

Lesson 9 – Who Was Cain’s Wife?

Background

Genesis 4:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. ¹⁷ **Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch.** When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

Why is this unsolved?

It is “unsolved,” simply because we are not told in the Bible. However, this does not mean that we can’t infer a logical answer to the question. This question has been perceived as a “gap” throughout history, and as ammunition for those who try to discredit the authenticity of scripture. For example, this question came up in the Scopes trial in 1925: Clarence Darrow asked his opponent, William Jennings Bryan, “Did you ever discover where Cain got his wife?” as a way to question the Bible’s historical reliability.

Questions to Consider:

How old was Cain when he killed Abel?

The Bible does not say how old Cain was when he killed Abel (Genesis 4:8). Since they were both farmers, they were likely both full-grown adults, possibly with families of their own.

Did Adam and Eve have any more children besides Cain and Abel?

Genesis 4:25 (ESV)

²⁵ And Adam knew his wife again, and **she bore a son and called his name Seth**, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.”

Genesis 5:4 (ESV)

⁴ The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and **he had other sons and daughters.**

Were any of these sons and daughters alive at the time Cain killed Abel?

Genesis 4:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and **whoever finds me will kill me.**”

Seth had clearly not been born yet (see Gen 4:25). However, the fact that Cain was scared for his own life after he killed Abel indicates that there were possibly many other children and perhaps even grandchildren of Adam and Eve already living at that time.

Where Did Cain Find His Wife?

Genesis 4:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. ¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

Scripture never says that he found her in Nod...was he already married when he left?

Could God Have Created Others Besides Adam and Eve?

Genesis 3:20 (ESV)

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

Adam clearly believed that all living persons would descend from Eve.

Can You Marry Your Sister or Niece?

The immediate reaction to Cain marrying his sister or niece is often shock or disgust. Today, marrying close relations is called incest. However, at the time of creation, God did not forbid marriage between close relatives. Why?

Adam and Eve were created perfect. Since Adam and Eve were created genetically perfect, their children would have had few genetic mutations. Mutations in subsequent generations would have continued to increase and accumulate. Eventually, it became too dangerous to marry a close relation because of the increased likelihood of inherited disease. During the time of Moses, God forbade marriage between close relatives (Lev 18:6–18).

What Really Matters

Romans 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

The story of Cain and Abel points to a great truth...the reality of human sin. Like a deadly cancer, sin invaded the human race with Adam and Eve, and brought evil and conflict in its wake. But Christ came to reverse problem of sin in this world.

Background

Genesis 4:1–5:5 (ESV)

¹ Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” ² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”

⁸ Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” ¹⁰ And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.” ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. ¹⁹ And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. ²⁰ Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. ²¹ His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. ²² Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

²³ Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.

²⁴ If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold,
then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.”

²⁵ And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.” ²⁶ To Seth

also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.

¹ This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. ² Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. ³ When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. ⁴ The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters. ⁵ Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

Leviticus 18:6–18 (ESV)

⁶ “None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD. ⁷ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. ⁸ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness. ⁹ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home. ¹⁰ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son’s daughter or of your daughter’s daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness. ¹¹ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife’s daughter, brought up in your father’s family, since she is your sister. ¹² You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s sister; she is your father’s relative. ¹³ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother’s sister, for she is your mother’s relative. ¹⁴ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. ¹⁵ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son’s wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness. ¹⁶ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife; it is your brother’s nakedness. ¹⁷ You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, and you shall not take her son’s daughter or her daughter’s daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are relatives; it is depravity. ¹⁸ And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive.

<https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/cain/creation-basics/>
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Where Did Cain Get His Wife?

by Dr. Georgia Purdom on July 1, 2014

Creation Basics

One of the most-asked questions about the Bible is “Where’d Cain get his wife?” Skeptics have found that many Christians are easily stumped by this query, but the answer isn’t as hard as you might think.

Several years ago I purchased *The Golden Children’s Bible* to use with my young daughter Elizabeth during devotion time. It was originally published in 1965, and I was attracted to the realistic illustrations that were reminiscent of those I had grown up seeing in Sunday school. The Bible was not a specific translation but rather a paraphrase of selected events from Scripture. When I got to the section entitled, “Cain and Abel, Sons of Adam,” I read,

After that [when God put a mark on Cain], Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden.

And later in the land of Nod, Cain took a wife and she gave birth to a son who was named Enoch.

This paraphrased account of Scripture highlights a very common misconception related to where Cain got his wife. Many Christians have been taught that Cain went to Nod, found a wife, got married, and had a son. But if Adam and Eve were the only two people that God created, where did the people of Nod come from?

What Does Scripture Say?

First, let’s read the actual words of Genesis 4:16–17, which *The Golden Children’s Bible* attempted to paraphrase:

Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son—Enoch.

The Bible does not say that Cain went to Nod and later found a wife there. Rather, the implication in Scripture is that he already had a wife when he went to Nod. The event that took place in Nod was that he “knew” his wife—had sexual relations with her—and she conceived and gave birth to a son.

If Cain didn’t marry someone living in the land of Nod, we still have the question, “Where did Cain get his wife?” or, “Whom did Cain marry?” Again, we need to look to Scripture for the answer.

In Genesis 2:7 we read of the creation of Adam, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Genesis 2:21–22 recounts the creation of Eve, “And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.”

And in Genesis 1:28 we read God’s command to Adam and Eve, “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.’”

Genesis 5:4 makes it clear that Adam and Eve had multiple sons and daughters.

God created only two people, Adam and Eve, and told them to have lots of children—“Fill the earth!” Scripture mentions only three of Adam and Eve’s children by name (Cain, Abel, and Seth). However, Genesis 5:4 makes it clear that they had multiple sons and daughters:

After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters.

In addition, Genesis 3:20 states,

And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

Scripture is clear that every human being is descended from Adam and Eve. Although it is common to classify people into “races” based on skin tone, eye shape, and so on, there is actually only one race.

So, since we are “one blood” descended from Adam and Eve, the only person Cain could have married would have been a sister or a niece.

It’s true that the human race is now composed of multiple people groups. How did this happen? The later history in Genesis helps us understand why people now look so different from each other, even though they all came from only two people.

Adam and Eve’s offspring multiplied and filled the earth for approximately 1,500 years before Noah’s Flood. At that point, an important event happened in human genetics: the population was reduced to Noah’s family of eight aboard the Ark. After the Flood, the human race multiplied again, but in disobedience to God they did not fill the earth. So God judged their disobedience by confusing their language at the Tower of Babel, and from there they migrated, filling the earth, as God intended. As people became isolated in different groups around the world, certain physical characteristics became dominant, such as dark skin in Africa and almond-shaped eyes in Asia.

Regardless of the diversity in physical characteristics we see today, the Bible (and the science of genetics) confirms we are all one race. As Acts 17:26 states, “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.”

Can You Marry Your Relation?

The immediate reaction to Cain marrying his sister or niece is often shock or disgust. Today, marrying close relations is called incest. However, approximately 6,000 years ago God did not forbid marriage between close relatives. Why?

Adam and Eve were created perfect. It wasn't until after the Fall that suffering and death affected mankind and every other living thing. One aspect of this suffering would have been mutations in the DNA that result in disease. Since Adam and Eve were created genetically perfect, their children would have had few mutations. Mutations in subsequent generations would have continued to increase and accumulate. Eventually, it became too dangerous to marry a close relation because of the increased likelihood of inherited disease.

During the time of Moses, approximately 2,500 years after creation, God forbade marriage between close relatives (Leviticus 18:6–18). It seems that one reason was health. Although the Israelites knew nothing of DNA, God did, and He knew close relatives were likely to have the same mutations. Since many diseases occur only when a child has two copies of the same mutation (one from Mom and one from Dad), marriage between close relatives would be harmful to the Israelites. This is one of the reasons that such marriages are prohibited today, too—to prevent diseases that can afflict children of this kind of union.

How Does the Answer to this Question Affect the Gospel?

I have often heard Christians say that it doesn't matter whether Genesis presents true history, such as the marriage of Cain. Creation is a side issue, it's not a primary doctrine, and the most important thing is to "trust in Jesus." While I agree wholeheartedly that the gospel is our central message, people must depend on the Bible to know what the gospel is. If the Bible that relates the gospel is not accurate and truthful in Genesis, then how do we know it is telling the truth about Jesus Christ?

In addition, the history of Adam's race in Genesis is foundational to understanding how the gospel applies to all people. Because all people are descendants of Adam and Eve, all people are sinners (Romans 3:23, 5:12). Christ died and rose again to redeem Adam's race (Romans 5:15, 5:17; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 15:45). If Cain married someone other than a descendant of Adam and Eve, that would contradict the clear teaching of Scripture, not only in Genesis but also as it relates to the gospel. If there are other races, then how can the gospel be for all people (1 Timothy 2:4)? It can't—the gospel depends in part on the accurate biblical answer to where Cain got his wife. So it's not just a side issue, it's part of the main issue!

Peter admonishes us to be ready always to give an answer for the hope that we have (1 Peter 3:15). The history in Genesis, including the identity of Cain's wife, is crucial to understanding that we are all sinners and in need of the forgiveness and salvation offered through Jesus Christ.

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<http://www.apologeticspress.org/AllegedDiscrepancies.aspx?article=4585>

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Does Genesis 4 Indicate that God Specifically Created Others Besides Adam and Eve?

by [Eric Lyons, M.Min.](#)

If Adam and Eve were the only human beings that God miraculously created, where did all of the people come from who were of great concern to Cain? After God sentenced the murderous Cain to be “a fugitive and a vagabond” on the Earth (Genesis 4:12), recall that Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (4:13). Cain then said: “Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that **anyone** who finds me will kill me” (4:14, emp. added). God then responded to Cain, saying, “Therefore, **whoever** kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him seven-fold.” So, “the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest **anyone** finding him should kill him” (4:15, emp. added). Do the references to “anyone” and “whoever” in these verses suggest that God specially created others besides Adam and Eve?

Before answering these questions, one must keep in mind that Genesis chapters 1-11 cover approximately the first 2,000-plus years of human history ([Butt](#), 2002; cf. [Lyons](#), 2002). The following 1,178 chapters of the Bible tell us about the next 2,000 years. Although the first 11 chapters of Genesis are undeniably literal, historical language (cf. [Thompson](#), 2001), God chose to reveal to man only a few important facts about the first 2,000-plus years of man’s existence—and most of this revelation is about Creation, the Fall, and the Flood. What’s more, Genesis chapters 4-5 likely cover a period of more than 1,400 years. Thus, a lot of time can pass between events without the text specifically expressing exactly how many decades or centuries elapsed.

How much time elapsed in Genesis 4:2? Immediately following the announcement of Cain and Abel’s births (4:1-2), the text says, “Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground” (4:2). Most likely, at least 20 years had passed by this time, and it could be that several more decades had expired before Cain and Abel finally settled on their respective vocations. (How many people today do not settle on a profession until they are 35 or 40 years old?)

How much time transpired when the Bible says, “**And in the process of time it came to pass** that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord” (4:3, emp. added)? How long was Cain angry with Abel before God spoke to Cain about his anger (4:6)? How long was it before Cain spoke with Abel (4:8)? (Have you ever known people, even family members, to hold-in feelings of resentment for years or decades?) Genesis 4:8 says, “**It came to pass** when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him” (emp. added). Again, we cannot know exactly how much time transpired between the conversation that Cain had with Abel and the day that he actually murdered Abel (4:8).

The fact is, Cain could have been **100 years old** or more by the time he killed his brother. [Keep in mind that since the patriarchs often lived to be several hundred years old (e.g., Adam died at the age of 930), being 100 in that day, was somewhat comparable to being 20 today.] What’s

more, Adam and Eve may have had 50 children or more by the time Cain killed Abel (cf. Genesis 5:4). They may have had 300 grandchildren by then. There could have been three or four generations of Adam's descendants on Earth by the time God sentenced Cain to be "a fugitive and a vagabond."

How many children, and possibly grandchildren, did Adam and Eve have when God said, "**Whoever** kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold"? How many people had descended from Adam by the time God "set a mark on Cain, lest **anyone** finding him should kill him"? Who were the "whoever" and "anyone" that both God and Cain mentioned? They were the dozens, hundreds, or possibly thousands of people on Earth by that time—all of whom were descendants of Adam, "the first man" (1 Corinthians 15:45) and Eve, "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). In no way does reason or inspired revelation forbid a literal interpretation of Genesis; on the contrary, it demands such.

REFERENCES

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