

Was Cain, the First Murderer, Forgiven and Not Cursed?



"Cain and His Family"—From the Famous Painting by F. Cormen. Sir James Frazer Asserts That Jehovah Liked Cain and Put a Mark Upon Him to Protect Him from His Brother's Ghost and Not to Save Him from Human Assailants, for Only His Parents Were Alive to Attack Him.

England's Greatest Anthropologist Asserts That Jehovah Only Meant to Protect Abel's Slayer from His Brother's Ghost and Reverses the Accepted Interpretation of Many Bible Stories

SIR JAMES GEORGE FRAZER, author of "The Golden Bough," and the most noted anthropologist in Great Britain, has now published a brilliant and controversial work in which he explains many famous Bible stories in the light of modern folklore study.

The distinguished scientist shows that the most striking Bible narratives, such as the story of man's fall, are susceptible of an entirely different explanation from the usually accepted one, when they are considered in connection with our present knowledge of folklore and ancient myths and customs. His studies on this subject are contained in a great three-volume work, "Folklore in the Old Testament," published by Macmillan & Co.

According to Sir James Frazer, we have formed a very imperfect idea of what happened in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve partook of the apple. The "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" occupies the centre of the stage, but, Frazer tells us, "when we look closer, we perceive a second tree standing side by side with the other in the midst of the garden. It is a very remarkable tree; for it is no less than the tree of life whose fruit confers immortality on all who eat of it."

"Yet in the actual story of the fall this wonderful tree plays no part. Its fruit hangs there on the boughs ready to be plucked; unlike the tree of knowledge, it is hedged about by no divine prohibition, yet no one thinks it worth while to taste of the luscious fruit and live forever. "The eyes of the actors are all turned on the tree of knowledge; they appear not to see the tree of life. Only when all is over does God bethink himself of the wonderful tree standing there, neglected, with all its infinite possibilities, in the midst of the garden, and fearing lest man, who has become like Him in knowledge by eating of the one tree, should become like Him in immortality by eating of the other. He drives him from the garden and sets an angelic squadron, with flaming swords, to guard the approach to the tree of life, that none henceforth may eat of its magic fruit and live forever."

In support of his statement that there was "a tree of life" as well as "a tree of knowledge," Frazer cites Genesis, Chapter III, 22 to 24.

He then argues that the "tree of life" must have played a more important role in an earlier version, that the "tree of knowledge" was really the "tree of death" and that God intended man to eat of the "tree of life" when he told him he could eat of every tree but one. The original story was composed to explain how death came among mankind. The name of "the tree of death" has been changed into "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" in the Bible.

The serpent persuaded Eve to partake of "the tree of death" in order that he might keep "the tree of life" for himself.

Frazer quotes the myths of the Phoenicians and many ancient peoples to show that they attributed extraordinary wisdom and longevity to the serpent.

Then the author makes the remarkable discovery that the brand set upon Cain was not a disgrace, but perhaps a form of protection or a tribal distinction. When Cain was driven out of society for murdering his brother Abel, the Bible tells us God "set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." Some writers think that this mark was some badge used by fighting tribes indicating that he belonged to a community that would avenge his murder. Among the fierce Bedouins to-day one of the chief tribal badges is a way of wearing the hair.

Frazer, however, believes that Jehovah was really kindly disposed toward Cain—"this first Mr. Smith, for Cain means Smith," as the author tells us. Cain was probably protected by the mark set upon him from his victim's ghost, not branded with a sign of frightfulness and shame, the former according better with the primitive estimate of a murderer's status in society. The usual interpretation that God affixed the mark to Cain to save him from human assailants is unreasonable, because there was nobody to assail him, since the earth was "inhabited only by the murderer himself and his parents."

Frazer tells us that the story of the finding of Moses in the bulrushes and his subsequent upbringing presents features which may reasonably be suspected of belonging to the realm of folklore rather than of history. The Bible tells us that Moses was doomed by Pharaoh to be destroyed with other Hebrew children at birth, that an Egyptian woman took pity on him and hid him by the Nile's brink, where Pharaoh's daughter found him and brought him up. Frazer proves that many primitive races had legends of early heroes, like King Gilgamesh of the Babylonians, who were left by cruel persons to die in infancy and then miraculously rescued.

"It has been conjectured," says the author, "that in stories like that of the exposure of the infant Moses on the water we have a reminiscence of an old custom of testing the legitimacy of children by throwing them into the water and leaving them to swim or sink, the infants which swam being accepted as legitimate and those which sank being rejected as illegitimate."

The famous story of Jacob and Esau is



The "Tree of Knowledge" Was Really the "Tree of Death," According to Frazer, and the Serpent Persuaded Our Parents to Eat Its Fruit in Order to Keep "the Tree of Life" for Himself.

given a very different interpretation by Frazer from the ordinary one. Jacob bought his older brother Esau's birthright from him when the latter was famished and much in need of a mess of red pottage. Then, in order to clinch the bargain by obtaining his father's blessing, Jacob had himself swathed in kid's skins, and cheated the blind old man into thinking that he was the hairy Esau.

Most people think that Jacob's conduct was very disreputable, but Frazer explains that there was in early times a widespread law that the youngest son and not the eldest, should inherit. A legend dating from the primitive time when this custom prevailed was the basis of the Jacob and Esau story, and the younger patriarch should not be too severely criticised.

The law of inheritance by the youngest born, called ultimogeniture, is connected with the "right of the first night," which prevailed extensively in the Middle Ages, but had its origin in the prehistoric past.

Many readers have wondered why the builders of the Tower of Babel should have been suddenly stricken with a diversity of tongues and why our different languages should have arisen in that peculiar manner. Frazer explains that the tower was really one of the great temple-towers of Babylon, of which two exist to this day in ruins.

He traces the Biblical story to the deep impression produced by the great city of Babylon on the simple minds of Semitic nomads, who, fresh from the solitude and



Frazer Argues That Samson Was a Most Disreputable Ruffian, and That While He Was a Hero to Some Hebrews, Delilah Must Have Been a Glorious Heroine and National Deliverer to the Philistines. From the Painting by Solomon J. Solomon.

silence of the desert, were bewildered by the hubbub of the streets and bazaars, dazzled by the kaleidoscope of color in the bustling crowd, stunned by the din of voices jabbering in strange, unknown tongues, and overawed by the height of the buildings; above all by the prodigious altitude of the temples towering up, terrace upon terrace, till their glistening tops of enamelled brick seemed to touch the sky. No wonder that dwellers in tents should imagine that they who scaled the pinnacle of such a stupendous pile by the long winding ramp and appeared at last like moving specks on the summit must indeed be near the gods.

Frazer holds that the mighty Samson was really a very disreputable character. The author admits, by the way, that he must have been a real character, for the Bible story is too full of exact details about his life to be fiction. It is significant, however, that there are many ancient folk tales of strong men who were beguiled by sirens and lost their strength when their hair was cut.

Samson, the learned author points out, judged Israel for twenty years, but of his judgments not one is recorded, and if the tenor of his pronouncements can be inferred from the nature of his acts, we may be allowed to doubt whether he particularly adorned the bench of justice.

"His talent," says Frazer, "would seem to have lain rather in the direction of brawling and fighting, burning down people's corn-ricks and beating up the quarters of loose women; in short, he appears to have shone in the character of a libertine and a rake-hell rather than in a strictly judicial capacity."

Instead of a dull list of his legal decisions we are treated to an amusing, if not very edifying, narrative of his adventures in love and war, or rather in fil-

bustering; for if we accept, as we are bound to do, the Scriptural account of this roystering swashbuckler, he never levied a regular war or headed a national insurrection against the Philistines, the oppressors of his people; he merely sallied forth from time to time as a solitary paladin or knight-errant and mowed them down with the jawbone of an ass or any other equally serviceable weapon that came to his hand.

"And even on these predatory expeditions (for he had no scruple about relieving his victims of their clothes and probably of their purses) the idea of delivering his nation from servitude was to all appearance the last thing that would have occurred to him."

"If he massacred the Philistines, as he certainly did in great profusion and with hearty good-will, it was from no high motive of patriotism or policy, but purely from a personal grudge which he bore them for the wrongs which they had done to himself, to his wife and to his father-in-law. From first to last his story is that of an utterly selfish and unscrupulous adventurer, swayed by gusts of fitful passion and indifferent to everything but the gratification of his mandatory whims."

"It is only redeemed from the staleness and vulgarity of commonplace rascality by the elements of supernatural strength, headlong valor and a certain grim humor, which together elevate it into a sort of burlesque epic after the manner of Ariosto."

"The marvellous and diverting incidents of his disreputable career, probably floated about loosely as popular tales on the current of oral tradition long before they crystallized around the memory of a real man, a doughty highlander and borderer, a sort of Hebrew Rob Roy, whose choleric temper, dauntless courage and prodigious bodily strength marked him out as the

champion of Israel in many a wild fray across the border into the rich lowlands of Philistia."

Frazer reasons that while Samson was a hero to the Jews, Delilah must have been a heroine and national deliverer to the Philistines—a far nobler and more admirable character than the strong man.

Many persons have been puzzled by the story in the Bible of how Joseph hid a silver cup in his brothers' sack and then sent after them and charged them with stealing the cup. "When they came back, Joseph said:

"What deed is this that ye have done? Know ye not that such a man as I can indeed divine?"

Frazer explains this to be a reference to the divining cup, which was used in ancient Egypt and is still in favor among savage tribes as a means of finding out secrets.

The story of the ravens feeding Elijah, the author thinks, was probably suggested by the prevalence of these birds near the Dead Sea and their ancient reputation for wisdom, due to their power of imitating the human voice and their habit of feeding on the dead.

Frazer devotes much space to showing that a story of a great flood, prevailed among all the primitive peoples of the world, including the American Indians. He argues that the Biblical story of the flood is derived from the Babylonian legend. The Babylonian narrative cannot be derived from the Hebrew, since it is older by at least eleven or twelve centuries.

Frazer is inclined to explain the Babylonian and Hebrew traditions by which the lower valley of the Euphrates and Tigris is annually exposed by the heavy rains and melting snows in the mountains of Armenia.