



QUESTION: What does writer of the Hebrew letter mean when he tells us that the blood of Jesus speaks better things than the blood of Abel?



“THE BLOOD OF ABEL”

The text is from Hebrews 12; 24: ***“But you have come to... Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.”*** (R.S.V)

The first question we need to ask is; *“To which blood is the writer referring?”* Has he in mind Abel’s own blood, shed by Cain? Is he referring to the blood spilled by an act of murder, which God said, *‘spoke to Him’* that is, *‘cried out to Him from the ground?’* (Gen. 4:10) Or, is the writer referring to *the blood of the lamb* which Abel himself offered in an act of *sacrifice*?

Not The blood of Abel himself.

The notion that it was Abel’s own blood that *‘cried from the ground for vengeance’* or *‘for justice’* has sometimes been advanced by both preachers and teachers, but in doing so it has become an example of using a *fact* to draw a *false conclusion!*

That Abel’s blood was *‘heard to speak’* by God, is a fact, because that is what the scriptures tell us. But to claim that *‘Abel’s blood cried out to be avenged’*, is to make an unwarranted assumption, because there is not a word in the scriptures to suggest that Abel’s blood demanded vengeance, or cried out for justice.

However, this has not prevented preachers presenting their hearers with the neat, though inaccurate, theory that: *“The blood of Jesus speaks better things than the blood of murdered Abel, because whilst the blood of Abel cried out for justice, the shed blood of Jesus proclaims forgiveness!”* Only the last seven words in that sentence state the truth!

Consider Abel’s story once again.

This is the first example of sacrifice recorded in the Old Testament scriptures and it raises a number of questions.

1. How did Abel learn about sacrifice?
2. Why did he sacrifice a *lamb*?
3. Why was his sacrifice regarded by God as *‘more excellent’* (or *‘more acceptable’*) than the offering made by his brother Cain?
4. And what are we to understand when we read that Abel was *‘approved as righteous’*?

When we come to the time of Cain and Abel, sin had already destroyed the innocence and tranquility of the world in which our first parents had lived, and the first divinely pronounced sentences had already been passed on the guilty parties. Consequently, these two sons of Adam lived in a world in which the principle of sin was already active, and, therefore, it was a world which now needed *‘religion’*.

Originally, Adam and Eve had no religion. They built no altar; they offered no sacrifice and they needed no priest. The word *‘religion’* comes to us from the Latin *‘re-’again’*, and *‘ligo-’I bind’*. Hence, *‘religion’* is that which *‘binds back’* to God.

But, the first human pair needed none of these, since they had perfect, unhindered fellowship and communion with God. *‘Religion’* only became necessary when that relationship was destroyed.

How did Abel come to understand the need for sacrifice – and why did he offer a lamb?

The answer to the first question is given in the first two words of Heb.1:2: ‘By faith’. Rom.

10:17 states that '*Faith comes by hearing the word of God*'. If Abel offered to God '*by faith*', and if what he offered was adjudged '*excellent*' and he, personally, was '*approved as righteous*' by God, the logical conclusion is that he must have been told, by God, what was required from him, because '*Faith comes by hearing*'.

It is also just as logical to conclude that both brothers, Cain, as well as Abel, had received the same instruction from God.

The First Recorded Act of Faith.

Abel, however, holds the distinction of being the first man in human history to have been moved to action '*by faith*'. He was concerned with getting right with God – and *keeping* right with Him. Therefore he acted in a way that was approved by God.

Abel's faith caused him to do something that met with God's approval. And this is not said of Cain. Abel offered a *sacrifice* which the scriptures describe as 'more excellent, or acceptable, than the *offering* brought by Cain.

We should notice this. Cain did not bring a *sacrifice* to God. He brought an *offering* - something which did not involve the shedding of blood and in which there was no acknowledgement of sin, and no admission of guilt. We read in Gen.4:5 that, for Cain and his offering, God had '*no regard*'.

Abel's sacrifice was a lamb, and *this* God accepted, not because of its *quantity*, but because of its *quality*. It involved the shedding of blood. It cost a life. And the Bible tells us, that '*he, being dead, yet speaks*'. Abel's act of faith will always remain a testimony to the truth that salvation is attained through submission to the word and will of God, and through sacrificial blood.

We now go back to the question with which this article begins.

We need now to ask ourselves; in what sense does the blood of Christ speak better things than the blood of Abel?

First, let it be perfectly clear than the blood mentioned in this verse is *the blood of Abel's sacrifice*, and *not* the blood of Abel himself, shed by Cain's violence. This becomes obvious when we study chapter 12 vv.18-24, because this passage reminded the readers of this letter of the great events of Sinai, when the Mosaic covenant was ratified, and when both covenant and people were sanctified by the sprinkled animal blood.

If there is one thing of which the blood of Abel's sacrifice speaks loudly, it is Sin and the Separation which sin creates. His sacrifice spoke of guilt, as did every other sacrifice offered throughout the Patriarchal Age and the Mosaic Age that followed. And, like all the sacrifices made under the Mosaic Law, which, at that time was yet to come, it was a confession of unworthiness before God.

The Significance Of Animal Sacrifices.

Every animal sacrifice that was offered in obedience to the law of God, was, in itself, an admission and confession of guilt. The sacrifice said, in effect: "*I am guilty. I deserved to stand where this animal stands. This sacrifice is my substitute. This blood represents my blood. The life I now offer represents my life.*"

God accepted such sacrifices for what they represented, and received them as an '*atonement*', that is, as '*a covering up*', for this is the meaning of the Hebrew word '*atonement*'. This is why, although each year on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest offered sacrifice for sins, there was no true forgiveness. Because, it was never possible for animal blood to remove human sin, the nation's sins were '*passed over*' for another year, until, at the proper time God's Own Lamb came to '*take away the sin of the world*'.

It is in this sense that the blood of Jesus' sacrifice '*speaks of better things*', or, '*speaks more graciously*', than the blood of Abel's sacrifice.

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