

Such an understanding is found in the Peshitta and consequently in Ephraem's explanation "It will not be as you say concerning the killers who come after you" (*Commentary on Genesis*). A similar explanation is found even without the "Not so!":

"And the Lord said to him: **Therefore**, anyone who kills . . .": R. Nehemiah said: Cain's case was different from that of [other] murderers. Cain killed and had no one to learn from: henceforth, anyone who kills will be killed.

— *Genesis Rabba* 22:12

See on these Maori, *The Peshitta Version*, 249–250.

That Cain's punishment was deferred seemed to support the idea that God had somehow forgiven him. This motif emerged most directly from Gen. 4:15. For, as was seen earlier, Cain's words could be taken as meaning "My sin is too great to forgive," in which case God's response (whether the "Not so!" [*lō' kēn*] of the Septuagint, Theodotion, Symmachus, Peshitta, and Vulgate, or even the "Therefore" of the traditional Hebrew text, *Samaritan Pentateuch*, Aquila, Onqelos, and so on) seemed to be intended to gainsay Cain's assertion: your sin is *indeed* forgivable! The motif of Cain's pardon is present even in Philo's writings, where Cain is otherwise altogether blameworthy and shows no sign of penitence:

[God] offers him [Cain] an **amnesty**, imposing a benevolent and kindly law concerning the first [crime?] on all judges—not that they may not destroy evil men, but that by hesitating a little and showing patience, they may cleave to mercy rather than cruelty . . . Not very long after the **forgiving of Cain**, it [Scripture] introduces the fact that Enoch repented, informing us that forgiveness is wont to produce repentance.

— Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:76, 82

The Sign Was a Letter: God gave Cain some sort of sign in Gen. 4:15. But what was it? The word for "sign" came to mean, in later Hebrew, a letter of the alphabet; not surprisingly, a number of interpreters concluded that God had put some letter or letters in Cain's body (sometimes, specifically, his forehead). Others explained that a supernatural sign was given to proclaim Cain's repentance to all, or that Cain was given a fearsome mark on his body—often, a pair of horns—to ward off potential attackers or given a dog to *signal* their arrival. See *Genesis Rabba* 22:12; also, Aptowitz, *Kain und Abel in der Agada*; Melinkoff, *The Sign of Cain*; Shinan, "On Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Gen. 4:15," 148–150; Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 159–172. Note that another text speaks of a "mark" (on the forehead) for the wicked, as well as a contrary mark for the righteous:

For God's mark is on the righteous for salvation . . . [but] those who act lawlessly shall not escape the Lord's judgment.

They shall be overtaken by those experienced in war, for on their forehead is the mark of destruction.

— *Psalms of Solomon* 15:6–9