THE QUESTION

When did God forbid marrying your own brother or sister?

Asked by a THF member on October 28, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 7 numbered quotations · the 10 early Christian passages and 74 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/when-did-god-forbid-marrying-your-own-brother-or-sister

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

Methodius says the earliest people married sisters because the human race first had to grow, and this lasted until the Law of Moses forbade it and called it sin. Clement sees a first step in Abraham's words about Sarah. The writers say God Himself never changes; He led people to stricter ways as they matured.

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HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
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IN THIS STUDY

1	The Law of Moses ended sister marriage	2	6	Some marriage rules served the time of growth	4
2	The human race first needed to grow	2	7	The church kept limits on close-kin marriage	4
3	God trained people like a wise parent	2		What these passages don't tell us	5
4	Abraham's half-sister marriage pointed to a limit	3		The Sources: 10 early Christian passages and 74 Bible verses, with links	5
5	The rule changed, but God did not	3			

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POINT 1 OF 7

The Law of Moses ended sister marriage

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Methodius says the first generations did not think it wrong to marry their sisters. That lasted until the Law came. The Law then named it a sin and put a curse on the man who uncovered his sister's nakedness.

1

"Therefore, people of ancient times thought it was not improper to take their own sisters as wives. This lasted until the law came and separated them."

later in the same passage

"By forbidding what at first had seemed right, the law declared it to be sin, calling cursed the man who uncovered the nakedness of his sister."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Methodius,** *Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 2 (c. 270–311 AD) **Source 10, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

The human race first needed to grow

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Methodius gives the reason it was allowed at first. There were very few people, and the race needed to increase in number before it could be led to a higher way of life.

2

"The human race was still very small in number. It first needed to increase in number, and then be brought to perfection."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Methodius,** *Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 2 (c. 270–311 AD) **Source 10, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

God trained people like a wise parent

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Methodius compares God to parents who do not give a small child an adult's lessons all at once. Once the earth was filled, God no longer let people stay in the old ways and moved them step by step toward a purer life.

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3 “In this way, God mercifully brought our race the help it needed at the right time, as parents do for their children.”

later in the same passage

“But later, when it had been settled from end to end, and the human race had spread without limit, God no longer allowed man to remain in the same ways.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Methodius,** *Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 2 (c. 270–311 AD) **Source 10, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Abraham's half-sister marriage pointed to a limit

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Before the Law, Abraham said Sarah was his sister through his father but not his mother. Clement reads this as teaching that children of the same mother should not marry. He treats it as an early boundary, not the full later rule.

4 “For this reason Abraham, referring to his wife as a sister, says, "She is my sister by my father, but not by my mother; and she became my wife," Genesis 20:12, teaching us that children of the same mothers ought not to enter into marriage.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 2.23 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 4, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

The rule changed, but God did not

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Novatian teaches that God is always the same and never turns into something else. So a new command does not mean God's character changed. It fits Methodius' picture of an unchanging God guiding people as they grew.

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5

"He, then, is always like Himself. Nor does He ever turn or change Himself into any form, lest by change He should seem to be mortal."

later in the same passage

"But what He is, He always is. And who He is, He is always Himself. And what character He has, He always has."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Novatian,** *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 4 (c. 240–258 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 8, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 6 OF 7

Some marriage rules served the time of growth

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Tertullian makes a similar point about a different marriage law, the duty to marry a dead brother's widow. He says it existed because the blessing to grow and multiply still had to run its course. Once that reason ended, the rule ended too.

6

"Then they will come to know that this reason, now having ceased, is among those parts of the law that have been canceled."

later in the same passage

"First, because that ancient blessing, "Grow and multiply," still had to run its course."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Monogamy* 7 (c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 5, page 5 Read it in the library ›

POINT 7 OF 7

The church kept limits on close-kin marriage

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Apostolic Constitutions bar from the clergy any man who married two sisters or his niece. This shows the church still treated marriage between close relatives as a serious matter.

7

"A man who has married two sisters, or his brother's daughter or his sister's daughter, cannot be a clergyman."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 9, page 6 Read it in the library ›

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not give a date or a single moment when the rule began.
- They do not discuss how the children of Adam and Eve found wives.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 10 early Christian passages and 74 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–10, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 11–60, in Bible order), then 24 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *10 passages from 8 writers*

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Dialogue with Trypho* (on point 7) “It was not lawful for Jacob to marry two sisters at once… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *First Apology* godless and shameful impurities, might unknowingly be involved with their own child, relative, or sibling. There are some who even prostitute their own children and wives, and some are openly… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · source 3*

3 *To Autolycus* 6 might be comforted by such relations. Epicurus himself also, besides teaching atheism, teaches incest with mothers and sisters, and this against the laws that forbid it. For Solon clearly made… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · source 4*

4 *Stromata* 2.23 **Quote 4, page 3** “she became my wife," Genesis 20:12, teaching us that children of the same mothers ought… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 5*

5 *On Monogamy* 7 **Quote 6, page 4** “the sour grape chewed by the fathers has ceased to set the sons' teeth… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *Commentary on Matthew* 10 “It is not lawful for you to have… [continues online] **read ›**

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7 *Against Celsus* 14 (on point 5) beginning, with a larger set of proofs. I am saying nothing new, but what has long been settled. God is good, beautiful, and blessed, and that in the highest and… [continues online] **read ›**

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · source 8*

8 *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 4 **Quote 5, page 4** work of a good Ordainer cannot be anything but good. Therefore, every evil is a departure from God. For it cannot be that He is the originator or architect of… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 9*

9 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** "He who has married two sisters, or his brother's or sister's daughter, cannot be a clergyman" **read ›**

Methodius, *c. 270–311 AD · source 10*

10 *Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 2 **Quotes 1, 2, 3, pages 2, 3** it to be sin, calling cursed the man who uncovered the nakedness of his sister. In this way, God mercifully brought our race the help it needed at the right… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *50 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

11 **Genesis 12:19** Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, look, your wife is before you. Take her and hurry away." **read ›**

12 **Genesis 20:12** For indeed she is truly my sister by my father, but not by my mother; and she became my wife. **read ›**

13 **Genesis 20:13** When God brought me out of my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the righteousness you shall show me: in every place where we go, say of me, "He is my brother."'" **read ›**

14 **Genesis 34:9** and intermarry with us: give us your daughters, and take our daughters for your sons. **read ›**

15 **Genesis 38:8** Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, marry her as her brother-in-law, and raise up seed for your brother." **read ›**

16 **Genesis 38:9** But Onan knew that the seed would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife, he spilled it on the ground, so as not to give seed to his brother. **read ›**

17 **Exodus 34:16** and you take some of their daughters for your sons, and give some of your daughters to their sons, and your daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, and your sons prostitute themselves to their gods. **read ›**

18 **Leviticus 18:6** No man shall approach any of his own close relatives to uncover their nakedness. I am the Lord. **read ›**

19 **Leviticus 18:7** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father or the nakedness of your mother; for she is your mother; you shall not uncover her nakedness. **read ›**

20 **Leviticus 18:8** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness. **read ›**

21 **Leviticus 18:9** The nakedness of your sister, by your father or by your mother, whether born at home or born elsewhere, their nakedness you shall not uncover. **read ›**

22 **Leviticus 18:10** The nakedness of your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover, for it is your own nakedness. **read ›**

23 **Leviticus 18:11** You shall not uncover the nakedness of the daughter of your father's wife; she is your sister by the same father; you shall not uncover her nakedness. **read ›**

24 **Leviticus 18:12** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister, for she is a close relative of your father. **read ›**

25 **Leviticus 18:13** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is a close relative of your mother. **read ›**

26 **Leviticus 18:14** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother, and you shall not go in to his wife; for she is your relative. **read ›**

27 **Leviticus 18:15** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; for she is your son's wife; you shall not uncover her nakedness. **read ›**

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28 **Leviticus 18:16** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. **read ›**

29 **Leviticus 18:17** You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter; you shall not take that woman's son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover their nakedness, for they are your close relatives; it is ungodliness. **read ›**

30 **Leviticus 18:18** You shall not take a woman in addition to her sister as a rival, to uncover her nakedness beside her, while her sister is still living. **read ›**

31 **Leviticus 18:19** You shall not go in to a woman in the separation of her uncleanness to uncover her nakedness. **read ›**

32 **Leviticus 18:23** You shall not lie with any four-footed beast to mate with it, to be defiled with it; nor shall a woman stand before any four-footed beast to be mounted by it; for it is a loathsome thing. **read ›**

33 **Leviticus 20:17** If anyone takes his sister, the daughter of his father or of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace. They shall be utterly destroyed before the sons of their race. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness; they shall bear their sin. **read ›**

34 **Leviticus 20:19** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister or of your mother's sister, for he has uncovered his own close relative; they shall bear their sin. **read ›**

35 **Leviticus 20:20** Whoever lies with his female relative has uncovered the nakedness of his own kin; they shall die childless. **read ›**

36 **Leviticus 20:21** If anyone takes his brother's wife, it is uncleanness; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness. They shall die childless. **read ›**

37 **Leviticus 21:3** and for a virgin sister who is near to him and has not been given to a husband; for these he may defile himself. **read ›**

38 **Numbers 36:11** Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, Noah, and Mahlah, the daughters of Zelophehad, became wives to their cousins; **read ›**

39 **Deuteronomy 7:3** nor shall you ever make marriages with them; you shall not give your daughter to his son, and you shall not take his daughter for your son. **read ›**

40 **Deuteronomy 23:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

41 **Deuteronomy 25:5** If brothers live together, and one of them dies and has no seed, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a man who is not a close relative. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and live with her. **read ›**

42 **Deuteronomy 25:7** But if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then the woman shall go up to the gate, to the elders, and say, "My husband's brother refuses to raise up his brother's name in Israel; my husband's brother would not." **read ›**

43 **Deuteronomy 25:9** then his brother's wife shall come forward before the elders, untie one of his sandals from his foot, and spit in his face; and she shall answer and say, "So shall they do to the man who will not build up his brother's house in Israel." **read ›**

44 **Deuteronomy 27:22** "Cursed is he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or of his mother." And all the people shall say, "So be it." **read ›**

45 **Deuteronomy 27:23** "Cursed is he who lies with his daughter-in-law." And all the people shall say, "So be it." "Cursed is he who lies with his wife's sister." And all the people shall say, "So be it." **read ›**

46 **Psalms 6:10** Let all my enemies be put to shame and greatly troubled; let them be turned back and greatly put to shame quickly. (Septuagint Psalm 6:11 (Psalm 6:10 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

47 **Psalms 8:7** sheep and all oxen, and also the cattle of the field, (Septuagint Psalm 8:8 (Psalm 8:7 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

48 **Ezekiel 1:4** And I looked, and behold, a lifting wind was coming from the north, and a great cloud in it, and brightness all around it, and fire flashing out; and in its midst something like the appearance of amber in the midst of the fire, and brightness in it. **read ›**

49 **1 Esdras 8:84** Now therefore do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, and do not take their daughters for your sons, **read ›**

50 **Tobit 6:10** the angel said to the young man, "Brother, today we shall spend the night with Raguel; he is your relative, and he has a daughter named Sarah. I will speak about her, that she may be given to you as a wife, **read ›**

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51 **Tobit 6:15** And the angel said to him, “Do you not remember the words that your father commanded you, that you should take a wife from your own people? And now listen to me, brother, for she will be your wife; and take no account of the demon, for this very night she will be given to you as a wife. **read ›**

52 **Tobit 8:7** And now, O Lord, I am not taking this sister of mine because of sexual immorality, but in truth. Command that mercy be shown to me, and that I may grow old together with her.” **read ›**

53 **1 Maccabees 10:54** now therefore let us establish friendship with each other. Give me now your daughter as my wife, and I will make a marriage alliance with you, and I will give you and her gifts worthy of you.” **read ›**

54 **4 Maccabees 13:23** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

55 **Matthew 22:25** Now there were with us seven brothers. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. **read ›**

56 **Mark 12:19** “Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up seed for his brother. **read ›**

57 **Mark 12:20** There were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and when he died he left no seed. **read ›**

58 **Luke 20:28** saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man’s brother dies having a wife, and dies childless, his brother should take the wife and raise up seed for his brother. **read ›**

59 **Luke 20:29** There were therefore seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died childless. **read ›**

60 **John 2:10** and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have drunk freely, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now!” **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *24 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Exodus 3:14

Malachi 3:6

Matthew 5:17 · 5:20 · 8:21 · 11:11 · 11:17 · 19:12 · 22:23 · 23:8 · 26:56

Mark 12:18

Luke 7:26 · 7:32 · 9:59 · 20:26

John 1:1 · 5:46 · 19:36

Acts 15:10

1 Corinthians 7:39

Galatians 3:27

Revelation 1:6 · 3:18

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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How to cite this study. The Historic Faith, “When did God forbid marrying your own brother or sister?” Early Church Questions, published November 9, 2026, https://thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/when-did-god-forbid-marrying-your-own-brother-or-sister. To cite one quotation, add its number and source, for example “quote 1, source 10.”

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THE END OF THIS STUDY