

Each brought an offering appropriate and normal to his given situation in life. Cain brought from the "fruits of the soil" which may have seemed to be an appropriate offering since God had provided all vegetation to produce food for man (Gen 1:29). Cain "worked the soil" (4:2) which was a responsibility God had previously assigned to man (cf. 2:15; 3:17-19). In his relationship with God he must have considered it essential to acknowledge God by bringing an offering from the abundance of that which the soil had produced.

Abel brought an offering from his flock. Divinely given was the mandate for man to rule over fish, birds, and every living creature (Gen 1:26,28). Since Abel was a herdsman he brought an animal sacrifice.

The gifts brought by Cain and Abel are identified by the Hebrew word *תְּנוּנָה* or offering.² There is no mention of expiation or indication that the shedding of blood in Abel's sacrifice had special merit as it did for the Israelites later.

The offering of Abel was divinely favored. The offering of Cain was rejected, with Cain keenly conscious of God's displeasure. Textually the reason seems to be indicated in the character of their offerings. The selection each made from their respective resources reflects the contrast in the characters of Cain and Abel. In his commentary H. Stigers points out that Cain brought "some of the produce of the ground" while Abel offered "some firstlings of his flock, even the best ones."³ It is apparent that Abel was concerned about selecting the best that God has provided as an offering while Cain merely took "some of the produce" reflecting an attitude of merely meeting the minimum of what might be expected. He did not have enough respect or reverence for God to bring him the best as an offering.

That his relationship with God was affected by bringing this kind of an offering is immediately apparent in the subsequent developments. Cain was chagrined and angry.

When Cain was divinely warned about his attitude he ignored God's advice and murdered Abel. He deliberately acted against better knowledge. Very likely his indifference toward God and what God expected of him was expressed in the quality of his offering prior to this act of murder in defiance of God's warning. Abel by contrast expressed his gratitude, love and respect for God by offering the best available.

The bringing of an offering was vital in the time of Cain and Abel in maintaining a genuine relationship with God. Brought in an attitude of reverential worship the offering made by Abel was pleasing to God. Looking back to this divine-human relationship the author of Hebrews recognizes that it was not the offering itself but the faith of the offerer that was basic and vital in Abel's relationship with God (Heb 11:4).

Delitzsch⁴ pinpoints the basic reason concerning the difference in the offerings when he asserts that "Abel's thanks came from the depth of his heart, whilst Cain merely offered his to keep on good terms with God." Consequently it was not the essence of the sacrifice that was important but the dedication of the heart reflected in giving the best to God.