

The Problem of Cain's Wife

By Jonathan Burke

It is notable that Genesis 4 contains the implicit indication that Adam and Eve were not the only humans who existed at the time. Firstly there is the problem of why Cain appears very obviously aware of people elsewhere in the earth, who do not belong to his immediate family.

Genesis 4:

¹³ Then Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to endure!

¹⁴ Look! You are driving me off the land today, and I must hide from your presence. I will be a homeless wanderer on the earth; whoever finds me will kill me."¹

There is also the problem of where Cain's wife came from. She is only mentioned after Cain had left "the presence of Yahweh", and therefore when he has already left his family, strongly implying he met her after he had found a group of humans outside his own family.

Genesis 4:

¹⁶ So Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

¹⁷ Cain had marital relations with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was building a city, and he named the city after his son Enoch.²

These statements in the text have been recognized for around 2,000 years in Jewish and Christian exposition as a serious challenge to the traditional interpretation that Adam and Eve were the first humans to exist.

Early responses

The earliest Jewish text to address the problem of Cain's wife is the Book of Jubilees, dating to around 150 BCE.³ The author invented a sister for Cain, and simply asserted that he married her.

Jubilees 4:

⁹ And Cain took his sister, 'Awan, as a wife, and she bore for him Enoch at the end of the fourth jubilee.⁴

The invention of Cain's sister is a tacit acknowledgement that the writer of Jubilees realized Cain's wife was a problem for an interpretation of Genesis 1-4 which assumes Adam and Eve were the first humans, and that they and their two first children (Cain and Abel), had no human contemporaries.

¹ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition (Noteless); Bible. English. NET Bible (Noteless)*. (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Ge 4:13-14.

² Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition (Noteless); Bible. English. NET Bible (Noteless)*. (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Ge 4:16-17.

³ "The earliest source to provide information about the timing and naming of Adam and Eve's daughters comes from Jubilees which is dated to the 160s bce.", John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry*, Themes in biblical narrative Jewish and Christian traditions 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 24.

⁴ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom, and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (vol. 2; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 61.

Notably, Jubilees does not address the earlier passage (Genesis 4:13-14), which describes Cain's fear of other people who already live in different parts of the earth, outside his own family. This problem did not go unnoticed by later Jewish expositors.

In the early first century, Philo of Alexandria made several suggestions in his attempt to grapple with the text, suggesting Cain feared natural perils, wild animals, and his parents.⁵ In contrast, the commentary called "Pseudo-Philo" (historically, though uncertainly associated with Philo of Alexandria), avoids describing Cain's wife as his sister, while naming her without explaining her origin.⁶ Later in the first century Josephus likewise suggested that Cain was afraid of wild beasts, avoiding the problematic indication of the text that Cain feared humans outside his family.⁷

"And when he was afraid, that in wandering about he should fall among wild beasts, and by that means perish, God bid him not to entertain such a melancholy suspicion, and to go over all the earth without fear of what mischief he might suffer from wild beasts; and setting a mark upon him that he might be known, he commanded him to depart."⁸

Although addressing directly the issue of who Cain was afraid of, Josephus passes quickly over the problem of Cain's wife, who he does not identify. A passing reference to Adam and Eve having daughters before Abel was killed, may have been Josephus' way of suggesting obliquely (and perhaps prudishly), that Cain married one of his sisters.⁹

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (an early medieval Hebrew interpretive translation of the Pentateuch), avoided the clearly uncomfortable idea of incest between Cain and his sister, by describing Cain as the daughter of Sammael (the angel of death), and Eve, and Cain's wife as the twin sister of Abel through Adam and Eve. Thus Cain married his half-sister,

⁵ "(74) What is the meaning of Cain, when he says, "Everyone who shall find me will kill me: "when there was scarcely another human being in the world except his parents? (Genesis 4:14). In the first place he might have received injury from the parts of the world which indeed were made for the advantage of the good and that they might partake of them, but which nevertheless, derived from the wicked no slight degree of revenge. In the second place it may be that he said this, because he was apprehensive of injury from beasts, and reptiles; for nature has brought forth these animals with the express object of their being instruments of vengeance on the wicked. In the third place, some people may imagine that he is speaking with reference to his parents, on whom he had inflicted an unprecedented sorrow, and the first evil which had happened to them, before they knew what death was.", Charles Duke Yonge with Philo of Alexandria, "Questions and Answers on Genesis", 1.174, in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 805–806.

⁶ "Pseudo-Philo does not agree with Jubilees, however, by portraying Cain's wife as his sister. Instead Cain's wife is named Themech and questions about her relation to Cain prior to their marriage are left unanswered.", John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry*, Themes in biblical narrative Jewish and Christian traditions 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 24.

⁷ "One may, probably quite correctly, surmise that the shift from fear of men to fear of beasts on the part of Cain is intended, originally, to reconcile the MT data with the fact that there were no other men to encounter at the time, saving, of course, Adam, Eve and Cain's own wife.", Thomas W. Franxman, *Genesis and the Jewish Antiquities of Flavius Josephus* (vol. 35; *Biblica et orientalia*; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 70.

⁸ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 31.

⁹ "Adam and Eve had two sons; the elder of them was named Cain; which name, when it is interpreted, signifies a possession. The younger was Abel, which signifies sorrow. They had also daughters.", Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 31.

rather than a full sister.¹⁰ This illustrates the great lengths to which early commentators would go in order to avoid the clearly morally repugnant conclusion that Cain married his sister.

Early Christian commentary typically followed the same path as the previous Jewish exegetes, though with obvious discomfort.¹¹ For most of Christian history the presupposition that Adam and Eve and their immediate family were the only humans on the planet at the time, would force commentators to the unpleasant solution of asserting that Cain married an unnamed sister, and that this sister found it acceptable to marry a brother who was a murderer.¹²

The problem with incest

The idea that Cain committed incest with one of his sisters, and that this was approved by God on account of necessity, is a solution invented purely to avoid the very fact for which the Genesis record gives evidence; that other humans existed at the same time as Adam and Eve's immediate family. To speculate that Cain married a sister requires going beyond what the text says, and going against what the text clearly indicates, as well as introducing the difficulty of how and why Cain would marry one of his sisters, especially after having killed their only other brother.

This is not merely a matter of whether or not God had forbidden incest at this time (there is no evidence for any such commandment), but also a matter of whether or not we would approve of incest if it was not prohibited by God. Do we really believe that incest is acceptable if God hasn't commanded it? Would anyone argue that incest is now acceptable, due to the abolition of the Law of Moses and its prohibition of incest, and the lack of any incest prohibition from Christ?

There are significant problems with the view that Cain married one of his sisters.

1. There is no evidence for this either inside or outside the Bible.
2. Incest has historically been condemned by every recorded human society, making it an unlikely that Adam and Eve's family would have considered it acceptable.
3. The Bible makes it clear that incest is wrong even in the absence of a divinely revealed prohibition
4. Children who grow up together (even if they are not blood relatives), are naturally conditioned against finding each other attractive
5. Incest typically occurs only in families with serious psychological problems.
6. The theory requires us to believe that one of Cain's sisters willingly married the man who had just murdered her only other brother.

Firstly, is ironic that those who typically object to informing our Bible reading using external evidence, are defending their view by inventing scenarios for which there is no evidence either in the Bible or outside it. They claim there must have been only four people in the earth at the time simply because the Bible does not mention anyone being

¹⁰ "By specifying that Eve bore Abel and his twin sister by Adam, it is clear that Cain is not their full brother. Cain's father is Sammael and Adam is the father of Abel and his twin sister.", John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry*, Themes in biblical narrative Jewish and Christian traditions 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 25.

¹¹ "Even Augustine had to devote a chapter to answering those who "find this a difficulty",", Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 1; Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 32.

¹² "the oft-repeated explanation that Cain's wife was his sister has been part of the interpretive history of Genesis 4 for at least 1800 years.", John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry*, Themes in biblical narrative Jewish and Christian traditions 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 2.

around except for Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel. But when confronted with the problem of Cain's wife, they inconsistently assume the existence of additional children of Adam and Eve, claiming that even though the Bible only mentions four people, it doesn't mean there weren't many other people already alive.

Either the Bible's initial reference to only four people means there weren't any other people living at the time, or it doesn't mean this; it can't be both. If it is wrong to accept the existence of other people simply because the Bible does not mention them, then it is wrong to claim Cain married a sister.

The idea that Adam and Eve already had more children by the time of Cain is contradicted by Eve's words on the birth of Seth; 'God has given me another child in place of Abel because Cain killed him' (Genesis 4:25). This does not sound like a mother who already has many children, two of whom have married and left the family to have grandchildren; it sounds like a mother who had two children, one of which murdered the other, and who is now comforted by the birth of a child to replace the one she lost. Speculation that Adam and Eve would surely have had more than three children by the time they had Seth when Adam was 105, is contra-indicated by the fact that Noah didn't have children until he was 500 years old, and still had only three children by the time he was 600 years old (Genesis 5:32; 7:6).

The fact is that when the Bible wants to refer to additional sons and daughters in the record of Adam, it does so explicitly; 'during this time he had other sons and daughters' (Genesis 5:4), 'and he had other sons and daughters' (Genesis 5:6, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 30). When we read the record of Noah, we find reference to him having three sons before the flood, and no more. Although we could speculate that additional children were born during this time, the narrative of the flood tells us this was not so, since only eight people entered the Ark. Additionally, Genesis 10 mentions only Shem, Ham, and Japheth when describing the descendants of Noah. All of this confirms that when we read of Genesis speaking of a family having a certain number of children, we can reliably understand it as saying this is all the children they had. There are no examples from Genesis 1-10 of families being said to have only a certain number of children when in fact they had many more.

The difference between the argument that Cain married a sister and the argument that Cain married someone unrelated to his own family, is the fact that there is no evidence at all for the first argument, either inside or outside the Bible. In contrast, inside the Bible the text naturally as a reference to Cain marrying outside his family, and there is abundant evidence outside the Bible that many other humans already existed at this time, who could not have been related to Cain because they were descendants of humans who lived before Adam and Eve.

Secondly, the argument that Cain married one of his sisters contradicts the historical objection to incest which is found in human societies. Every society in recorded human history has prohibited incest between members of the same family,¹³ including the societies in the Ancient Near East in which the events of the Old Testament took place. Thirdly, there is no evidence that incest between direct family members was acceptable before God prohibited it in the Law of Moses. There are no examples in the Bible of any approval of such relationships, before or after the Law of Moses prohibited them (Leviticus 18); Abraham married the daughter of his father's second wife, a sister in law who was not his blood relation (Genesis 20:12), and Amram married his aunt (Exodus 6:20). On the contrary, the incest between Lot and his daughters is presented explicitly as shameful and so unnatural an act that Lot's daughters needed to get him drunk in order for it to happen (Genesis 19:31-36).

¹³ 'Societies also have rules that state whom one can and cannot marry. Rules about whom one cannot marry are directly related to the incest taboo, which is found in all societies and is therefore a cultural universal. The incest taboo forbids sexual relations between certain categories of close relatives. Almost universally, forbidden categories include mother and son, father and daughter, and brother and sister. Since sexual partners cannot be sought within the immediate family because of the incest taboo, they must be sought elsewhere.', Abraham Rosman, Paula G Rubel, and Maxine K Weisgrau, eds., *The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 102.

Additionally, Paul made it clear that some acts are so unnatural that we should not need a commandment from God to know they are wrong. He told the Corinthians that they were wrong to tolerate a man who was cohabiting with his father's wife, indicating that they should be ashamed of themselves since 'that is not permitted even among the Gentiles' (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Paul does not appeal to the Law of Moses, or any divinely revealed prohibition. On the contrary, he argues that the Corinthians should not need a prohibition from God in order to know that certain acts are morally depraved and should not be committed. Paul rejects the view that incest is acceptable if God hasn't prohibited it; to Paul, even incest with a step-mother is so obviously unnatural and wrong that even the unenlightened heathen realize it's unacceptable, and normal thinking people should realize it's wrong without needing God's explicit revelation.

Fourthly, the fact that children who grow up together (even if they are not blood relatives), are naturally conditioned against finding each other attractive, makes it highly unlikely that Cain would have married a sister. This conditioning is known as the Westermarck Effect (named after the psychologist who defined it), and it has been validated many times over 70 years of research and numerous unsuccessful attempts to prove it wrong. If Cain married a sister, it is clear this would have been someone with whom he grew up; Genesis 4:1-16 shows Cain was still living with the rest of his family at the time he killed Abel, and had not moved away by the time he was married. The Westermarck Effect means Cain's marriage to a sister is unlikely to the point of being totally unrealistic.

Fifthly, incest among direct family members in which siblings grow up together and with their parents, is not found in psychologically healthy families; it is so unnatural that it typically occurs only in families with serious psychological problems which result in breach of the Westermarck Effect.¹⁴ Sixthly, the theory that Cain married a sister requires us to believe that one of Cain's sisters willingly married the man who had just murdered one of her brothers. This is even less likely than the idea that Cain and his sister would find each other mutually attractive.

The natural reading of Genesis 4 is that humans other than Adam and Eve's immediate family already existed in the earth, and that Cain was aware of them. The idea that Cain would marry a sister, that a sister would marry a murderer, and that this entire unnatural relationship would be sanctioned by the family, is unlikely in the extreme, unless we are prepared to accept that Adam and Eve's family was psychologically dysfunctional, and Cain and his sister mentally ill or sexually depraved. It is noteworthy that archaeological evidence supports this overwhelmingly, and that even our earliest commentators were well aware of this. An interpretation which has support within the text is more credible than an interpretation without any textual support, and which has been simply invented to avoid a difficulty caused by pre-conceived ideas.

The pre-Adamite solution

It is clear that historical exegetes struggled with the obvious tensions in the text of Genesis 1-4. On the one hand the text appears to present Adam and Eve as the first humans on the planet. On the other hand the text explicitly cites the existence of people other than Adam and Eve and their immediate family. These two views are irreconcilable.

The pressing need to resolve this tension clearly influenced some early Jewish, Christian, and Muslim commentators, who believed Genesis 4 indicated that Adam and Eve were not the first humans to exist. Perhaps the earliest

¹⁴ 'In a controlled study, Philip Madonna, Susan Van Scoyk, and David P. Jones found that on a standardized family evaluation scale incest families tended to rate in the severely dysfunctional range.', Mark T. Erickson, "Thought and the Current Clinical Understanding of Incest," in *Inbreeding, Incest, and the Incest Taboo: The State of Knowledge at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf and William H. Durham (Stanford University Press, 2005), 166.

attempt at this “pre-Adamism” is the tenth century text known as “Nabatean Agriculture” (Kitab al-falaha al-nabatiya), a lengthy text written in Nabatean which contains the claim that Adam originated in India and traveled to the Middle East as the progenitor of agriculture, rather than the first human.¹⁵ Pre-Adamic humans were also suggested by medieval rabbis Judah Halevi (twelfth century),¹⁶ and Moses Maimonides (twelfth century), who cited the pre-Adamite theory in Nabatean Agriculture.¹⁷

Pre-Adamism was a serious threat to established Catholic teaching, in particular representing a challenge to the doctrine of Original Sin, so it is not surprising to find barely any Christian adherents of the doctrine before the Reformation era. Nevertheless, there is some (scant), evidence for Christians holding this belief in earlier centuries; Tomás Scoto (fourteenth century), and Zaninus de Solcia (fifteenth century), were both condemned for pre-Adamism.¹⁸ These earlier forms of pre-Adamism were the product either of attempts to address the Biblical text (as in the case of Maimonides and Halevi), or of speculation about other worlds (as in the case of de Solcia).

Such comments were typically dismissed as heretical speculation, and were easily suppressed (though not so easily addressed). However, in the fifteenth century Western exploration of the New World contributed powerfully to a reconsideration of human origins, with evidence which could be neither dismissed nor ignored. The fact that the explorers Walter Raleigh and Thomas Harriot were accused of belief in pre-Adamism, suggests strongly their acceptance of evidence that the New World had been settled by humans long before the time allowed by the traditional chronology, and their realization that the New World had been populated by people who lived before Adam.¹⁹

¹⁵ “Nabatean Agriculture, for example, an apologia for Babylonian society against Islam that appeared in A.D. 904 suggested that Adam had come from India to be the progenitor, not of the human race, but of an agricultural civilization.”, David N Livingstone, *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: American philosophical Society, 1992), 2.

¹⁶ “Judah Halevi gave his final opinion, which indicated he really did take seriously some pre-Adamite possibilities,”, Richard Henry Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676): His Life, Work and Influence* (Brill, 1987), 28.

¹⁷ “This scheme was later reported in the Guide for the Perplexed written by the celebrated Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, Maimonides”, David N Livingstone, *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: American philosophical Society, 1992), 2; “Maimonides, by concentrating on the role given to Adam in this work, indicated a slight pre-Adamite possibility,”, Richard H. Popkin, “The Pre-Adamite Theory,” in *Philosophy and Humanism: Renaissance Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller and Edward P Mahoney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 54.

¹⁸ “One Father Tomás Scoto was accused in the fourteenth century of maintaining that there were men before Adam, and Zaninus de Solcia was condemned in 1459 for holding that Adam was not the first man.”. R. H. Popkin, “The Development of Religious Scepticism and the Influence of Isaac La Peyrère’s Pre-Adamism and Bible Criticism,” in *Classical Influences on European Culture, A.D. 1500-1700, Parts 1500-1700*, ed. R. R. Bolgar and Robert Ralph Bolgar (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 273; note that de Solcia “was not, however, holding that there were people before Adam in our world”, Richard Henry Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676): His Life, Work and Influence* (Brill, 1987), 30.

¹⁹ “Allegations of preadamism were thus among the charges laid at the feet of men like Sir Walter Raleigh (1554-1618) and Thomas Harriot (1560-1621). In Raleigh’s case, of course, his theorizing was always conducted within the confines of scriptural authority, but his computational strategy was to seek for the greatest amount of time that the Hebrew text would allow. As for Harriot, it was his experience of exploration in Virginia that, together with his work on biblical chronology, raised questions about the origin of the ‘American Indians.’ Perhaps it was for these reasons that both Raleigh and Harriot, and indeed Christopher Marlowe, were branded with holding to the preadamite heresy, and belonging to a circle of atheists which impiously and impudently persisted in affirming that American Indian archaeology gave evidence of artifacts that predated Adam by thousands of years.”, David N Livingstone, *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: American philosophical Society, 1992), 3.

The discomfoting New World discoveries provoked urgent debate.²⁰ This was exacerbated by further evidence of pre-Adamism from the Far East. Although Europeans had been visiting China since the fourteenth century (typically for trade and diplomacy), it seems that it was in the seventeenth century that European residents of China (typically diplomats and missionaries), gradually became familiar with a large corpus of Chinese literature which clearly recorded historical events far earlier than the earliest traditionally accepted date for Adam.²¹

Various strategies were devised in order to try and preserve the traditional chronology and Adam's position as universal human progenitor. One method was to attack pagan chronologies as unreliable,²² a strategy which had been used by early medieval Christians who had been disturbed by the unusually long histories preserved in Egyptian and Babylonian records. Other methods included arguing that early descendants of Noah had reached the Americas by ship, claiming the Americas could be reached on foot from Asia, or asserting that the Americas had been settled recently by the Vikings.²³ A particularly ingenious exegetical maneuver was made by Englishman John Webb, who not only proposed that Noah's Ark had come to ground on a mountain in China, rather than Ararat, but also claimed Chinese was a form of ancient Hebrew.²⁴

In contrast, others simply acknowledged that the newly discovered historical evidence was best explained by the existence of pre-Adamic humans.²⁵ Jacob Palaeologus, a Dominican friar in Prague, not only accepted pre-Adamic humans but also argued that original sin was not universal, since not all humans could be descended from Adam.²⁶

²⁰ "Later, in the mid-seventeenth century, Matthew Hale would concede that the central issue around which debates about human origins rotated was the American Indian. The very fact of their existence, he noted, "hath occasioned some difficulty and dispute touching the Traduction of all Mankind from the two common Parents supposed of all Mankind, namely *Adam* and *Eve*."", David N Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 22.

²¹ "A contemporary source of problematically long genealogy, however, was provided by tales of Chinese chronology: 'They say the World is aboue a hundred thousand yeares old after their Chronologies, and accordingly deriue a Pedigree and tell of wonders done ninetie thousand yeares before Adams creation.'", William Poole, "Seventeenth-Century Preadamism, and an Anonymous English Preadamist," *The Seventeenth Century* 19.1 (2004): 3.

²² "And yet as often as not the rehearsing of these ancient cosmologies with their estimated ages of the world, as in the case of men like Montaigne, Charron, and Thomas Lanquet, was with the express object of refuting them.", David N Livingstone, *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: American philosophical Society, 1992), 5.

²³ "Some speculated that Noah's maritime skills were sufficient to allow for the possibility that America could have been reached by sea in ancient times; some were convinced that the native peoples of America were the ten lost tribes of Israel. Others, notably the Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta in the late sixteenth century, desperately intent on preserving the integrity of scripture, urged that it was possible to cross into the New World from the northern wastes of Asia. Still others, in particular Hugo Grotius in 1643, held to the view that the Vikings had colonized America and called upon philological evidence to support his theory, a view that was vigorously challenged by various writers, including Georg Horn.", David N Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 20, 22.

²⁴ "Indeed, at the tail end of the seventeenth century a certain John Webb advanced the novel thesis that after the Flood, Noah and his ark landed not on top of Mount Ararat in Armenia but instead in China. As Umberto Eco remarks, Webb argued that "the Chinese language is the purest version of Adamic Hebrew, and only the Chinese, having lived for millennia without suffering foreign invasions, preserved it in its original purity.", David N Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 10.

²⁵ "Thus the encounter with ancient chronologies, together with the anthropological awakening precipitated by the voyages of exploration presented more and more challenges to the received interpretation of the biblical chronicles of creation, and thus encouraged speculation about the existence of non-Adamic peoples.", William Poole, "Seventeenth-Century Preadamism, and an Anonymous English Preadamist," *The Seventeenth Century* 19.1 (2004): 5.

Likewise, in his work “Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima” (1658), the Jesuit missionary Martino Martini was the first to state expressly that the Chinese records were conclusive evidence of pre-Adamic humans.²⁷

For those who accepted the evidence for pre-Adamic humans, the next challenge was to identify their origins, which was attempted by various authors in the sixteenth century. Prompted by the New World discoveries,²⁸ German alchemist Theophrastus von Hohenheim (known as Paracelsus), proposed that distant countries had been populated by humans from “another Adam” as part of a pre-Adamic creation, rather than by Adam’s descendants.²⁹ The French bishop Jean Bodin also proposed a pre-Adamic creation,³⁰ which he supported by arguing that the Bible’s account of human history was selective and confined only to God’s elect,³¹ a strategy which would prove increasingly with other commentators.³² Another pre-Adamic model was suggested by the Dominican friar Giordano Bruno, who proposed (on mystical rather than biblical grounds), that the earth had brought forth three groups of humans, and that Adam was the last of these groups. Consequently, he believed that Adam was only the progenitor of some humans.³³

²⁶ “The oriental scholar Jacob Palaeologus, a resident of Prague, was reportedly executed in 1585, for example, for holding to the heresy that because all people were not descended from Adam and Eve, the inheritance of original sin was not universal.”, David N Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 22.

²⁷ “Martini was the first major writer to point out the questions the eastern accounts invited about Biblical universality, and the first to draw explicit and seemingly non-biblical conclusions: ‘I hold it as certain that the extremity of Asia was populated before the flood’, Martini dangerously declared.”, William Poole, “Seventeenth-Century Preadamism, and an Anonymous English Preadamist,” *The Seventeenth Century* 19.1 (2004): 3.

²⁸ “Paracelsus, for example, was propelled towards polygenism by the sheer presence of newly discovered races. It was, he confessed, difficult to believe that the inhabitants of the “hidden islands” were descended from Adam, and while he was convinced that they had no souls, he suggested that “these people are from a different Adam.”, David N Livingstone, *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: American philosophical Society, 1992), 4.

²⁹ “The children of Adam did not inhabit the whole world. That is why some hidden countries have not been populated by Adam’s children, but through another creature, created like men outside of Adam’s creation. For God did not intend to leave them empty, but had populated the miraculously hidden countries with other men.”, Paracelsus, quoted in David N Livingstone, *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: American philosophical Society, 1992), 4.

³⁰ “The notion of a pre-Adamic creation was implicit in the influential works of Jean Bodin (1530-96) in the late sixteenth century.”, John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism* (Springer, 2016), 74.

³¹ “Similarly, Jean Bodin thought of primitive Europeans as just that, primitive, and considered that the Bible was only concerned with “the origins of that people whom God alone chose . . . not of the others.””, David N Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 17.

³² “The English freethinker, libertine, and disciple of Hobbes Charles Blount (1654–93), who was accused by Josiah King of adopting pre-adamism,⁶⁷ plainly told the readers of his *Oracles of Reason*, published just before his death in 1693, that “there were two creations both of Man and Woman, and that Adam was not the first Man, nor Eve the first Woman, only the first of the Holy race.””, David N Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 42.

³³ “The regions of the heavens are three; three of air; the water is divided into three; the earth is divided into three parts. And the three races had three Patriarchs, When mother Earth produced animals, first Enoch, Leviathan, and the third of which is Adam; According to the belief of most of the Jews, From whom alone was descended the sacred race.”, Bruno, quoted in David N Livingstone, *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: American philosophical Society, 1992), 4.

Despite these efforts, pre-Adamism was confined to the fringes of Christianity up to the end of the seventeenth century, and was most commonly found among unorthodox groups,³⁴ which were free to experiment with greater doctrinal diversity than mainstream Christianity permitted.³⁵

Nevertheless, the disparate voices of sixteenth and seventeenth century pre-Adamism actually made significant exegetical progress. Previously the passages of Scripture which clearly indicated the earth was populated by more than Adam and Eve's family (such as the reference to Cain's wife, and Cain's fear of being killed by other humans), had been devalued and dismissed out of preference for an interpretation which held Adam and Eve were the first humans on earth. Instead of awkwardly explaining away these passages by inventing an immoral and highly unlikely incestuous relationship with a sister the Bible never mentions, and transferring Cain's fear from other humans to animals (or simply ignoring the passage), expositors were encouraged to take these passages seriously.

In fact, some commentators could see that rather than causing problems for the text, the discoveries in the New World, and the Chinese genealogies, actually resolved a long standing interpretive challenge. For this reason, late Renaissance and early modern pre-Adamism must be seen not as an interpretive innovation to make Scripture conform to historical and geographical discoveries, but rather as a welcome alternative to previously clumsy attempts to avoid the fact that the Bible itself very obviously indicates that Adam and Eve were not the first humans on earth.

In 1655, Jewish radical Calvinist Isaac de la Peyrère wrote "Systema Theologicum Ex Prae-Adamite Hypothesi". one of the most learned arguments for pre-Adamism. The following year it was translated into English as "Men before Adam. Or A discourse upon the first chapter of the epistle of the apostle Paul to the Romans. By which are prov'd, that the first men were created before Adam", which increased its reach and influence considerably. Peyrère's argument was both remarkable and persuasive insofar as it was founded almost entirely on Scriptural evidence, with historical and geographical data only being used to corroborate his interpretation of the Bible.³⁶ For Peyrère, the purpose of the entire argument was theological, reconciling the tensions within the Scriptural text itself, which clearly led to the conclusion that humans existed before Adam.³⁷

³⁴ "Typically, however, when the pre-adamites did surface, they were to be found in the dubious company of radicals, skeptics, or esoterics.", David N Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 42.

³⁵ "Preadamism was later to resurface in the radical decades of the seventeenth century, notably in the writings of Gerard Winstanley the Digger, Laurence Clarkson the Ranter and Thomas Totney who wrote under the prophetic name of Theaureaujohn Tany. Apart from these outbursts, though, Preadamism remained understandably rare, as the consequences of rejecting both the universality and the accuracy of the Mosaic books were too obvious and terrible to be risked.", William Poole, "Seventeenth-Century Preadamism, and an Anonymous English Preadamist," *The Seventeenth Century* 19.1 (2004): 3.

³⁶ "Peyrère began, as the full title of his work makes plain, with Pauline theology.", David N Livingstone, *The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion* (Philadelphia: American philosophical Society, 1992), 6.

³⁷ "Here was a ready-made explanation for Cain's fear, after his banishment from the Garden of Eden, that he would encounter hostile individuals seeking to kill him; it delivered a population to inhabit the city he built; it provided a possible answer to the question about where his wife came from. On the standard account there simply were no other people beyond the adamic family to make sense of these details. But now there was a simple answer: preadamites. As La Peyrère himself explained, ever since childhood he had been perplexed by these niggles but had only found resolution when he pondered the fifth chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans.", David N Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 34.

Other seventeenth century supporters of pre-Adamism were likewise led to the conclusion by the text of the Bible, rather than external evidence. The difficulty of Cain's wife, and Cain's fear of other humans, led expositors such as Laurence Clarkson,³⁸ Gerard Witstanley,³⁹ and Charles Blount,⁴⁰ to conclude that Scripture itself taught there were humans before Adam. Support for pre-Adamism increased significantly during the Enlightenment era of the eighteenth century, and became popular in the nineteenth century. The earliest Christadelphian expositors took pre-Adamism for granted, freely acknowledging the existence of humans before Adam, on the basis of scientific evidence.⁴¹ However, among early Christadelphians it was held that all pre-Adamites died out before Adam was created, and that Cain married his sister.

Conclusion

Pre-Adamism experienced something of a decline during the early twentieth century as a result of conservative objections to evolution. However, later pre-Adamism experienced a revival even among conservative scholars, mainly due to the recognition that the text in Genesis 4 plainly assumes that humans existed who were not part of the primal family of Adam and Eve, without explaining where the other people came from.

“The origin of Cain's wife is an old debate, but the mark of Cain assumes the presence of other tribes that would attack Cain as he went as a vagabond through the earth. It is little help to hear the fundamentalists explain how this would be done by his brothers and sisters born later or his nieces and nephews.

³⁸ “Laurence Clarkson, a Muggletonian—a radical millenarian group that held the soul to be mortal and found no need for formal religious ceremonies—reflected on his youthful, wilder days in the 1650s, when he had denied that “Adam was the first Creature, but that there was a Creation before him . . . judging that land of Nod where Cain took his wife, was inhabited a long time before Cain.”, David N Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 42.

³⁹ “And Gerard Winstanley, a member of the agrarian reformist group the Diggers, warned against literalistic readings of the Genesis account, highlighting the contradictions and absurdities such hermeneutics would deliver. To him the idea that Cain was “the third man in the world” could not be taken literally because a few verses later Bible readers were told that he needed protection from others who would seek to take his life. To Winstanley it was obvious that “there were men in the world before that time”— namely, the time of Adam.”, David N Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 42.

⁴⁰ “It was simply one of the “great Errors committed in the manner of reading Scripture” to imagine that Adam was the father of all humankind. Any sensible hermeneutic would recognize that “Moses made [Adam] only to be the first Father of the Jews, whilst others Hyperbolically make him to be the first Father of all Men,” and that Noah's flood only covered the “Land of the Jews.”, David N Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 42.

⁴¹ “There are indeed hints, casually dropped in the scriptures, which would seem to indicate that our planet was inhabited by a race of beings anterior to the formation of man.”, John Thomas, *Elpis Israel: An Exposition of the Kingdom of God* (electronic ed.; Birmingham, UK: The Christadelphian, 1990), 10; “From this point of view therefore the geologist is free from coming into collision with scripture. He may come to discover traces of a race of beings similar to man, but not of Adam's posterity, but whether he does or not, there is another point of view from which we have an approach to certainty, that a race of beings similar to man did exist prior to Adam and a constitution of things likewise similar to what now obtains, and all this we have from scripture itself.”, Jardine, “The Bible as a Law of Life and Immortality”, *The Ambassador of the Coming Age*, 2, no. 8 (1865), 127; “The reason is even hinted at in connection with pre-Adamic inhabitants (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6) styled “the angels which fell.” The existence of prior inhabitants is implied in the command addressed to Adam and Eve to be “fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth” (Gen. 1:28), the words addressed to Noah when the world had been cleared of a previous population. Therefore the remains found at depths pointing to pre-historic antiquity, even if human remains, do not disprove the Bible scheme of the Adamic era.”, Robert Roberts, ““Christ Is Coming””, *The Christadelphian* 16, no. 182 (Birmingham: Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association, 1879), 81.

The famous four (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel) are only representative human beings at the dawn of civilization, not the only human beings. There is plenty of room here for L. S. B. Leackey's discoveries in *Adam's Ancestors*.⁴²

"There may be a biblical hint of such a situation in the surprising impression of an already populous earth given by the words and deeds of Cain in 4:14, 17.⁴³ Even Augustine had to devote a chapter to answering those who "find this a difficulty",⁴⁴ and although the traditional answer is valid enough (see commentary on 4:13, 14, below), the persistence of this old objection could be a sign that our presuppositions have been inadequate."⁴³

"Exactly who the people are whom Cain fears will kill him has been the source of much inventive exegesis. The text as we have it shows no interest in the question. It merely presumes that other people are present without explaining how that came about."⁴⁴

Significantly, the text's reference to human beings outside Adam and Eve's immediate family has been acknowledged even by critical scholars who have no interest in harmonizing the Bible with science.

"This statement suggests that at this point there are people in the world besides Adam, Eve, and Cain. The existence of others is also indicated later by the reference to Cain's wife (v. 17)."⁴⁵

"Even if Cain is described as the son of the first couple (and this information belongs to the genealogy, not the narrative) then the conclusion does not necessarily follow that at that time there could not have been other human beings. One should not apply criteria belonging to historical thought patterns to the presentation of the primeval events. When Cain presumes that there are other people "out there", he is speaking in an utterly unreflective manner."⁴⁶

Honest recognition of what the text actually says, is the first step towards interpreting it correctly. Regardless of what we conclude about the origin of Cain's wife, we should acknowledge that the Bible plainly says that she was not one of his family members.

⁴² Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 1; Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 32.

⁴³ Dale Moody, "Tabletalk on Theology Tomorrow", *Review and Expositor* 64, no. 3 (1967): 345.

⁴⁴ Paul J. Kissling, *Genesis* (The College Press NIV Commentary; Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 2004–), 226.

⁴⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 233.

⁴⁶ Claus Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 311.