

Torah Talk for Bereshit 5777      Genesis 1:1-6:8

Gen. 4:1

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?”

Gen. 4:7

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.**”

Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, 208 [1944/1961]

This is one of the most difficult and obscure biblical sentences... [Akk. *rabitsu* = “demon.”]

Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 298-299 [1974/1984]

No satisfactory explanation of these two verses [vv. 6-7] has been proposed as yet ... The structure of the verses has the effect of a foreign body on the context. One must reckon with the possibility that this piece does not belong to the original... One expects here something to balance שאת, but it is lacking. Instead there follows a sentence which is incomprehensible: “At the door (lit. towards the door) a crouching one, (the) sin.” All explanations or attempts at emendation of the text have failed. It must be admitted that the text is very corrupt. A particular difficulty is that רבץ is masculine, which חטאת is feminine.

**IBN EZRA:**    **Sin couches at the door.** Some commentators take this to mean “Your sin”—that is, your transgression, matching the masculine verb—“couches at the door of the grave, on the day of judgment.” **Its urge is toward you.** The masculine suffix would then have to mean not “its” but “his”—Abel’s—obedience is toward you. “Why are you distressed that I accepted Abel’s offering? He obeys you as if you were his master.”

Westermann: All explanations mentioned take it that Gen 4:7 describes sin as a demon—one that lies in wait at the door. But this is very unlikely, first, because it is difficult to imagine such personification (demonizing) of sin in so early a text and, second, there is nothing like it anywhere in the Old Testament.

Baruch J. Schwartz, “Yom Ha-kippurim: The Biblical Significance”

<http://thetorah.com/yom-ha-kippurim-the-biblical-significance/>

Temple-purification was extremely important among ancient Israel’s neighbors as well. Impurity was feared because it threatened the gods as well as their temples. Elaborate rituals were employed to rid these temples of demons and to prevent their return.

לְפֶתַח חַטָּאת רָבִץ

e-mail: [torah@earthlink.net](mailto:torah@earthlink.net)

iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/torah-talk/id291683417>

web: <http://mcarasik.wordpress.com/category/podcast/>

RSS feed: <http://feeds.feedburner.com/TorahTalk>

Unless otherwise identified, English translations are from *Tanakh* by permission of the Jewish Publication Society.