

Bite Size Bible Study

Cain's Wife #250

By Lee Logue

Who was Cain's wife? The Bible reports that after killing Abel, *Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch.*
Genesis 4:16,17a NIV

The only children recorded in the Bible at this point are Cain and Abel. However, the Bible records that Cain marries and has children in the land of Nod. But even more interesting is that Cain is afraid that during his wanderings "*anyone who meets me may kill me*" (Genesis 4:14). Who is out there to threaten him? Taking the Biblical text at face value, the first couple had only three children. Clearly there is something not recorded for reasons we do not yet know.

History is rife with speculations: 1) The early rabbis based their answer on the principle that all humans on earth necessarily descended solely from Adam and Eve, the first humans God created. Therefore, Cain's wife had to be his sister. 2) Early Christians similarly explained that Cain married his sister, pointing simply to Genesis 5:3-4: "*When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth ...and he had other sons and daughters.*" After years of wandering, Cain married one of Adam's many other daughters.

Professor Mary Joan Winn Leith, writing for Biblical Archeology Society, offers us a different explanation. "In recent years sociologists and anthropologists have called attention to the fact that traditionally as humans we have tended to give ourselves group identities in opposition to the "other": "We" are who "we" are because we don't do what "they" do. A Biblical example is the Israelite use of "uncircumcised" to identify the Philistines. The implication is that a "proper" human being (i.e., an Israelite) would be circumcised, and that it is humanly abnormal, even repulsive, to be otherwise. In essence, "we" are fully and "normally" human, and anyone who is "not us" is at best less human and, at worst, not human at all."

Egyptologist Gerald Moers has observed that in ancient Egypt, the word for "Egyptian" was also the word for "human". Foreigners/outsideers were not human.

A similar mind-set could explain where Cain's wife came from. There were probably other people "out there" when God created Adam and Eve, but they didn't count.

As far as the Israelite storyteller was concerned, the only humans God created were Adam and Eve. The "non-humans" didn't count.

These non-humans were not important enough to be recorded along with the record of Adam and Eve. It was

Adam and Eve that would be the ancestors of the Israelite peoples.

It even seems appropriate that Cain married one of these "other" (non-human) foreign people because his sin had literally diminished his humanity in the eyes of his people. Alienated from his human mother and father, he was now one of the "other" non-humans. But separated from God's protection he was now at the mercy of the non-humans and was afraid that he could be killed.

In the premodern world all religion was local. Each community had a god (or sometimes many gods) that was responsible for that region and culture. Ancient people seldom traveled far from home, and the people who lived outside their own geographical area did not figure into their thinking of human beings (the "others").

This was also true in ancient Israel's thinking about God and the world. In the Biblical text, Israel was assigned to Yahweh and other nations to other gods: *When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.*
Deuteronomy 32:8,9 RSV

All this changed when Israel was exiled to Babylon in 586 BCE. The exiles' experienced living far from their Judean homeland in a land worshipping other gods. This expanded their awareness of the wider world and their perception of God's (Yahweh's) domain.

Isaiah portrays Yahweh not as the national deity of a single ancient Near Eastern people but as Lord of the Universe. Yahweh informs King Cyrus of Persia:

*I am the Lord, and there is no other;
apart from me there is no God.*

I will strengthen you,

*though you have not acknowledged me,
so that from the rising of the sun
to the place of its setting*

people may know there is none besides me.

I am the Lord, and there is no other.

Isaiah 45:5,6 NIV

Least we think this is only a characteristic in the ancient world, we need only listen to the news for a moment or google "unwanted ethnic groups in the world today". Hispanics are being targeted as the "others" and deported. People of color have traditionally been treated worse than the white people. American Indians have suffered for hundreds of years by being slaughtered and/or placed on reservations. Large numbers of "kulaks" in USSR, regardless of their nationality, were resettled in Siberia and Central Asia. Oriental cultures

have not been free of this type of discrimination either. The list could go on and on.

“We” vs. “they” has littered our world with bias, hatred, and unspeakable treatment of God’s children.

From ancient times there seem to be “others” in the cultures of the world. Maybe we should consider this when we think about Adam and Eve. Were they really the only humans on the earth at that time or is it possible that Moses (who wrote Genesis) was also constrained by this “we vs. them” attitude.

So, the question of “Who was Cain’s wife?” now seems to have another possible answer. An answer that we see extant in the world today.

However, if you don’t see it this way, you are not alone. Many scholars reject this idea. Remember though, this is not a question of your relationship with God but only us looking for an explanation of events that the Bible feels is unnecessary to report on.

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