word order, a special particle, or intonation, depending on the language) in order to signal the intended perspective for relating the clause to the larger context. A topic (contextualizing constituent-C.C.) does not need to be the subject of a sentence, and a topic (C.C.) is functionally as distinct from focus as day from night. Its purpose is to help the listener understand how and on what basis some sentences are grouped together” (Both, 84).

the entire pre-peak).

These elements of discourse linguistics show the congruence of verse seven to the entire narrative and support a sacrificial sense for חַטָּאת rather than that of a “demon” or “sin” ready to devour its victim.¹⁴

II. Grammatical and Syntactical Analysis of Gen 4:7

Several grammatical elements of verse seven and their syntactical function are of extreme importance for the understanding of Gen 4:7. They are presented as listed in the introduction to this article.

A. The Suffixed Pronouns and Their Common Antecedent

The common antecedent of the suffixed pronouns attached to חַטָּאתוֹ “his/its desire” and תְּמַשְׁלֵנוּ “you shall rule over him/it” is not found in Gen 4:7.¹⁵ The suffixed pronouns are masculine and the only probable antecedent implied by some translations of the Hebrew Bible¹⁶ is the noun חַטָּאת .¹⁷ This noun, however, is feminine and consequently does not agree with both masculine suffixed pronouns.

The most feasible place to find the antecedent of the suffixed pronouns is in the context of Genesis four. An overview of the first part of this chapter (vs. 1-7) shows that Cain was the firstborn. He supposedly should be the priest, leader, and the future patriarch, so to speak,

¹⁴ If the focus is to be translated as “sin” or “demon,” then it would not fit the development of the episode that builds up into the climax with the topic of “noncompliance with the prescribed ritual and the loss of authority (firstborn right).”

¹⁵ All English translations were made by the author unless the source is indicated.

¹⁶ See for example: NRSV, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it”; NKJV “if you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it”; João Ferreira de Almeida, “Se ben fizeres, não haverá aceitação para ti? E se não fizeres ben, o pecado jáz à porta, e para ti será o seu desejo, e sobre ele dominarás”; L. Alonso Schökel and Juan Mateos, “Por qué te enfureces y andas cabizbajo? Ciertamente, si obraras bien, seguro que andarías con la cabeza alta; pero si no obras bien, el pecado acecha a la puerta. Y aunque viene por ti, tú puedes dominarlo”; Cipriano de Valera, “Como, no serás ensalzado si bien hicieres: y si no hicieres bien, no estarás echado por tu pecado á la puerta? Con todo esto, á ti será su deseo; y tú te enseñorearás de él”; Martin Luther, “Ist’s nicht also? Wenn du fromm bist, so kannst du frei den Blick erheben. Bist du aber nicht fromm, so lauert die Sünde vor der Tür, und nach dir hat sie Verlangen; du aber herrsche über sie.”

¹⁷ Francis Brown, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon [BDB]* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1979), 308.

of Adam's clan. By his noncompliance with the sacrificial ritual, he may have lost his firstborn right,¹⁸ causing his anger toward his brother Abel. Therefore, the most probable antecedent for both suffixes, him and his, would be the only masculine noun that fits in the literary flow of the plot of Gen 4:1-16, namely "Abel."¹⁹

B. חַטָּאת

The second linguistic problem is the ambiguous word חַטָּאת, which has been usually translated by "sin" in Gen 4:7. It has, however two basic meanings, namely, "sin" and "sin-/purification-offering."²⁰ The application of one or the other meaning will depend, exclusively, on the context of the specific passage where the word is located.

Several points in the text indicate that חַטָּאת conveys a sacrificial sense. According to Jacob Milgrom, חַטָּאת should be translated as "purification-offering" rather than "sin-offering" in passages related to ritual sacrifice. He stated that,

morphologically, it appears as a Pi'el derivative. More importantly, its corresponding verbal form is not the Qal "to sin, do wrong" but always the Pi'el (e. g. Lev 8:15), which carries no other meaning than "to cleanse, expurgate, decontaminate" (e. g. Ezek 43:22, 26; Ps 51:9). Finally the "waters of *ḥaṭṭat*" (Num 8:7) serve exclusively a purification function (Num 19:19; see Ezek 26:25). "Purification-offering" is certainly the more accurate translation. Indeed, the terse comment of Rashi (on Num 19:19) is all that needs to be said: "*ḥaṭṭat* is

¹⁸Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. David A. Hubbard (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987): "Though the eldest son had certain legal privileges (see, e.g., 25:32; 27:1-40; Deut 21:15-17), the biblical narrative regularly show God's choice falling on the younger brother (e.g., Isaac not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; Ephraim, not Manasseh; David, the youngest son of Jesse). Already in this verse, then, there are hints that Abel is the elect younger brother," p. 102.

¹⁹J. Oscar Boyd, *The Octateuch in Ethiopic*, in *Bibliotheca Aethiopia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1909), 10: The Ethiopic version has two MSS, C and G, with an additional word to the text, which is not found in the LXX or MT. The additional word is *la'ēḥuka* "of your brother" after *megebā'ehu* "his returning." It may imply that they--the scribes of MSS C and G--understood that the masculine suffixed pronouns go back to Abel; John W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, *Septuagint and Cognate Studies* n. 35 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 55: Wevers says, concerning the Septuagint text (Wevers uses Gen for Septuagint), that "the nearest credible masculine (or neuter) singular antecedent would be Ἰβελ. If that is what Gen [LXX] meant then this is a promise of reconciliation; Abel will come back to you and you will (once more) exercise rule over him."

²⁰For the various meaning of חַטָּאת see David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 198.

literally the language of purification.”²¹

Milgrom argues for two types of זָבַח regarding its ritual purification. One is for general impurities and the other for sins of inadvertencies.²² He distinguished these two types by the following characteristics:

The inadvertent offender is never called “impure” and hence requires no ablutions. In this case the concluding formula reads, . . . the priest shall perform the purification rite . . . that he may be forgiven (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35) whereas for the impure person the formula reads, . . . the priest shall perform the rite of purification. . . and he(he) shall be clean (12:6, 8; 14:9, 20). Thus the impure person needs purification and the sinner needs forgiveness.²³

The writer of this narrative (Gen 4:1-16) seems to know very well the levitical regulations regarding sacrificial ritual. Therefore, he could very well classify Cain’s fault, though in an embryonic state regarding the elaborated levitical system, as a sin of inadvertency. Consequently Cain needed a זָבַח for his forgiveness, as implied in verse seven.

Further evidence for a sacrificial meaning for זָבַח is that the context of the first part of chapter four (vs. 1-7) pictures a ritual background indicating that the most probable sense for זָבַח is “purification-offering” rather than “sin.” The Septuagint seems to follow this line of thinking:

Since the general context is that of offering sacrifices, Gen [LXX] puts a cultic interpretation on the first part of the verse. By taking זָבַח in the sense of raising a sacrifice and by rendering כִּי־כִשְׁרָה adverbially, the translator comes out with “if you should sacrifice correctly.” This contrasts with $\delta\epsilon\ \mu\grave{\eta}\ \delta\iota\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\eta\varsigma$ “but you should not correctly divide,” i. e. divide or cut up the sacrifice. Gen considered Cain’s sacrifice unacceptable to God, because he had not performed the sacrificial ritual correctly.²⁴

Thus, verse seven presents the solution for Cain’s mistake. He could offer a זָבַח offering, with the sense of obtaining forgiveness for his fault, and then the desire of his brother would be toward him, and he would have the preeminence as the firstborn again.

²¹ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, in *Anchor Bible* vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 253; see also idem, “Sin-offering or Purification-offering?”, *VT* 21 (1971): 237-239.

²² Jacob Milgrom, “Two Kinds of *Haṭṭat*,” *VT* 26 (1976): 333-337.

²³ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 256.

²⁴Wevers, 55.

C. רבץ

The masculine participle רבץ, meaning "lying down, resting, reposing"²⁵ is a further evidence for taking חטאת as a sacrifice. It is a cognate form of the Akkadian word *rabāṣu* "to lie down, to lie" and the Ugaritic word *trbṣ* "stable, stall, sheepfold."²⁶ Some scholars, however, have personified this participle as the "croucher" or "demon" based on the Akkadian participle *rābiṣu*.²⁷

The use of this participle in the Pentateuch does not allow the interpretation of it as a "demon" (Gen 49: 14, Ex 23:5, Deut 22:6). The participle רבץ is used in relation to sheep (Gen 29:2), leopard and goat living peacefully together (Isa 11:6), and it is used in a figurative manner referring to a person being compared to a sheep (Ps 23:2), or to people as sheep (Ezek 34:14); in another instance it is applied to a flock or sheepfold (Isa 13:20). Only once out of thirty instances in the OT is this word used in the sense of a ferocious beast (Gen 49:9). It may imply that a purification-offering, whether a ram, goat, or any male animal employed for sacrifice, was lying down or resting at the door of Paradise. Thus the masculine gender of the participle רבץ refers directly to the gender of the male sacrificial animal for the purification-offering rather than to the feminine noun חטאת (cf. Lev 4:4; 4:23). This may solve the problem of gender disagreement.

In addition to that, verse seven presents a rebuke and a prescription to correct Cain's fault in performing the ritual required. He should offer a male animal "of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions" as Abel did (ומכלבהן צאנו ומחלבן, Gen 4:4) and not "from the fruit of the

²⁵ BDB, 818; Koehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, ed. by Johann Jakob Stamm (Leiden: J. E. Brill, 1990), 1102: "die Sünde ist ein Lauerer, die Sünde lauert."

²⁶ Koehler-Baumgartner 1958, 871; BDB 918; Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, Bd 2 M-S (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972), 933, 935: For *rabāṣu* he has "sich lagern," and for *rābiṣu* "der lagert, lauert"; John Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 176: He casts some doubts on the word *rabāṣu* as being an Akkadian loan word. For him it could well be a Ugaritic native word (*trbṣ*) meaning "stable" or "sheepfold" found in some legal documents e.g., *Ē-tu₄: ta-ar-bā-si u Ē-tu₄ GUD^{meš} a-na ša-šū-ma* "the stable and the cattle-pen are likewise his," (PRU 3 91f.:17).

²⁷ Speiser, *Genesis*: "Now the stem *rbṣ* in Hebrew signifies 'to couch.' A pertinent noun is otherwise unattested in this language, but is well known in Akkadian as *rābiṣum*, a term for 'demon.' These beings were depicted both as benevolent and malevolent, often lurking at the entrance of a building to protect or threaten the occupants," p. 33; Koehler-Baumgartner, 1958, 871: for the same opinion see also Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Mercer, 1997), 44.

ground" (מפרי האדמה, Gen 4:3).²⁸

D. לפתח

For a better understanding of the expression לפתח, chapter four should be interpreted in the light of the entire Paradise account (Gen 2:4-3:24). In the biblical antediluvian account, Paradise is pictured as a sacred place where sin cannot abide. Thus after disobedience, Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden. Nevertheless, Yahweh made provision for them, preparing garments of skin to cover their nakedness, implying that animals were slaughtered (Gen 3:21).²⁹ It might be an indication of a sacrifice, the first of the Genesis account. Probably that sacrifice was offered at the door of Paradise, for the gate of the Garden is pictured in the literary plot as the border between the sinful and sinless worlds. It was the place of separation between Yahweh and His creatures, the closest place where fallen creatures were allowed to come near to the tree of life (Gen 3:21-24).

Notice that there are indications in the text of the presence of Paradise in the plot of Genesis four. It seems that Gen 4:1-16 was intentionally placed between two citations of Paradise. Chapter three ends with the cherubim guarding the way, the gate of Paradise, which leads to the tree of life. While Gen 4:16 mentions the direction Cain went after having killed his brother, based on the geographical localization of Paradise, "Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod east of Eden" (4:16, NIV). Between the two citations of Paradise, Cain and Abel's pericope is introduced, raising the pitch of suspense in the narrative at its height; for Cain's disobedience took place at the gate of Paradise.

Further evidence for the presence of Paradise in Cain and Abel's pericope is that Gen 4:1-16 presents a parallel literary structure to Gen 2:4-3:24:³⁰

²⁸There are many instances in the Old Testament in which the word קטאת is associated with a sacrificial animal; "bull of the sin-offering" Lev 4:9, 20; 8: 2, 14; 16:6, 11, 27; Ezek 43: 21; 45:22, calf of Lev 9:8, goat of Lev 9:15; 10:16; 16:15, 27; Num 18: 22; 29: 22, 28, 31, 34, 38; Ezek 43:25, goats of 2 Chro 29:23; Ezr 8:35. See David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1996), 199.

²⁹ Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, JSOT vol. 96 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 46.

³⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*: Wenham acknowledges this parallel literary structure in his commentary; he stated "in determining the character of the stories in chapter [4:1-16], a comparison with Gen 2-3 is most instructive. Structurally, thematically, and verbally there are close parallels between the Cain and Abel pericope (4:2b-16) and the Garden of Eden story in Gen 2-3," p. 99; A. J. Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links between Gen 4:1-16 and Gen 2-3," *JETS* 23 (1980):297-305; Hauser also recognizes the existence of the parallel between Gen 4:1-16 and Gen 2-3.

Chaps. 2:4-25 (in Paradise) = 4:1-2 (at the door of Paradise)

Chaps. 3:1-22 (disobedience in Paradise) = 4:3-15 (disobedience at the door of Paradise)

Chaps. 3:23-24 (departure from Paradise) = 4:16 (departure away from the door of Paradise)

Therefore, Paradise has its role in the plot of Gen 4:1-16. It is clearly implied by mentioning the Garden of Eden as the literary boundaries which indicates the beginning and the end of the events narrated in Gen 3:24-4:1-16, and by the parallel structure between the narratives of Adam and Eve's disobedience in Paradise and Cain's disobedience at the door of Paradise.

III. ANE Background of Gen 4:1-16

Since the Old Testament was not written in a cultural vacuum, the evident parallel between the Paradise account and later Levitical Sanctuaries fits the ANE religious and mythological backgrounds. This parallel is presented below followed by its relationship to the ANE religious and mythological beliefs that are analogous to that of Gen 1-3 (and 4). The sole intention of this section is to make the reader aware of the existent parallel between both traditions, rather than a study *per se* of these relationships.

A. Paradise and Later Levitical Sanctuaries

It is not my purpose to present an exhaustive study on the analogy between Paradise and the Levitical Sanctuary, for it has already been noticed by many.³¹ My only concern is to show that this analogy existed, and that this is important for the understanding of the narrative of Genesis four.

The vocabulary and the narrative description of the events in Gen 4:1-7 indicate that the writer was aware of the levitical ritual. The evidence from the text supports this statement:

(a) The narrative presents Cain and Abel as knowing the sacrifice requirements; what to

³¹ The Book of Jubilees identifies the Garden as the site of the Temple, the abode of God (Jub 8:19); Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood, Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, eds. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994): According to Wenham "the garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a place of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is, a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many of the features of the Garden may also be found in later sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary," p. 399: For further comparison of the Garden to the Sanctuary see Gary Anderson, "Celibacy or Consumption in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden," *HTR* 82:2 (1989) 121-148; and Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 144-164.

bring, how to perform, and where to do it.

(b) The vocabulary of Gen 4:1-16 alludes to later cultic ritual. For instance, the verb "to bring" (וּבֵא, he brought, Gen 4:3) is used in cultic passages for the offering of sacrifices (Lev 2:2, 8); the word מִנְחָה (Gen 4:3, 4), according to Milgrom, indicates usually cereal-offerings (Lev 2:7),³² but in some rare instances מִנְחָה can consist of animals (Gen 4:7; 33:10; 1 Sam 2:17, 29); the term "firstborn/firstlings of his flock" (מִבְּכֹרֵת צֹאנוֹ, Gen 4:4) is also used in levitical contexts (Lev 27:26; Num 18:17); the fat of a sacrificial animal was to be burned on the altar "and of their fat portions" (וּמִחֻלְבָּהֶן, Gen 4:4, and also in Lev 1:12; Num 18:17); the word "accepted/ lifted up/ forgiven" (שָׂאֵה, Gen 4:7) has something to do with the whole process of reconciliation between two parties (Gen 50:17; Ex 32:32; Num 14:18); the most clearly levitical feature, however, is the phrase "at the door . . ." (לְפֶתַח, Gen 4:7). A similar expression to לְפֶתַח is used many times in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (without the preposition ל) referring to the Sanctuary's door, and to the location where sacrifices were offered before Yahweh at the entrance of His abode;³³ and the usage of the word קִטְּפָה (Gen 4:7) as purification-offering.³⁴

(c) Another sanctuary imagery is the supernatural presence of cherubim at the east side of the Garden (Gen 3:24), which is the same geographical orientation of the entrance of the levitical tabernacle with "the front to the east" (Ex 38:13).³⁵ Several passages in Exodus indicate a similar supernatural presence at the door of the Sanctuary. Emphasis by the author:³⁶ Ex 33:9, "When

³² Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 197.

³³ In 44 instances it is associated with מִעַד אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד "the tent of meeting." See for example: Ex 29:4; 29:11,32,42; 33:9,10; 35:15; 36:37; 38:8,30; 39:38; 40:5,6,12,28,29; Lev 1:3,5; 3:2; 4:4,7,18; 8:31;14:11,23; 15:14,29; 16:7; 17:4,5,6,9; 19:21; Num 3:25,26; 4:25,26; 6:10,13,18; 10:3; 11:10; 12:5; 16:18,19,27; Deut 31:15 etc. For further examples see Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1981), 1197.

³⁴ For further comparison of vocabulary between Gen 4 and Gen 2-3 see: M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 367-408; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 174; C. L. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976); D. J. A. Clines, "The Tree of Knowledge and the Law of Yahweh," *VT* 24 (1974): 8-14; M. Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord, The Problem of the Sitz in Leben of Gen 1:1-2:3," *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de H. Cazelles* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 501-512.

³⁵ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored* (Tyler: Reconstruction Press, 1958), 29: Chilton has also noticed the parallel between later sanctuaries and the Garden of Eden regarding the orientation of their entrance.

³⁶ Wenham, *Sanctuary Symbolism*: Regarding the cherubim he stated "that the entrance of the garden was guarded by *kerubim* is another indication that it is viewed as a sanctuary, for *kerūbîm*, Akkadian *kuribu*, were the traditional guardians of the holy places in the Ancient Near

Moses entered the tent, the **pillar of cloud** would descend and stand **at the entrance** of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses”; Ex. 33:10, “When all the people saw the **pillar of cloud** standing **at the entrance** of the tent, all the people would rise and bow down, all of them, at the entrance of their tent”; Num. 12:5, “Then the LORD came down in a **pillar of cloud**, and stood **at the entrance** of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward” (NRSV).

The entrance of the sanctuary was the place where the offerer would bring his sacrificial offering before the Lord to be placed on the altar, which was located in front of the door of the tent of meeting.³⁷ A. M. Cooper and B. R. Goldstein have recognized the developmental stages of the importance that the entrance to the tent of meeting (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד) had in Israel’s history. The first two stages suffice for our purpose; in the preliterary background “the entrance to the clan chieftain’s tent is the site of occasional theophany of the clan’s ancestral deities”; in the Mosaic era “the entrance to the Mosaic אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד is the one legitimate site of occasional theophany.”³⁸ Although I partially agree with their argument regarding Israel’s religious development, they should not have overlooked the stage that preceded Israel’s history as a nation. If one takes the entire Pentateuchal narrative into consideration then an earlier stage should be placed before the preliterary background. This earlier stage would be found in the narrative of the antediluvian account where the entrance to the Garden was considered as the site of occasional theophany.

Thus the vocabulary of Genesis four and the narrative description of the events conclusively support the existence of a parallel between the Paradise account and later sanctuaries. Consequently, the door of Paradise was regarded, in the biblical antediluvian account, as the most sacred place for offering a sacrifice, the sacred gate that led to the place where Yahweh dwelt on earth, and as the center of religious activities as depicted in its parallel in the ANE

East,” p. 401.

³⁷ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 147: “The word *petah* refers either to the opening of a structure or to the space outside and in front of it. Thus the *petah* of the house (14:38; Gen 19:11; Deut 22:21; 2 Sam 11:9) and the *petah* of the gate (1 Kgs 22:10; 2 Kgs 7:3; Ezek 46:3) designate--in these cited instances--the area immediately in front of the opening (N.B. 1 Kgs 22:10, where the *petah* of the gate is designated as the *gōren* “the threshing floor”). Thus the whole courtyard from the entrance of the courtyard to the entrance of the tent was accessible to the layman. It is there that he was directed to perform certain vital acts with the animal sacrifice, in preparation for the altar ritual of the priest.”

³⁸ Alan M. Cooper and Bernard R. Goldstein, “At the Entrance to the Tent: More Cultic Resonances in Biblical Narrative,” *JBL* 116 (1997): 212.

mythology.

B. Ancient Near Eastern Background
of Gen 2:4-4:16

According to the *Sumerian epic of paradise*, Sumer is depicted as a region with a garden called *kùr-dilmun* that can be rendered by “Mountain of Dilmun,” where animals and humans lived together peacefully.³⁹ The Sumerians regarded the land of Dilmun as the garden of Paradise and the center of religious activity of Sumer, whence the water-god Enki ruled mankind and in whose temple he revealed his secrets.⁴⁰ Thus in ANE mythology Paradise is associated with the abode or shrine of the deity.

An analogy to this belief is seen in the Old Testament (OT) by the use of the expression “Mountain of the Lord,” which is found in Isa 2:3, “Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the Mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob . . .’” (see also 2 Sam 21:6; Mic 4:2; Zach 8:3, NRSV). The expression “Mountain of the Lord” is clearly analogous to the abode of Yahweh, his house-temple, as the “Mountain of Dilmun” is the equivalent for the abode of the water-god Enki.⁴¹ Therefore in both traditions—OT and the *Sumerian epic of paradise*—the terms Paradise, Mountain and Sanctuary refer to the same respective institution, namely, the abode of their deity. Thus Genesis account on Paradise finds echo in the ANE religious-mythology.

³⁹ James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 37-41.

⁴⁰ S. Langdon, *Sumerian Epic of Paradise, the Flood and the Fall of Man*, The University Museum Publication of the Babylonian Section, vol. 10, n. 1 (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1915), 14; E. A. Speiser, “The Rivers of Paradise,” in *Oriental and Biblical Studies: Collected Writings of E. A. Speiser*, ed. J. J. Finkelstein and M. Greenberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967): Regarding the geographic place of Paradise Speiser stated that “the biblical text itself contains two semantic trailmarkers that point unambiguously to the land and lore of Sumer. One is the geographic term Eden, which hardly can be separated from Sum.edin ‘plain.’ The other is the *eḏ*’ of Gen 2:6, the term for the ground water that first irrigated the land. Whether one derives the word, with W. F. Albright, from id ‘river,’ or from a.de.a (AKK. *eḏū*) ‘ground flow,’ its origin would be Sumerian in any case. Near the head of the Persian Gulf lay the celebrated Dilmun which, as Kramer has shown, was ‘the land of the living,’ a place that knew neither sickness nor death, a garden of the gods—or in a word, Paradise,” p. 26.

⁴¹ Wenham, *Sanctuary Symbolism*: Concerning the verb *hithallek* “to walk to and fro” (Gen 3:8) Wenham stated that “the same term is used to describe the divine presence in the later tent sanctuaries in Lev 26:12, Deut 23:15, 2 Sam 7:6-7. The Lord walked in Eden as he subsequently walked in the tabernacle,” p. 401.

IV. Conclusion

Consequently, the literary setting of Gen 4:7 is of a ritual environment that finds a parallel in later sanctuary imagery and also in the ANE mythology. Verse seven fits perfectly into the literary development of the narrative (Gen 4:1-16) and its contextual translation can be made by placing together all pieces of the linguistic puzzle discussed above: “. . . a purification-offering [a male sacrificial animal] lies down at the door [of Paradise], and to you will be his [Abel's] desire and you will rule [again as the firstborn] over him [your brother].”