

*Miracles, Myths, and Doubts  
of Biblical Proportions*



# SCRIPTURE AND THE SKEPTIC

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## CHAPTER ONE

# ISN'T THE BIBLE ONLY HUMAN?

For people destined to inherit paradise in heaven for all eternity, Christians can be such fragile little snowflakes sometimes. Every other day, it seems like another group of believers gets triggered over some new, imminent threat to their faith. In my lifetime I've seen Christians express outrage over everything from dancing teenagers and Super Bowl halftime shows to men in skinny jeans and women in yoga pants. Just this morning, my Twitter feed informed me that thousands of Southern Baptists are up in arms because a woman was invited to a Baptist conference to offer a spoken word performance during a worship service.

*A woman, you guys!*

The trouble with this particular woman is that she describes herself as a pastor which, for most Southern Baptists, is unacceptable

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because there are verses in the New Testament forbidding women to lead or teach Christian men. I'm not arguing in favor of female pastors here (I'll do that later in the book); right now, my point is simply that this woman wasn't even invited to preach or teach at that Baptist conference; she was simply asked to recite some cool poetry she wrote. Still, a mob of Christians is threatening to boycott the event because this pastor and her poetry pose a clear and present danger to their biblical purity.

I don't mean to attack anyone's doctrine here; I know that most Christians who believe women shouldn't be pastors are just doing their best to be obedient to Scripture. But when I read about stories like this woman and her spoken word performance evoking such a negative, public response from Christians, I wonder if we have forgotten the words of Jesus who, after his disciples tried to stop a stranger from doing good things in Jesus's name, said, "Do not stop him. . . . For whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:39-40). The advice of the apostle Peter applies here as well:

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15, emphasis added)*

Christians tend to have a pretty good handle on "Always be prepared to give an answer," but we're often deficient in the "with gentleness and respect" department. Insecurity is what I see when I observe how some Christians interact with the wider culture, which begs the question: If our tickets to heaven are already punched, why are many Christians so insecure?

I've concluded that the driver of Christian insecurity is a deep fear many believers experience when we don't have what it takes to defend the Bible in our twenty-first-century secular context. Our fragility stems from the burden we feel to read, obey, honor, and defend a book that most of us have not been trained to interpret. Despite our lack of preparation, we feel obligated to protect the Bible, so whenever a threat to our holy book emerges, the claws come out.

And how do you protect something you don't fully understand? How do you defend a book when your opponents publicly point out the verses that appear archaic at best, and morally indefensible at worst? You fight. You get angry. You regurgitate something you heard your preacher say. You make your point, and if your opponents refuse to accept it, the "Unfriend" button is just a click away.

## Creepy Uncle Cain

I was in high school the first time I remember seeing Christian insecurity about the Bible on full display. Even though my dad was the pastor at the Methodist church in town, I preferred the non-denominational church's youth group because of the ~~organized structure and in-depth Bible teaching~~ basketball court. Plus, the non-denom girls were way cuter. One night, the church's youth minister, Greg, decided to teach us about the story of Cain and Abel who, in addition to being the sons of Adam and Eve, were also the world's first murderer and murder victim, respectively. After telling us how Cain slaughtered his little brother and then proceeded to get snarky with God about it (God: "Where is your brother Abel?")

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Cain: “I don’t know. *Am I my brother’s keeper?*”), Youth Pastor Greg dropped this confounding verse on us: “Cain made love to his wife . . .” (Genesis 4:17).

I could see the terror in Youth Pastor Greg’s face the moment he stopped reading. He had to be kicking himself for saying that final verse out loud. He never intended for his lesson on Genesis 4 to take the unfortunate turn that suddenly felt inevitable. Predictably, a sophomore raised her hand and asked the question on most of our minds, “Where did Cain’s wife come from?”

In case you’re unfamiliar with the problem presented by Cain’s wife, here it is: In Genesis 1, God made two people, Adam and Eve. In the next chapter, they married each other (not a very deep dating pool!). In chapter 3, they ate one bad apple and all hell broke loose. God forced them to leave the Garden of Eden. In the fourth chapter, they made love and had kids. At this point in the story, if you read the text literally, Adam and Eve’s nuclear family were the only people on the planet, so the obvious answer to the sophomore’s question is that Cain married his own sister which, to a roomful of adolescents like us, sounded both horrendous and hilarious.

The noise of chaos and laughter swelled in the Youth Room. Whatever lesson Youth Pastor Greg intended to teach was a moot point. He downshifted into damage control because the only talking point that we students were taking home that night was the apparent incest in Genesis 4. Trying to think on his feet, and perhaps clinging to his job, Youth Pastor Greg insisted we were wrong. He said, “It’s impossible that God would allow Cain to marry his sister because Leviticus 18 says marrying your sister is a sin. The Bible forbids it, so it could not have happened.”

The sophomore's boyfriend interrupted: "But doesn't the Bible forbid murder, too? *That* happened. Ask Abel!" Youth Pastor Greg pretended not to hear him.

Then someone shouted, "So who *was* Cain's wife?!" All sweaty, Youth Pastor Greg explained, "What must have happened is that Adam and Eve had other kids, and then their kids had kids, and after enough time passed, Cain married one of them."

"Wait," the sophomore shot back, "So Cain married his *niece*?"

A collective "Ewwwwwww" spread like a virus across the room, as the thought of marrying an uncle or aunt caused each of us to upchuck in our mouths a little. Knowing he had no chance of gaining control over that room again, Youth Pastor Greg shouted, "If I let you go play basketball, will you promise not to tell your parents what happened here tonight?" We accepted his terms of surrender.

The controversy over whom Cain married is indicative of a much larger question that is tearing Christians, churches, and denominations apart: How should we respond when someone challenges our Scriptures, especially when the Bible appears ambiguous about the issues being raised? Absent some better answer, the typical Christian counter to tough questions about the Bible is to get defensive, which rarely produces a fruitful exchange with skeptics. If anything, the Christian tendency toward panicked, circular logic pushes intelligent doubters even further away from faith in God.

## **My Brother's Keeper?**

What are we so afraid of? Do we really think the book with a two-thousand-year shelf life and the number-one best seller in history can't take a little heat from modern intellectuals? Are we



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really so afraid that a few questions from unbelievers could cause the entire canon to crumble unless we quickly offer a foolproof defense? Wouldn't that imply that the Bible is nothing but a house of cards anyway? We don't think so little of this book, do we? Of course not.

We don't need to jump through hoops to explain away uncomfortable questions about Cain's wife. Consider this much simpler, more reasonable line of reasoning: (1) the first few chapters in Genesis are not an eyewitness report, (2) it doesn't really matter whom Cain married, and (3) the only thing that matters in this story is God's love for Cain.

Central to the story is the fact that Cain was the world's premier homicidal maniac, and that God loved him nonetheless. Before killing his brother, "Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast" (Genesis 4:5). God, aware of Cain's toxic resentment, tried to warn the young man:

*"Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." (Genesis 4:6-7)*

Cain did not rule over it. Instead, he invited his brother to go on a walk, and later that day, Cain walked back home, alone. Fully aware of what Cain had done, God gave the man a chance to confess:

*"Where is your brother Abel?"*

*"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"*

*The LORD said, "What have you done?" (Genesis 4:9-10)*

*Many Christians and non-Christians alike have absorbed the supposition that “Old Testament God” was meaner and morally inferior when compared to “New Testament God.”*

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Even if you've never read the Bible, you've likely heard about God's reputation for wrath and bloodthirst in the Old Testament. Many Christians and non-Christians alike have absorbed the supposition that “Old Testament God” was meaner and morally inferior when compared to “New Testament God,” who was the embodiment of mercy and love. How, then, would you expect *mean old God* to react to Cain's monstrous sin? With an equally monstrous penalty, right? If ever a man was deserving of capital punishment, it was Cain.

But *mean old God* is full of surprises. For the crime of murder in the first degree, God sentenced Cain to a life of hunting and gathering instead of farming:

*“When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”  
(Genesis 4:12)*

That's it! So much for the bloodthirsty God of the Old Testament. Still, instead of jumping for joy, Cain aired his grievances:

*“My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence. I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” (Genesis 4:13-14)*

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After receiving the lightest possible sentence for the worst imaginable crime, Cain had the hubris to play the victim. To be clear, if I was God, those might have been Cain's last words. *Are you kidding me, Cain? Who do you think you are?* But how did God respond to Cain's fear of being killed?

*"Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. (Genesis 4:15-16)*

Wait, *what?* "Old Testament God" promised to protect the world's first murderer? Why? Because all along, throughout the entire story, God was answering Cain's question. The same question the people of God continued to ask in all sixty-six books of the Bible. It's the question Jesus came to answer once and for all. And in this age of movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and the battle over abortion rights, this question looms large even now.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" asked Cain. In other words:

*Am I responsible for what I do?*

*Am I expected to protect the most vulnerable?*

*Am I made to love?*

And God, merciful and kind, looked at Cain the murderer and said, "*Yes you are.*"

## **The Humanity of the Bible**

Understood in a vacuum, Cain's story is an interesting fable about being nice to your siblings, but in the greater context of the Bible,

Cain's failures and God's forgiveness foreshadow future events. Like much of the Old Testament, the story of Cain and Abel has no satisfying end; it beckons us to anticipate someone better than Cain and something better than sin.

The Old Testament is amazing on its own, but as a prequel to the life of Jesus, it's epic. Everything you find in the Old Testament—even the awful, ugly parts—points forward to the life of Jesus. The humanity on display in the Hebrew Scriptures is both repulsive and redemptive. Take Abraham, for example; by all accounts, the father of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam was a man of great faith. We're introduced to Abraham (who was also called Abram) in Genesis, the first book of the Bible:

*The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.*

*"I will make you into a great nation; ...*

*I will make your name great....*

*And all peoples on earth*

*will be blessed through you."*

*So Abram went.... (Genesis 12:1-4)*

Wow! Abram had a comfortable life, and just walked away because God told him to. What a godly man of faith, right? One day, I hope to become half the man that Abr—OK, *hold that thought*. Six verses later, Abraham traveled with Sarai to Egypt to escape a famine, and before crossing the border, it occurred to Abraham that his wife was gorgeous:



# Understand the Bible by interpreting it through the lens of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.

The Bible is the best-selling, most widely read, and most quoted book in history. It is also misunderstood, misquoted, and fiercely debated. If, as Christians believe, the Bible is the Word of God, why is it so complex and difficult to interpret in parts, yet simple enough for even children to understand in others?

In *Scripture and the Skeptic*, Eric Huffman, author of *40 Days of Doubt*, helps readers understand and cope with confusion about the Bible and provides answers to questions by reframing it as a perfect and seamless story. Huffman illustrates how the Bible, even the parts some consider ungodly, presents the perfect love story that God intended to tell.



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