Another Look at Cain: From a Narrative Perspective

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In the Hebrew primeval histories names often carry significant weight. Much etymological rigour has been exercised in determining many of the names within the Bible. Some of the meaning of these names appear to have a consensus among scholars; among others there is less consensus and more contention. Numerous proposals have come forward with varying degrees of convincing (or unconvincing as the case may be) philological arguments, analysis of wordplays, possible textual emendations, undiscovered etymologies from cognates in other languages, or onomastic studies detailing newly discovered names of similarity found in other ancient Semitic languages. Through these robust studies, when applicable, we can ascertain the meanings of names that may help to unveil certain themes or actions of a character within a narrative.

For most of the names within the primeval histories of Genesis, the

meaning of a name is only one feature. For some names there is an encompassing feature set: wordplay, character trait and/or character role, and foreshadowing. Three of the four members in the first family in Genesis, Adam, Eve, and Abel, have names that readily feature all the elements listed above. Cain, however, has rather been an exception in this area, further adding to Genesis 4's enigmaticness in the Hebrew Bible's primeval history. While three characters (Adam, Eve, and Abel) have names that (1) sound like other Hebrew words, that are (2) suggestive of their character or actions and (3) foreshadow or suggest future events about those characters, the meaning of Cain's name does not render itself so explicitly to his character or his role in the narrative, at least not to the same degree of immediate conspicuousness. In examining the names of Genesis 4:1-16, I will highlight the most pertinent and compelling arguments made by scholars and take it further by suggesting the meaning that provides meaningful foreshadowing and elucidates on Cain's overall character and actions in the narrative.

To this end, this paper will first examine the names of Adam, Eve, and Abel demonstrating 1) how each of their names have a specific meaning, 2) how the meanings of their names point to their own character and/or actions throughout the narrative, 3) how their names suggest a foreshadowing of each character's role within the narrative. After showing how all three names of Adam, Eve and Abel have the same feature set, I will then endeavour to apply the same method to the name of Cain.

Starting with Adam, his minuscule role in Genesis 4:1-16 disallows one to glean nearly anything about him, but then this pericope is more

concerned about Cain and his actions. We must turn to Genesis 2 where Adam plays a more prominent role to better understand his name. In Genesis 2, we learn that Adam was "formed by the LORD from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."[1] That Adam's name sounds similar to the ground (אָדָם from אֲדָמָה)[2] would not have been lost on the original hearers of this story. It has also long been readily perceived that Adam's name is also suggestive of his call-ing in Genesis 2:15 and 3:23 to work the ground/garden—classic Hebrew wordplay. It also foreshadows his return to the ground as it is stated clearly in 3:19 regarding the punishment the LORD sentences Adam with, linking Adam inescapably to the ground.[3]

Similarly to Adam, we must turn to a previous chapter to learn more about Eve's name. In a similar vein to Adam's name and its likeness to another word, Eve's name (חַוָּה) sounds like the Hebrew word for life (חָיָה). Her name is suggestive that she will play a very important role in procreation of human life, as it was Eve who bore the first children. The foreshadowing of this name is heavy. She is the mother of all mothers, the bearer of all bearers.[4]

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1) Genesis 2:7, unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotes are from the NIV.

2) A similar wordplay is found in Adam's words when he calls the newly created female "Woman" as she was taken from a man (אִשָּׁה from אִישׁ) in Genesis 2:23.

3) In comparing Cain to Adam, Victor Hamilton writes, "He [Cain] is a tiller of the soil (ʿōbēd ᵃdāmâ, lit., "a servant of the ground"), and so was his father both before his sin (leʿ obᵉdāh, 2:15) and after his sin (laʿabōd ʾet-hāᵃdāmá, 3:23). But the land that Adam tills in 3:23 and that which Cain tills in 4:2 is outside the garden. The trespass of ch. 3 brought with it no vocational change for Adam." Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17, NICOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 222.

4) Even though Adam is a participant in the conception of Cain, he is not mentioned at all

It has been pointed out by Cassuto that Eve's name also sounds like the Aramaic word for snake (הִיוְיָה). The suggestion is that as the serpent has been said to have seduced Eve, so did Eve seduce her husband.[5] However, regardless to how similar these might sound, immediately after she is named in Genesis 3:20 the text unambiguously states "because she would become the mother of all the living," not "because she too seduced Adam." If kept in context, applying serpent here is suspicious. Being mindful that stories were passed down orally before they were written down and that the Hebrew word for serpent in Genesis 3 (and everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible for that matter) is נָחָשׁ, this suggestion is specious at best. Furthermore, as noted by Richard S. Hess, "there is no trace of the Aramaic ḥwh" in Genesis, and "this sort of word play between two languages (Aramaic and Hebrew) requires caution, even where they are closely related linguistically, geographically and chronologically."[6]

In light of the above, I am in agreement with Hess as it is far more

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in the narrative surrounding the birth of Cain nor Abel, it is only Eve and she expresses the thankfulness to the LORD in her genealogy (even then, only for Cain). See Kathleen O'Connor, *Genesis 1-25A* volume 1A, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys 2018), 75.

5) Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on Genesis: Part 1 From Adam to Noah Genesis I-VI 8*, trans. Israel Abrahams; (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press/The Hebrew University 1998 [1961]) 170-171. See also Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPS Torah Commentary: Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 29; and for a survey of the onomastic options and etymologies related to Adam and Eve see Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 14-24.

6) Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11*, 22, parenthesis original. He notes that the Targumists were perhaps more aware of this than the original authors as the Targumists worked in both languages.

likely that the original authors and hearers would have based their wordplay on the language of the narrative. This resonates with most scholars as many point to Eve's name meaning or sharing similarity with life. That Eve's name sounds like life, and the proclamation by her husband that "she would become the mother of all the living" makes the meaning of her name a compelling fit. Future events in her life bolster this claim further as human life does continue from her as she bears children.

Though Adam and Eve are the opening characters in Genesis 4 as shown in verse 1 where Adam knew[7] his wife Eve, the focus leaves the couple and intensifies upon Eve. Concerning Cain she says, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man," a celebratory remark—a remark in which she is the first person to speak the name of the Lord.[8]

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7) The Hebrew word used here is "to know" (יָדַע) and is a well-attested euphemism for a sexual act often resulting in a child. "'Knowing' in the Bible is not essentially intellectual activity, not simply the objective contemplation of reality. Rather, it is experiential, emotional, and, above all, relational." Sarna, *Genesis*, 31.

8) Some have noted that this could be boastful. for a recent survey of some who acknowledge Eve as boasting, see Julián Andrés González Holguín's *Cain, Abel, and the Politics of God: An Agambenian reading of Genesis 4:1-16* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 76-80. However, after being forced out of Eden and the hardships guaranteed by the Lord in Genesis 3, it is doubtful. I agree with Brueggemann that "The name is given as praise to God," Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 56; see also Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary* (tans. by John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 289. Recently, O'Connor makes a similar claim: "her exclamation of joy at Cain's birth in collaboration with Yahweh underscores her participation in the creative life of the Creator," O'Connor, Genesis *1-25A 1A*, 77. Fretheim correctly notes that "her cry expresses no more a prideful boast than does that of the man," referring to "Adam's cry that woman was taken out of man" in Genesis 2:23." Terence Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New*

With regards to Abel the text simply states in v. 2 that "later she gave birth to his brother Abel." Abel is not called a son in this narrative, further highlighting his role in his relationship as a brother rather than progeny of Adam and Eve.[9] As Cain is the subject of this paper, I believe it would be beneficial to look at the name of Abel first.

On the surface, the name Abel has no immediate inherent wordplay like the names Adam and Eve do, that is, we cannot look to another word in the narrative. However, the scholarly consensus is that the wordplay is made available by the Hebrew word it sounds similar to. Gerhard von Rad correctly states that "an explanation of this name is not given, but everyone who hears it thinks of the other Hebrew word *hebel* ('breath,' 'futility') and takes this connotation as a somber allusion to what follows."[10] He readily observes the foreshadowing this name brings to the narrative. Westermann presses further: "Everything points to this name having been *formed in the context and course of the narrative*: he is the one who was murdered by his brother and so is called הבל = breath, nothingness."[11]

Interpreter's Bible (ed. Leander E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) 1.372.

9) Only Cain (Gen 4:2) and Seth (Gen 4:25) are called sons of Eve.

10) Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, revised edition, trans. John H. Marks (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1972), 104, parenthesis original. הבל can also mean meaningless as it is used several times in Ecclesiastes. However, Abel is not meaningless in this story, therefore breath is the better meaning for his name. For more on Abel's etymology, see Karolein Vermeulen's "Mind the Gap: Ambiguity in the Story of Cain and Abel" in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133 (2014) 29-42; Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* 27-8.

11) Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 292, italics mine. Westermann sees a further connection pairing it with the way "a human being as 'dust'; Gen 4 adds another aspect by using the

Therefore, Abel, whose name means "breath," has, like his parents, a very fitting name. With respect to Abel's unremarkable entrance into the narrative, there are no words of his parents "knowing" each other, no celebratory statement surrounding his birth. He is only to be ushered in by a wordless, breathless silence as he is quietly bought into the world. His name seems to foreshadow his brief and quiet role in the story—he never even speaks. His spilt blood cries out instead.[12]

It has been shown that Adam, Eve, and Abel have names that are linked to their roles within the narratives (or lack thereof in the case of Abel), as well as what would appear to be foreshadowing. Adam is created from the ground, tasked to work it, and (he and his line) will return to the ground from whence he came. Eve, more than just being alive, will bring life to the next generation. Abel, who is like a breath, is here and gone, as is attested by his limited role in the story. Contrariwise is Cain's name, i.e., at first glance it does not appear to have this kind of simplicity.

Many see the meaning of Cain's name as being derived from the words of his mother at the time of his birth: "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."[13] The verb "brought forth" (קָנִיתִי) has given translators no shortage of difficulty.[14] Though the NIV renders this

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name הבל. It looks to a person's contingency and nothingness and also to what can happen to those who live together in the human state," punctuation original.

12) Though others like Karolein Vermeulen have written to bring more significance to Abel's role in the story (and rightly so), it is undeniable that he is a minor character (Karolein Vermeulen, "Mind the Gap"). "In the text, Abel is dismissed while Cain is an embodiment of vitality," Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 56; see also Sarna, *Genesis* 32.

13) Genesis 4:1b.

verb "bought forth," it typically means "to get" or "to acquire."[15] It is further complicated with the addition of "with the help of the LORD" (אֶת־יְהוָה).

First, it should be determined whether אֵת here is the marker of a preposition or a marker of the accusative, this will aid in how one translates קָנִיתִי. Lamentably, the *BDB* lists Genesis 4:1 as an example for both.[16] Von Rad makes plain that אֶת־יְהוָה "cannot be understood as accusative, but is still best taken prepositionally."[17] Most scholars and Bible translations agree.

Keeping with the consensus of scholarly opinion that אֵת is to be translated prepositionally, the second difficulty is in the typical rendering of אֶת־יְהוָה to "with the help of the LORD." As von Rad states, "one must remember that otherwise *ēt* never means 'with the help of.'"[18] "Help" has been supplied in translations for this instance and this instance only. According to Sarna, אֵת "often has the sense of 'together with.'"[19] Westermann, in his masterful work, provides several exam-

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14) "Man" (אִישׁ) has also been problematic. it is never again used for a newborn or child. I am inclined to agree with Fretheim that "her words also refer to Adam's cry that woman was taken out of man (אִישׁ 'îš; 2:23); now the woman cries out that she produced an 'îš (the link explains the unusual use of this word for child)." Fretheim, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 1:372, parenthesis original.

15) Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 1111-1112.

16) See page 84 for the marker of the accusative and 86 for the propositional usage. Francis Brown, et al. *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors 1981).

17) Von Rad, *Genesis*, 103. However, outliers Martin Luther, Walter Kaiser Jr., Karl Budde, and Nahum Sarna see אֵת as an accusative. For Luther and Kaiser see Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 221; for Budde see Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 29; see also Sarna, *Genesis*, 32.

18) Von Rad, *Genesis*, 103.

ples in which others have tried to make sense of this wording and ulti-
mately concedes "with" is the best explanation. However, he notes that
"a definitive conclusion is not possible."[20] In taking seriously the argu-
ments from scholars above, I render אֶת־יְהוָה as "with the LORD."

With the clarification of אֶת־יְהוָה complete, we can now translate קָנִיתִי.
As shown above, קנה typically means to acquire or to obtain, however,
"*qānâ* can mean 'to create' or 'give birth,' particularly when God is the
subject."[21] A prime example is found in Psalm 139:13: "For you created
(קָנִיתָ) my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb."
Though the LORD is doing the knitting, it is happening in the mother's
womb—her role is not diminished. Eve is definitely not claiming to
have created alone in Genesis 4.[22] Granted the Hebrew קָנִיתִי is in-
flected in the first person singular, as provided above, the אֶת is
propositional. Whereas it is grammatically difficult to prove, Eve con-
ceptually reveals dual agency in her proclamation on the birth of her
first son. אֶת in this case is probably best defined as the אֶת of

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19) Sarna, *Genesis*, 32. This is perplexing as he seemed to view אֶת as an accusative marker,
as already noted in footnote 17.

20) Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 290-292. He says of Cassuto's translation ("I have created a
man equally with the LORD"), "This last explanation accords best with the context" 291.
Hamilton translates אֶת as "from" supporting it with the אֶת/עם parallel of Genesis 49:25,
but this parallel is not found in Genesis 4:1, see Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 221. This
difficulty is even known in the Targum Neofiti as it is translated "from before" see Martin
McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1, Genesis*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 64.

21) Christine Roy Yoder, *Proverbs* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville:
Abingdon Press, 2009), 94.

22) This idea of cooperation with the use of אֶת is shared with Delitzsche, see Westermann,
Genesis 1-11, 290.

collaboration.[23] This renders "I have created a man in collaboration with the LORD" as the most compelling translation. Therefore, as the LORD is a part of the creation of Cain, the other definitions "to acquire" or "to get" do not apply here.[24]

If it were not for the addition of "with [the help of] the LORD," I believe a narrative study of Cain's character being related to "acquire" would be fitting as Cain tries to "acquire" the LORD's look of favour on himself and his offering by seemingly eliminating the LORD's only other choice: Abel and his offering. Instead, he is acquired by sin. He acquires a punishment from the LORD for his action. He also acquires a mark to guarantee his safety from those who might wish to kill him. Interestingly, Abel is constantly underscored as Cain's brother, a brother that Cain might not have acquired but cannot seem to un-acquire either—even in death Abel is still Cain's brother.[25] In the end, this must be set aside for as evidenced above, Eve is the subject of קָנִיתִי, creating in collaboration with the LORD, making it unlikely that Cain's name has to do with acquiring.

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23) I am thankful for this insight that came from an email conversation with Dr. William P. Brown on 27 September 2020.

24) Cassuto notes, "In Biblical Hebrew, קַיִן *qayin* signifies a 'weapon', which has been given *form* by the craftsman (ii Sam. xxi 16)." He maintained, however, after reviewing all the possibilities regarding Cain's name that, "the conclusion to be drawn from all this is that the name of Adam's first son means: *a creature* [literally, 'a formed being']," Umberto Cassuto, *Genesis*, 198, italics and brackets original. For more on the meaning of קנה especially with other ANE cognates, see Cassuto *Genesis*, 199-202; and K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26* (The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 260-261.

25) Once in v. 2, twice in v. 8, and after Abel's murder twice in v. 9, and once in vv. 10 and 11.

It is possible that Cain's name acknowledges that he was created or formed, but it does not reveal much about his character as he neither creates nor forms, but rather destroys.

It has also been suggested by some that Cain's name could mean "smith" and perhaps has a link with the ancient people known as the Kenites, that Cain is the progenitor of that line. Though the *HALOT* indeed has a definition of קין as smith, this view loses plausibility as it was Tubal-Cain who was the first to be known to forge (לטש) six generations removed from Cain (Genesis 4:17-22).[26] This view is further eroded as in the Hebrew Bible a smith, or blacksmith is חרש, not קין.[27]

With regards to the Kenites, a nomadic tribe, what should not be forgotten is that only Cain was cursed with wandering, not his descendants.[28] Furthermore, Cain's descendants were wiped out by the flood (Genesis 7) meaning the line of the Kenites would have had to have come from the Sethite lineage. In Noah's time, however, "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time," Sethites included (Genesis 6:5). Only Noah

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26) *HALOT* 1097. Cassuto dismisses "smith" on the basis that it "is only one of the secondary and incidental connotations of words derived from the root קין *qayin*." Cassuto, *Genesis*, 182, italics original.

27) *HALOT* 358. A few instances have מסגר, however, it is not immediately clear what kind of smith they are, see *HALOT* 604.

28) For a list of reasons why Cain is not the ancient father of the Kenites, see Cassuto, *Genesis*, 179-182; Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11*, 26, 37-39; and Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield England: Almond Press, 1990), 87.

found favour and was righteous and blameless in Genesis 6:9. Neither his wife, sons, nor his son's wives share in this evaluation.

The Kenites enjoyed a positive relationship with the Hebrew people and were often written about favourably.[29] Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was a Kenite (Judges 1:16). Jethro kept Moses' family safe, and later brought them to Moses, and also worshiped with Moses and Aaron. He also gave sound advice to Moses for leading his people (Exodus 18). The honour that was to be bestowed upon Barak instead was given to Jael, Heber the Kenite's wife, for killing Sisera (Judges 4). Saul also showed great kindness to the Kenites as well, telling them to evacuate the land before the Israelite army went in (1 Samuel 15:6). One wonders why the Hebrew people, having a positive relationship with the Kenites, would have tied their existence to the first murderer.[30] It should also be noted that neither "smith" nor the Kenites reveal any significance about Cain's character or foreshadowing, certainly not to the degree of the names of the rest of his immediate family have in this narrative.

Another candidate could be found in the verbal from of קין meaning "to sing a dirge" or the derivative noun form קינה meaning "a funeral song, dirge."[31] This is rarely noted by scholars, with an exception of Matthew Schlimm, who notes it in his *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The*

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29) Cassuto, *Genesis*, 182.

30) "The Kenite tribe was treated with esteem and friendship by the Israelites, and it is impossible to suppose that the Torah accepted a story designed to denigrate it." Cassuto, *Genesis*, 182.

31) *HALOT* 1096-7.

Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis. He notes the *HALOT*'s definition of the dirge and adds, "It is striking that words closely related to death are quite similar to the name of the individual who brings death into the world."[32] Though this meaning certainly points to the foreshadowing of Abel's death it does not demonstrate the character of Cain. The text does not hint at or suggest his lament or even remorse over the death of Abel. Rather, Cain seems to ignore Abel after his death. This definition is also not suggestive of his role within the story. There is no song for Abel; the closest are the words of his mother when naming her new son, Seth. Moreover, Cain is not known for music. Like the first smith, the first musician Jubal is six generations away from Cain.

As seen above, the above suggestions to the meaning of Cain's name do not fit with the narrative, not in the consistently overt way that his family members do. The other members of his family have names that seem to foreshadow future events and their characteristics, but not Cain's. However, Cain's name, like his father's, his mother's, and his brother's, sounds like another word that more befits his role in the story.[33] This word is found later in the Old Testament.

In 2 Samuel 21, David is once again fighting against the Philistines. Four among the ranks of the Philistines in particular are brought to the forefront as "These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath" (2 Samuel

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32) Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 136.

33) Here I agree with Westermann's point concerning Abel's name and believe this rationale should be applied to Cain's name as well: "Everything points to this name having been *formed in the context and course of the narrative*: he is the one who was murdered by his brother and so is called הבל = breath, nothingness." Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 292, italics mine.

21:22).[34] The one that concerns us the most is Ishbi-Benob, for within the descriptions concerning his weaponry we see something interesting:

> And Ishbi-Benob, one of the descendants of Rapha, whose bronze spearhead weighed three hundred shekels and who was armed with a new sword,[35] said he would kill David (2 Samuel 21:16).

Reminiscent of Goliath and his armour and weaponry in 1 Samuel 17:4-7, this scene appears a mirror image. These passages are often compared, and it is easy to see why: both passages have a named opponent, both opponents appear to be giants, both desire to kill David, and their *weaponry* is described.[36] More specifically, Goliath's spearhead weighs six-hundred shekels, Ishbi-Benob's weighs three-hundred shekels. Though there is some issues in clarity in the Hebrew, such as "sword" is not found in the Hebrew, Tsumura finds that קֵינוֹ and whatever is being described as "new" in the Hebrew of 2 Samuel 15-16, "are weapons of some type."[37] The only item of importance to us is the spearhead as the Hebrew here is קֵינוֹ, and according to the *HALOT* it comes from קַיִן, meaning spear, and curiously is also the name of Cain.[38] It should be noted that it would impossible to know how wide-

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34) These men are described in 2 Samuel 21:15-22.

35) The word "sword" is not in the original Hebrew, only "new." the NIV supplies "sword" because in Hebrew the word "sword" is feminine and agrees with the adjective "new" in gender. See Frank Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Volume 3, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1992), 1058.

36) Although in Hebrew the details in the 2 Samuel verses are vague, there are clues.

37) David Toshio Sumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 298.

spread the usage of this word (קַיִן) was at any time among the Hebrew people, the typical word for spear in the Hebrew Bible being חֲנִית.[39] Nevertheless, as noted by Schlimm, "it may not be accidental that Cain's name has a homonym used in 2 Sam 21:16 to describe of the weapons with which Ishbi-benov intends to kill David."[40]

With the above mentioned in mind, we now return to our pericope to see how this definition fits the set pattern established earlier consistently. Like the other characters of this narrative, Cain's name sounds like another word, in this instance, "spear," and it would appear that this proposed meaning lends to contextual foreshadowing as well. Indeed, with the word play on spear in a narrative reading of Genesis 4, we arrive at a character description of Cain, a violent one.[41]

After the LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering and not Cain or his offering, "Cain was very angry, and his face fell" (Genesis 4:4-5). The Hebrew for angry here means "to be hot" (חרה). A red-hot spear pointing downwards (his face fell) poses little danger as spears are typically held upwards during an attack. There is, however, enor-

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38) *HALOT*, 1097. Curiously, Westermann, concerning the meaning spear, states, "קין occurs in 2 Sam 21:16 meaning a 'spear'; but no scholar understands it in this sense in Gen 4" Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 289. However, that is exactly as von Rad wrote some thirteen years before Westermann: "Cain, the name of the first-born, means 'spear,'" though von Rad does not elucidate any further. See von Rad, *Genesis*, 103.

39) *HALOT*, 333.

40) Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 136.

41) Though this is through my own observation of the Hebrew, I see that I am not the only one to have made this connection, though perhaps the only one to do so narratively. See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, 103; Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew*, 74; Cassuto, *Genesis*, 197.

mous potential for more danger. Cain's dangerous potential at this point is evidenced by the LORD engaging Cain in conversation (Genesis 4:6). Cain's anger is due to either he and his offering were not looked upon favourably or because only Abel and his offering were looked upon favourably, or perhaps both.[42]

The LORD is aware of Cain's anger and the potential danger surrounding it. In the one-way conversation the LORD asks, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?"[43] The LORD surely knows, but the LORD desires a relationship with the humans and asks questions the LORD already knows the answer to (Genesis 3:9, 11, 13). This allows the person questioned to speak, share their experience, and (hopefully) be honest with the LORD.

Here, Cain either does not respond or was not allowed the chance to respond to the LORD's questions. Whichever is the case, the LORD then asks, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:6-7a). The Bible does not unequivocally state that Cain has done something wrong. however, it suggests that he does know what is right; the LORD has given Cain reason to think about his future actions in a broader view. In the end, the LORD imparts Cain a warning: "But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:7b). The warning followed the by questions have the same affect: Cain needs to ruminate on his actions; there is more to stake than his feelings, regardless how justified

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42) The Bible never tells us how Cain knew that Abel and his offering were looked up on favourably by the LORD, and that he and his offering were not looked upon favourably.

43) Genesis 4:6.

or not. We know that unfortunately Cain does not conquer sin:

> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field."[44] While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him (Genesis 4:8).

Where the NIV has "Cain attacked his brother Abel," the Hebrew reads "and Cain rose up against Abel" (וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל). If we return to our spear wordplay, a spear that is raised up is now in attack position.[45] A spear pointed downwards is not ready for attack; one that is raised up is ready to deal a fatal blow by the one who wields it. As a spear is raised as an instrument of warfare to injure or kill an opponent, so has Cain risen up to attack and kill his brother.[46] Abel's role in the story, which is already quite limited, is almost over. For the first and the last time Abel speaks and is heard in this story; his blood cries out to the LORD. But his

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44) "Let's go out to the field" is not in the MT. Some English versions (NIV, NRSV and NET) supply this phrase perhaps leaning on ancient versions of the story found in the Septuagint, Vulgate, Samaritan Pentateuch, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and Targum Neofiti; the English versions have a footnote noting that it is not in the original Hebrew. Other English versions such as the NASB state, "Cain told his brother" with a footnote noting the Hebrew word is "said." For more on this aspect of whether Cain "said" or "told," see Pamala Tamarkin Reis, "What Cain Said: A Note on Genesis 4.8," in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27.1 (2002): 107-113.

45) I am aware that the text does not say whether or not Cain was angry when he attacked Abel, but it is safe to assume he was indeed still angry as there was no resolution prior to this fatal event. That this could be an accident is dubious.

46) "Although readers are never told the means by which Cain strikes down his brother (Gen 4:8), the fact that Cain's name sounds like an instrument of death does not bode well for Abel," Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 136.

role is over, the damage has been done—the spear has been thrusted.

In using "spear" as the meaning of Cain's name, we are able to add consistency to it, letting it have the same dimensions as with his other family members. Like Adam, Eve and Abel, Cain's name sounds like another Hebrew word, denotes his character, and also foreshadows an event in his future. Westermann states, "We are dealing with a personal name in 4:2-16 the immediate meaning of which is no longer accessible to us. What is said of this Cain can be derived only from the narrative of 4:2-16."[47] And we find that in this narrative Cain came to be an angry and a potentially dangerous person, so dangerous the LORD noticed and intervened by speaking to Cain about it. This is not to say that Cain is a spear any more than Abel is a breath, only that narratively we are able to take what we know about these words and apply them to the character of the person.

For centuries it has been pointed out that Abel can mean breath (or nothingness, vanity) and therefore elucidates his short role in the story, as can only be made sense within this narrative. If Cain means spear, it sheds light on his character and foreshadows his role in the narrative. A spear is a weapon, and like all weapons it has the potential for danger and can be used to such destructive ends such as murder. I believe the original hearers would have made the link between Cain and spear,

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47) Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 289. Two sentences earlier he similarly states, "Its meaning must be determined from the context in each case; it is not possible to give a meaning that covers all cases." As noted earlier, Cain's etymology seems to have something to do with forming, creating, smith, and spear. Therefore, קין does not have to encapsulate every one of these definitions all the time but will rather be determined within context.

much like scholars believe the original hearers would have linked Abel to breath. Taking Westermann's words for Abel and the meaning of his name, I should like to apply then to Cain: Everything points to this name having been formed in the context and course of the narrative. He is the one who had risen up and murdered his brother, and so is called קין = spear.[48]

주제어 Keywords

Cain, Qanah, Genesis 4:1-16, Acquired, Kenites

가인, 카나, 창세기 4:1-16, 얻다, 겐족

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48) The original quote being, "Everything points to this name having been formed in the context and course of the narrative: he is the one who was murdered by his brother and so is called לבה = breath, nothingness," Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 292.

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한글 초록

가인의 이름의 구연적 재검토

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창세기 앞부분의 고대 이야기에 등장하는 이름들은 가끔씩 인물들의 성격 뿐만아니라 그들에게 주어진 역활까지도 잘 보여준다. 이름의 의미는 음성학적으로 다른 히브리 단어와 비슷하기에 종종 언어유희로 그 의미가 해석되기도 한다. 때로 그 이야기 속에 담긴 이름은 그 개인의 성격과 역할을 예측하는 암시로 사용되기도 한다. 아담, 이브, 아벨은 음성학적으로 다른 히브리 단어들과 유사하다. 이런 언어유희는 각자 인물의 역할과 잘 어울릴 뿐만 아니라 따라서 창세기 설화에서 그들의 역할을 예측하는 암시로도 사용된다. 그러나, 가인의 이름은 수 세기동안 학자들 가운데 명쾌한 답을 주지 못했다. 이 논문은 가인의 이름에 관하여 이미 주장된 의미와 어원들을 재검토한다. 그의 직계 가족들의 이름에 담긴 의미에 근거하여 같은 방식으로 가인의 이름의 의미를 발견하고자한다. 즉 1) 유사한 히브리 언어유희를 검토하고 2) 그에 따른 이야기 속에서 가인이 가지고 있는 성격과 역활 3) 그리고 이미 예측되는 암시를 발견한다. 몇 가지 좀 더 유망한 주장들을 검토한 후에 이 논문은 가인의 이름의 의미에게 있어서"창"이 가장 적합한 의미를 가졌음을 제시한다.