

Abel, The Silent Prophet

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A response to the article "How Was Abel a Prophet?" by Lee Anderson, Jr.,
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Mr. Anderson's article raises a question that many students of the Bible ask: "How was Abel a prophet?" He proposes that Abel must have been preaching to others, and especially to his brother Cain, to repent, in order to be a prophet.

However, Abel was a prophet by his actions, not by his words. Abel prophesied by offering a sacrifice that pleased God. Abel's sacrifice was prophetic in two ways. First it showed that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins and second, it pointed to the atoning blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Cain's sacrifice did neither. Cain tried to bring the work of his own hands to God as a sacrifice. God rejected Cain's offering of his own labor, but accepted Abel's offering of another living being. Cain killed Abel over this issue. Just like Cain, it is those who trust in their own righteousness that persecute those who instead put their trust in a merciful God and the blood sacrifice that He requires.

Mr. Anderson spent most of his article speculating on Abel's words, mostly missing the point. However, he gets close to getting it right when he states "In fact, the testimony of his actions may have been as much a part of his prophetic ministry as his words." Actually, Abel's actions *were* his prophetic ministry. This is exactly what is shown in Hebrews 11:4.

Mr. Anderson's argument for un-recorded words of Abel may have resulted from the following definition of a prophet, which he embraced in his article: "In the Old Testament, a prophet was one who acted as God's mouthpiece, relaying the words of God to men in accordance with God's instructions." (quoting from A.A. MacRae, "Prophets and Prophecy"). However, this definition is misleading, for there were times when God closed a prophet's mouth as a prophetic message. For example, God closed Ezekiel's mouth, making him dumb and then opened it again as a sign (Ezekiel 24:27, 33:22). Or consider Jesus before Pontius Pilate (1st Timothy 6:13). Though Jesus was silent before Pilate, He is credited with giving a good confession (testimony).

Actually prophets were well known for their theatrics. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all acted out prophetic messages (e.g. Isaiah 20, Jeremiah 35, Ezekiel 4). One of the greatest prophecies in the Bible is not of words but of action. Consider the prophecy of Jonah in the belly of the great fish. In Matthew 12:40, Jesus states that Jonah's experience was a prophetic sign of His own death and resurrection.

A better definition of prophecy would be "Prophets conveyed the message of God, sometimes with words, sometimes with actions, sometimes with both and sometimes

merely the events of their lives served as prophecy". In the case of Jonah, and of Abel, it was not their words, but rather their actions and what happened to them that point prophetically to Jesus.

Genesis was written in Hebrew, and there is something interesting in the Hebrew of our passage:

In Genesis 4:4, the Hebrew word for "respect" (NKJV) looks like, though it is not related to, the name Yeshua (Jesus). The Hebrew in our passage actually reads 'and he respected' וישע while the name Yeshua is ישוע and means 'salvation'. The two words come from different roots: שעה compared to ישע , so there is no linguistic connection, however, of all the words the author of Genesis could have used to convey his message, it is interesting that he chose one that looks like the name of Yeshua (Jesus). This is no accident, Abel's sacrifice pointed to Jesus, and the author of Genesis chose a Hebrew word that also reminds us of salvation and of Jesus.

Conclusion:

In this world, those who trust in their own righteousness and don't believe they need to be forgiven will persecute those who trust in God for forgiveness. Those who realize their own righteousness is like a dirty maxi-pad in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6), will be persecuted by those who think their good deeds look like a pristine, well ironed, pure white shirt. God's standards are too high for us, but He will declare pure as snow, those who trust in Him. Abel's message was not one of preaching to his brother to repent, but rather one of realizing that he, himself deserved to die for his own sins and that only the death of an innocent one in his stead could satisfy God's judgment.