

Genesis. That brief statement throws a flood of light on the antediluvian age, such as is nowhere else to be found. On reading it, we come to the knowledge of the fact that both Cain and Abel, the first-born of our race, were worshippers of the true God. They were not Atheists. They both recognized the presence of the living and true God, and acknowledged their obligations to worship Him. Cain, being a tiller of the ground, brought of the fruit thereof, probably a bouquet of flowers, or a basket of fruit, as an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, being a keeper of sheep, brought of the firstlings of the flock, as an offering unto the Lord. Nothing could appear more natural than this. It was natural that Abel, being a shepherd, should bring an offering of the firstlings of the flock which he had watched over with a shepherd's care; and it was equally natural, one should think, that Cain, being a husbandman, should bring an offering of the fruits of the ground which he had weeded, and watered, and dressed.

In these offerings, both seem to have recognised God as the Giver of all good, and as entitled to their homage and gratitude. But both were not accepted. What could be the reason of this? It is to be observed that in Abel's offering there was something more implied than a mere recognition of God as the Giver of all good. The offering of animal sacrifices implied that man is a sinner, and, as such, needs forgiveness of God: that this forgiveness could not be obtained of God without the shedding of blood, as "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin;" and further, that this shedding of blood should not be of man himself, but of another in his stead. All this seems to have been implied in Abel's offering. Hence we infer that those sacrifices which were afterwards offered under the Mosaic economy were only a continuation of that which had been from the beginning, and of which we have an example in the sacrifice offered by Abel. It is highly probable that God himself gave instructions to our first parents concerning the offering of sacrifice, so soon as he had revealed to them the promise of a Saviour who was to bruise the head of the serpent. It is generally believed that the skins of those animals with which they were clothed after the fall, were the skins of animals that were thus offered. And there appears to be some foundation on which to rest the belief. Animals were not then allowed to man for food, yet we know that before the flood there was a distinction between the clean and the unclean. This distinction could not have been made on account of their skins, or the use that was to be made of them, but simply on the ground of their fitness or unfitness for sacrifice. Nor is it at all probable that those animals whose skins were used for a covering to our first parents, were slain merely for their skins. The probability is, that they were slain in sacrifice, and their skins thus appropriated. For these reasons, we conclude that the offering of animal sacrifice must have originated in Divine appointment.

We are expressly told in the sacred narrative, that Abel offered a sacrifice of "the firstlings of the flock." It was a lamb of the first year, the choicest and best which his flock could yield. It was therefore a sacrifice of the same kind with that which was afterwards incorporated into the Jewish ritual, and which was required to be offered for the whole congregation of Israel on the great day of annual atonement. It is probable that the fruit which Cain offered was also the choicest or best which his garden or field could yield. And it, too, was of the same kind with that which was afterwards incorporated into the Jewish ritual, and presented as a thank-offering or meat-offering unto the Lord. Yet the inspired writer declares that "Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." How was this? Wherein lay the difference. The great difference lay in the fact that the one sacrifice was offered *by faith*, while the other was not. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin!" Such an offering as that made by Cain might do for a sinless being, but not for the guilty. Cain was a sinner, and his offering implied neither confession, nor contrition, nor faith in the promised seed, whereas Abel's offering implied all this.