

Prayer List

Gene
Veda
Judy
The Williams' Family
Ophelia

Services:

Sunday

Bible Class 9:00 a.m.
Assembly 9:50 a.m.
Assembly 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Pinole Tidings

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This Week's Question:

Who brought myrrh and aloes for the burial of Jesus?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

Manasseh - 2 Kings 21:18

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Abel

by Martin Pickup

“BY FAITH ABEL offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous” (Hebrews 11:4).

Abel, the first man ever to experience death, heads the list of Old Testament heroes in Hebrews 11. Yet, for the Hebrew writer, it was not the way he had died that made Abel so admirable, but the way he had lived. Abel was a man of faith. Unlike his faithless brother Cain, Abel demonstrated his faith by the sacrifice he offered to God. Abel's act of faith may have brought the murderous wrath of his brother down upon him, but it also brought him God's good favor and eternal reward.

Genesis 4 tells the story of Adam and Eve's two sons. “Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part, also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions” (4:2–4).

The Hebrew word for “offering” in these verses is *mincha*, a term commonly used in the Old Testament to refer to “a gift.” When speaking of a gift given to God, this word refers to a sacrifice. This sacrifice could be either a vegetable or animal offering (Leviticus 2; 6:15; 1 Samuel 2:17). It was burned on

an altar so that the smoke would rise up to heaven. In this way a man could “give” his gift to God.

Sacrifices were not always offered for the specific purpose of making atonement for sin. They could serve as an expression of the worshipper’s gratitude to God for His blessings. The latter seems to have been the purpose for the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, since the text says nothing about these being sin offerings. It would seem that both men sought to give God a gift in view of the fact that God had prospered them in their respective occupations. As a farmer, Cain’s gift to God was a portion of his crops. Abel, a herdsman, offered God a portion of his flock.

Though both men acted, God did not respond to each man in the same way. “And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard” (verse 5). The key question is this: why was God pleased with Abel’s gift, but not pleased with Cain’s gift?

A common explanation is that God wanted an animal sacrifice and not a vegetable sacrifice. Since Romans 10:17 says that “Faith comes from hearing ... the word,” it is assumed that God must have told Cain and Abel to offer an animal sacrifice. Abel obeyed, but Cain offered what God had not authorized.

Adherence to what God has authorized is certainly an important biblical principle, but there are several considerations which cause one to question whether this is the precise point being made in Genesis 4. The passage says nothing about God having previously specified animals as the proper offering. One must assume this to have been the case. It is true that, under the Law of Moses, the blood of animals was normally demanded when the worshipper was seeking pardon for his sins (see Leviticus 5:11 for an exception to this general principle); but the sacrifices in Genesis 4 do not appear to have been sin offerings.

It seems better to seek the explanation for God’s acceptance of Abel’s sacrifice in what is actually stated in

Genesis 4. The text says that Abel “brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions” (verse 4). Notice that Abel gave away the very best that he had. He took the best of his flock, burned it on an altar, and sent its smoke rising into the heavens. Abel offered God this special gift because he understood that God—though unseen—was the one providing him with everything he needed.

Cain, on the other hand, did not give God the very best of the crops he had harvested. The text says simply that Cain “brought an offering.” Cain did give God something, but he was unwilling to part with anything of special value. Cain’s gift was one of mere formality. It did not show a real recognition on Cain’s part that all he had harvested had come from God. Contrast this with the Law of Moses which commanded the Israelites each year to give some of the first-fruits of their crops to the Lord. They were to say, “I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which Thou, O Lord hast given me” (Deuteronomy 26:5,10). Cain’s gift demonstrated no real appreciation for what God had done for him. It manifested no real faith in God’s provision.

God wants Christians today to offer up sacrifices to Him. “And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Hebrews 13:16). The outward form of our sacrifices may not be like what Cain and Abel offered, but in our acts of kindness, and by sharing our possessions with those in need, we honor our God. We show that we recognize God as the unseen provider of all that we possess. We need to be willing to give God the very best that we have to give. We need to be willing to sacrifice what is of real value to us, knowing that God will always provide for us. As Paul told the Ephesians, “With good will render service ... knowing that whatever good thing one does, this he will receive back from the Lord” (Ephesians 6:7–8).

The writer of Hebrews said, “Though [Abel] is dead, he still speaks” (11:4) May Abel speak to the hearts of all of us and motivate us to emulate his faith.