

Monogamy: The Biblical Standard

Contents

Abraham.....	2
Jacob	4
Moses.....	5
Gideon.....	7
David	8
Solomon	10
GOD.....	10
The Consequences of Polygamy	12
Laws Governing Polygamy	13
Slavery, Divorce, and Polygamy.....	14
Polygamy and the Final 27 Books of the Bible.....	16
Another Nail in the Coffin:	19
One Final Consideration:.....	20

The word **monogamy** means: the state of being married to only one person at a time. The word **polygamy** means: the state of having more than one wife or husband at the same time. However, when a man is married to more than one wife at a time, this is called **polygyny**; and when a woman is married to more than one husband at a time, it is called **polyandry**.

Polyandry is very rare, and it generally only occurs in situations where there are more men available than women, a family's land would become overly divided if every male member married separate women, or if protection was needed because the husband was to be absent. However, there are no regularly cited examples of any women with multiple husbands in the Bible, so - when we discuss polygamy in the Bible - we are actually discussing polygyny.

The following men from the Bible are sometimes cited as examples of, or justifications for, polygamy: Lamech (*Genesis 4:19*), Abraham (*Genesis 16:3-4; 25:6*), Nahor (*Genesis 11:29; 22:20-24*), Jacob (*Genesis 29:20-30; 30:4, 9*), Esau (*Genesis 28:6-9*), Moses (*Exodus 2:21; Numbers 12:1*), Ashur (*1 Chronicles 4:5*), the 5 sons of Izrahiah (*1 Chronicles 7:3-4*), Shaharaim (*1 Chronicles 8:8-11*), Caleb (*1 Chronicles 2:18; 2:46, 48*), Gideon (*Judges 8:30*), Elkanah (*1 Samuel 1:1-2, 8-2:10*), David (*1 Chronicles 1:1-*

9; 2 Samuel 6:23; 20:3), Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-6), Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 11:21), Abijah (2 Chronicles 13:21), Ahab (1 Kings 20:7), Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:17), Joash (2 Chronicles 24:1-3), and Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:15). However, when discussing polygamy in the Bible, typically most people usually tend to focus in on Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, David, and Solomon; therefore, we will consider each of these key individuals very carefully.



Abraham

When Abraham was 85 years old (*Genesis 14:4; 16:3*) and his name was still Abram, Sarai his half-sister and wife suggested that he attempt to have a child with her Egyptian servant Hagar to fulfill the promise of the LORD that he would have a son to pass on the inheritance. Culturally, this was considered a form of surrogate motherhood, as *Genesis 30:3* reveals.

So she [Rachel] said, “Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear a child on my knees, that I also may have children by her.” (*Genesis 30:3*)

So, Abram was monogamous for the first 85 years of his life, and he never sought to be anything but monogamous, but he accepted bad advice from his wife Sarai. And when Abram was 86 years old (*Genesis 16:16*) he had his one and only child with Hagar, and they called his name Ishmael.

But immediately after the child was conceived, Sarai regretted her decision; and the Bible explains: **Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me.”** But Abram said to Sarai, **“Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight.”** So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence. (*Genesis 16:5-6*)

Notice that Abram told Sarai **“your maid is in your power”**; and this means that Abram did not actually take Hagar to be his wife in any way that made her an equal to Sarai! In fact, Scripture never indicates that Abram and Hagar ever acted as husband and wife again. And if the Angel of the LORD would not have intervened in *Genesis* chapter 16, and told Hagar **“Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority.”** (*Genesis 16:9*) Hagar would have left Abram’s household forever. So Hagar remained the handmaiden of Sarai, she was under her authority, and she did not have a wifely status in Abram’s household.

And all of this is confirmed later in *Genesis*, where it is written: **Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac.”** And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham’s sight because of his son. But God said to Abraham, **“Do not let it be displeasing in your sight**

because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. “Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed.” So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba.

(Genesis 21:9-14)

God did not call Hagar Abraham’s wife, He called her “the bondwoman”. And when studied carefully the Bible only indicates that Abram very limitedly “knew” Hagar in his 85th year, until she conceived Ishmael. Also, the Bible makes it clear that Sarai originally considered the child her handmaiden would bear as her own, because Scripture records: **Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, “See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.** *(Genesis 16:1-2)*

So, Sarai and Hagar’s situation was not a case of multiple marriages, it was a case of a misguided attempt to fulfill the promises of God through fleshly thinking and actions. The poor choices involved almost immediately led to strife, jealousy, insubordination, and abuse. And the long term effects of their error are still felt in the world today through the hostilities we consistently witness between the Ishmaelites within the Arab nations and the descendants of Israel! This supernatural antagonism occurs because many of the Arab nations claim to be the descendants of Ishmael and his twelve sons, just as the nation of Israel is descended from Jacob and his twelve sons.

So we have shown that Hagar is not an example of polygamy, instead she was an example of an ancient middle-eastern surrogacy custom of barren women turning to their servants to provide the family with an heir. And we should also mention: we should no more emulate Abram’s behavior with Hagar, than we should emulate Abram’s marrying of his half-sister Sarai! And, about marrying a half-sister, Scripture says: **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.** *(Leviticus 18:11 CAB)* And – about Sarah, Abraham said - **truly she is my sister by my father, but not by my mother, and she became my wife.** *(Genesis 20:12)*

Next, we should deal with the claim that Abraham had other wives beyond Sarah (and supposedly Hagar), and this claim is based on Genesis 25:5-6, which says: **Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.** *(Genesis 25:5-6)*

So to begin to address the claim that Abraham had other wives or concubines we must first point out that Sarah died in Genesis chapter 23. And, since Hagar was sent away in Genesis

chapter 21, and Sarah died in chapter 23, Abraham was free to take an actual wife from Genesis 23 onward. So we should not be surprised when we read in chapter 25: Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. (*Genesis 25:1*)

So, when Genesis 25 explained how: **“Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east”**, the passage was describing how he had given gifts to Hagar in Genesis 21, and to his sons with Keturah in Genesis 25. (*cf. 1 Chronicles 1:32*) And in this way, Abraham was wisely sending all of his other sons (other than Isaac) away - so that they would become well established in other distant locations before Abraham’s death - thus insuring that Isaac’s inheritance would not be challenged.

And the final confirmation of the generally monogamous nature of Abraham is found in Genesis chapter 25, where it is written: **And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife.** (*Genesis 25:9-10*) Abraham was buried with one singular wife, his beloved Sarah; and even Ishmael came to bury his father with the woman that he dearly loved.



Jacob

But what about Abraham’s grandson Jacob? In his case we have to admit that polygamy clearly existed, because Jacob was married to two wives at the same time, but still we must ask: did Jacob seek after polygamy for himself? Well Scripture tells us quite clearly: **Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.” And Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me.” So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.** (*Genesis 29:18-20*) So Jacob had only one bride in mind, and monogamy was his intent.

In fact, monogamy was also Isaac’s intent when he sent him to find a wife, because he told Jacob: **“Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.”** (*Genesis 28:2*)

But Laban his uncle had other plans, and just as Jacob once tricked his father, Laban hatched a scheme against Jacob. Scripture explains: **Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her.” And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast. Now it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. And Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he**

said to Laban, “**What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?**” (*Genesis 29:21-25*) If not for Laban’s deception, Jacob would have only married one woman! But because he truly loved Rachel, he served Laban for seven more years to make Rachel his wife.

And as soon as Jacob was married to those two sisters, the jealousy, strife, competition, and pain multiplied, just as his grandfather had experienced with Sarai and her handmaiden Hagar. In fact - in their jealousy - each of the sisters turned to *their* handmaidens as surrogates to bear them more children just as Sarai had turned to Hagar, and in all - twelve sons and at least one daughter were born to Jacob.

Now, are you seeing a trend here with polygamy? It will always lead to pain, strife, favoritism, jealousy, competition, and misery! And the Bible gives us case study after case study to prove that statement with alarming clarity! In fact, the jealousy and strife caused by polygamy and the favoritism it naturally engenders led to Jacob/Israel favoring Joseph, and his half-brothers brutally betraying him. And perhaps it was because he personally knew of the evils of polygamy that Joseph, even with all of his great power and authority, lived a monogamous life with his Egyptian wife Asenath, the mother of Ephraim and Manasseh.

And we should also mention that Jacob’s reluctant polygamy should not serve as a positive example any more than his example of marrying two sisters. And this is because YHWH directly forbade such a marriage, when He commanded: **‘Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive.’** (*Leviticus 18:18*)



Moses

Now after the patriarchs, the next great man of faith that is often accused of polygamy is none other than Moses’ himself. And the primary basis of this accusation is found in Numbers 12, where it is written: **Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.** (*Numbers 12:1*) And the reason this passage is used to claim that Moses was practicing polygamy is because in every other passage the wife of Moses is listed as Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro of Midian. So the assumption is that this is a record of Moses marrying another wife besides Zipporah, and therefore it is seen as confirmation of his alleged polygamy.

However, 1st Chronicles records: **The sons of Moses were Gershon and Eliezer.** (*1 Chronicles 23:15*), and Exodus 18 recounts: **Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses’ wife, after he had sent her back, with her two sons, of whom the name of one was Gershom**

(for he said, “I have been a stranger in a foreign land”) and the name of the other was Eliezer (for he said, “The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh”); and Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God. Now he had said to Moses, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her.”

(Exodus 18:2-6)

We can say conclusively that Moses only had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, and their mother was Zipporah. So, there is no genealogical evidence that supports that claim that Moses was polygamous. And this means that we only need to understand Numbers 12:1 correctly to determine if there is any truth in the claim that Moses had multiple wives at the same time.

So what accusation did Miriam and Aaron present against Moses? Was it an accusation of polygamy, or an accusation about marrying a foreign woman?

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. *(Numbers 12:1)*

Well the text is clear that the origin of the woman was at the heart of the accusation, and the name of Moses’ first son begins to shed light on what he was being accused of. You see, as we just read, according to scripture, Gershom’s name means: “I have been a stranger in a foreign land”. And Gershom’s mother was from that foreign land where Moses had been a stranger! But could Zipporah actually be called an “Ethiopian woman”?

Well, the words here translated here as “Ethiopian woman” are more accurately translated as: “Cushite woman”, and that simply means that the woman in question was a descendant of Cush, the son of Ham, the son of Noah. And even though Cush is typically thought to be geographically synonymous with Ethiopia, not every descendant of Cush had to come from that geographical location! Therefore, the term “Cushite” does not necessarily have to do with an individual coming from any particular geographic location, but it does mean that they were descended from the line of Cush.

In fact, it is possible that all dark skinned, dark haired, people at that time, might have been labeled as Cushite. Therefore - since we know that Zipporah was a foreign woman who lived in the land of Midian when Moses married her, and we know that Miriam and Aaron’s complaint against Moses was about him marrying a foreign woman, plus we know that the Bible never names another wife, or any other sons of Moses in any other way - this accusation may have been aimed at Zipporah, and she could have had a dark complexion and a “Cushite” mother.

However, an alternative explanation that has also been historically popular with scholars is that Moses married the Cushite woman after Zipporah died. And this secondary explanation also eliminates Moses from the ranks of the polygamous men in the Bible, at least in regards to Numbers 12:1.

But occasionally, highly confused individuals will accuse Moses of having yet another wife, and they base this accusation on Numbers 10: 29, which says: **Now Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us, and we will treat you well; for the LORD has promised good things to Israel."** (*Numbers 10:29*)

Since "Jethro" is frequently given as the name of Zipporah's father from Midian; some folks - when they read Numbers 10:29 - assume that "Reuel the Midianite" is a completely different man. And since he is called "Moses' father-in-law" they assume Moses had another Midianite wife.

However, this is a serious mistake, because Exodus 2 explains: **Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. And they came and drew water, and they filled the troughs to water their father's flock. Then the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. When they came to Reuel their father, he said, "How is it that you have come so soon today?" And they said, "An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and he also drew enough water for us and watered the flock." So he said to his daughters, "And where is he? Why is it that you have left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses. And she bore him a son. He called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."** (*Exodus 2:16-22*)

Obviously, "Reuel" and "Jethro" are two different names for the same person, and Moses was married to Reuel/Jethro's daughter: Zipporah. Therefore, Hobab from Numbers 10:29 was Moses' Midianite brother-in-law.

And now that we have a proper understanding of Numbers 10:29 and Numbers 12:1 we can declare with confidence that Moses was not polygamous, he was monogamous! And either Zipporah was his lifelong "Cushite" wife; or she died at some point, not mentioned by Scripture, and then Moses married a Cushite woman.



Gideon

And now we arrive at the fourth name that we can find in Hebrews chapter 11, that has also been associated with polygamy; and that name is Gideon. But this time - just as we found with Jacob - Gideon actually was polygamous! However, in Gideon's case, it was not against his will; it was freely chosen.

Since we readily admit that Gideon's polygamy existed and it was freely chosen, we won't dig very deep into the details of his polygamy, instead we will simply note that Scripture records: **Then Jerubbaal (Gideon) the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. Gideon had**

seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives. And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. Now Gideon the son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. (Judges 8:29-32)

But, did Gideon's sons live happily ever after, and thereby become our first example of successful and pain-free polygamy? Definitely not!

In fact the Bible records: **Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, "Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?'**

Remember that I am your own flesh and bone." And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him.

Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself. (Judges 9:1-5)

So, the terrible legacy of polygamy lives on in the house of Gideon, complete with the betrayal and murder of all but one of his seventy sons, by the son of Gideon's concubine. And God severely judged Gideon's son Abimelech for his murderous treachery not long after, when: **a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.**

(Judges 9:53)



David

By far, the most faithful and divinely favored 'intentionally polygamous' man in the Bible is certainly the humble shepherd turned king, named David. The anointed son of Jesse is the third individual who was named in Hebrews 11, who also practiced polygamy. He had at least 8 wives and at least 10 concubines, and by these women he had at least 19 sons and at least one daughter. So how did polygamy turn out for the man the YHWH calls "**a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.**"? *(Acts 13:22)*

Well, David's son Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar; which led Tamar's brother Absalom to seek revenge on his half-brother Amnon, and have him brutally murdered. Then eventually,

David's son Absalom plotted against his father to overthrow him, and it became so serious that David had to flee Jerusalem.

Then Absalom publically violated all of his father's concubines to hold him up to open shame and eliminate all expectations of reconciliation. And finally, his rebellion led to 20,000 Israelites being slaughtered in battle, before Absalom was eventually killed. So, once again, the legacy of polygamy in the Bible is jealousy, strife, violence, and heartbreak. And this strife also included a brief power struggle between half-brothers Adonijah and Solomon for the throne, which ended with Adonijah being put to death.

But even though polygamy always resulted in such devastation, some who desire to practice polygamy themselves point to a specific verse from David's life to claim that God supports a man having multiple wives. And the verse they highlight is 2 Samuel 12:8, which says: **'I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!** (2 Samuel 12:8)

Because this verse is situated in the context of David's grievous sin with Bathsheba, the claim is made that God was telling David that He would have given him more wives if he had just asked. But if you look carefully at the sentence structure, it is obvious that God was indicating that He would have expanded David's territory and power - and with all that he had already been given - he should have been content.

The truth is: Scripture says: **Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."** (Hebrews 13:5)

And the Holy Spirit warned through Paul: **Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.** (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

Therefore, we should be content and grateful for all that we have, because: **For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.** (Ephesians 5:5)

Thankfully, David sincerely repented of his coveting, adultery, and murder; but we are left to wonder: if David would have known ahead of time about the pain that his polygamy would eventually cause - would he have made all the same choices?

Would Gideon have chosen polygamy if he knew it would eventually have led to the death of his seventy sons? Truly Gideon and David did not seem to know about the disastrous consequences of polygamy, so they made choices that did not lead to a happy ending. Therefore, now that we fully understand the inevitable consequences of polygamy, we have to ask, “What would they have done, if they would have known what we know now?”



Solomon

Well, the one man who should have understood the consequences of polygamy better than anyone else was David’s son Solomon. But Solomon’s polygamy was profoundly worse than any other individual in the Bible!

In fact the Bible records: **King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites– from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.”** Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. *(1 Kings 11:1-4)*

Truly, Solomon did not make it into Hebrews 11, and instead he became the perfect example of what Moses commanded against, when He said: **“When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ “you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. “But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ “Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.”** *(Deuteronomy 17:14-17)*

So no one could ever claim that Solomon’s polygamy was approved of or condoned in scripture.



GOD

Some really confused men occasionally turn to blasphemy and false doctrine to try to justify polygamy - or even portray it as a higher form of righteousness - and you will sometimes find them actually attempting to argue that G-d is a polygamist!

Most commonly, they will point to the metaphor God used with His prophets to compare Israel and Judah to unfaithful wives, and they will claim that since G-d seemed to have two wives, they can practice polygamy. But they fail to recognize that it was Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness to him in the first place, **caused by Solomon's multiplying of his literal wives**, which caused the kingdom to split! So, Solomon's polygamy led to idolatry and spiritual adultery, and that idolatry led to the Israelites spitting into a northern and southern kingdom.

And we should also note that God ultimately declared His plan to reunify the northern and southern kingdom into one eternal kingdom; and what was once one nation will be one nation again! So, unless the polygamist can split his wife into two separate women and then rejoin them back together again, they should stop using this metaphor of the two kingdoms as adulterous wives as a justification for them to have multiple wives literally.

But some polygamists, who believe in dispensational ecclesiology – a misguided view of the Church that teaches that Israel and the Church are two separate groups - will actually claim that there will be two separate brides for God at the end of all things. They claim the church will be the bride of Christ, and Israel will be the bride of the Father. But this separation between the Church and Israel is a man-made construct, and it is not what the Bible teaches.

Jesus will have one bride, just as **“there will be one flock and one shepherd.”** (*John 10:16*) And this is because Gentiles who follow the Messiah are: **“...cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and ... grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree...”** (*Romans 11:24*)

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building,

being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:11-22)

So there is one bride - the Church, the Assembly of the Saints! And every saint is a child of Abraham, because they are grafted into the true Israel of God when they follow in the faithful footsteps that Abraham walked in!

That is why Paul explains: **Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. (Romans 4:9-12)**

Therefore we can reject claims that our Holy God practices polygamy, and we can rebuke those who would blaspheme His holy name to justify their own selfish, fleshly desires.



The Consequences of Polygamy

So we have seen that the consequences of polygamy begin with some sort of jealous rivalry between the wives. Then, if children are born, there is always some sort of jealous rivalry between the children; along with favoritism and preferential treatment for certain wives and children. Then this contention eventually leads to strife and typically violence.

So, a natural question we should be asking now might be: if polygamy is so destructive why can't we find a Bible verse to specifically condemn it? Well, to answer that question, let me ask you yet another question. The truth is that there is absolutely no debate that pedophilia is disgusting, abhorrent, and destructive, but did you know that there are actually no specific Bible verses condemning that repugnant practice either? So, an absence of condemnation does not mean that God approves of any particular practice! Instead, consequences like provoking your wife to jealousy - while causing rivalry, strife, and sometimes violence - are typically a good indication that a practice is not God's best for mankind.



Laws Governing Polygamy

But here comes the most challenging pro-polygamy argument anyone can ever make, and that argument is: “Did you know that YHWH gave Moses laws that govern polygamy?” And at first glance it would seem like sound logic to say that “if God presented laws to govern polygamy in the Bible, then those laws would seem to constitute a form of divine approval”, but let’s look at those laws together, and then consider some other, very similar laws from Scripture.

Law number 1: “if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. “If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. “And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. “If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. “And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money.” (Exodus 21:7-11)

So, Law number 1 is all about female Israelite slaves. If a daughter was sold as a slave, she was not set free on the seventh year as the male slaves were. (cf. Exodus 21:2) Also, if she was not taken as a wife by her master or his son, she should be allowed to be bought back or redeemed, but only by an Israelite. She could not be sold to a foreign people. And if her master betrothed her to his son, he had to deal with her as if she were his daughter. But if her master became her husband and later married another woman, he had to continue giving her the same amount of food, clothing, and marital attention as she had before. And if he failed to treat her fairly, she could go free without being redeemed by money.

The purpose of the law was to guarantee fair treatment for the daughters of Israel, even if they were sold as slaves to pay off a family debt. And the master/husband was **NOT** encouraged to take another wife! However, **IF** he did choose to do that, he was not permitted to neglect his first wife, and thereby violate her God-given rights. So this law was simply dealing with the reality that multiple marriages might happen, and it guaranteed that the first wife would be treated fairly by her husband, or she could go free.

Law number 2: “When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ “you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. “But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ “Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.” Deuteronomy 17:14-17

Law number 2 is specifically meant for kings, and this fact actually demonstrates that God often gives laws that govern what He knows His people will do, **even though they are rebelling against His perfect will for them.** And I say this because, when Israel fulfilled this prophecy and asked God for a king, He said: **“...they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”** (1 Samuel 8:7)

Surely God’s will was not that they would “reject Him”, but He still gave laws to govern their actions even after they went their own way! Therefore **a law governing a particular behavior most definitely does not imply that God actually approves of it.** It simply means that God is restraining the people from an even greater evil. So, just the fulfillment of the Deuteronomy 17:14 prophecy was a failure of the people that God allowed! And within that failure He commanded the king “not to multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away”.

David failed to obey the command “not to multiply wives for himself”, but he never let his heart turn away from the Lord. However, Solomon broke all of this commandment and more; and he proved that wisdom alone is useless, unless it is paired with faithful obedience and the fear of the Lord!

Law number 3: **“If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, “then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. “But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.” Deuteronomy 21:15-17**

Law number 3 reveals the painful reality of polygamy, which is that it will commonly produce a loved wife and an unloved wife. But the purpose of law number three is to guarantee that the actual firstborn son received the double portion, not the son of the loved or preferred wife.



Slavery, Divorce, and Polygamy

So, now that we have seen the three laws that govern polygamy in the Law of Moses, let me ask you a very important question. And that question is: What do slavery, divorce, and polygamy, all have in common? Well, the answer is that all three have laws governing them in the Law of Moses, but those laws were written to curb the hardened hearts of men, not to approve of the existence of slavery, divorce, or polygamy!

About slavery, Paul wrote: **Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.** (1 Corinthians 7:21-23)

Also, please tell me how you think God feels about slavery, when you read in Jeremiah: **This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem to proclaim liberty to them: that every man should set free his male and female slave—a Hebrew man or woman—that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage.**

Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let them go. But afterward they changed their minds and made the male and female slaves return, whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection as male and female slaves.

Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ‘I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying, “At the end of seven years let every man set free his Hebrew brother, who has been sold to him; and when he has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you.” But your fathers did not obey Me nor incline their ear.

‘Then you recently turned and did what was right in My sight—every man proclaiming liberty to his neighbor; and you made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name.

‘Then you turned around and profaned My name, and every one of you brought back his male and female slaves, whom he had set at liberty, at their pleasure, and brought them back into subjection, to be your male and female slaves.’ “Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and every one to his neighbor. Behold, I proclaim liberty to you,’ says the LORD—‘to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine! And I will deliver you to trouble among all the kingdoms of the earth.

(Jeremiah 34:8-17)

Proclaiming liberty to those who were in bondage is what is right in YHWH's sight! And that is why the Messiah came to: **“To preach the gospel to the poor... to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; (and) to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”** (Luke 4:18-19)

So, God hates slavery, and in His glorious eternal kingdom there will be no slaves, therefore: **the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.** (*Romans 8:21*)

And just as God hates slavery, Scripture is clear that: **“the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce”!** (*Malachi 2:16*) Yet someone will say: “If God hates divorce and slavery why did He permit them to occur, and even give laws to govern how divorce and slavery were practiced?” And to them I would say, consider the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ on divorce.

Our omniscient Messiah said: **“Because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”** (*Matthew 19:8*)

God did not create a world with sin, death, slavery, divorce, polygamy, rape, murder, or adultery, but the free will of mankind, in combination with the hardness of his heart, introduced those abominations into our history. And the laws God gave Moses regarding divorce, slavery, and polygamy were simply meant to curb the hardness of man’s heart until the Messiah came to set us free to follow the royal law of liberty, in the power of the Holy Spirit!



Polygamy and the Final 27 Books of the Bible

Just as Jesus revealed even tighter restrictions on divorce in the Final 27 Books of the Bible, and the Apostles revealed even tighter restrictions on slavery in the Final 27 Books of the Bible, the Spirit gives us some clear indications that there are now tighter restrictions on polygamy in the Final 27 Books of the Bible, too!

Matthew records: **The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ “and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? “So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”**

They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.” His disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” (*Matthew 19:3-10*)

Because of their sinful hearts, the Pharisees were hung up on what they thought the law permitted, but Jesus kept redirecting them back to what God prescribed when He made the world. And Scripture is clear that God only made Adam and Eve directly, and later only Eve is listed as **“the mother of all living”**. (*Genesis 3:20*) So, in God’s perfect design “the two become one flesh” and only the two; and then: all life descended from only those original two.

And I should note that in Matthew 19:5, Jesus quotes the Septuagint version of Genesis 2:24, because the Masoretic text reads: “they shall become one flesh”, while the Septuagint specifically reads: “the two shall become one flesh”.

Also, as we just read, Jesus said: **“I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery”**. So please consider what the Lord has just said. There is only one legitimate reason for divorce, and that is sexual immorality, and if a man divorces his wife for any other reason and marries another woman, he commits adultery. Now, please understand that ***this statement presupposes that a man marrying two women at the same time is adultery!***

If a man could marry two women at the same time - then the Lord’s words in Matthew 19:9, Mark 10:10, and Luke 16:18 make no sense at all! **Because the Lord’s main argument is that an improper divorce cannot legally end a marriage before God, and if the first marriage was not ended by the sole exception for divorce - which is sexual immorality - then a second marriage is adultery, not polygamy!** So, by extension, in His teachings on divorce, Jesus undeniably labels marrying two women at the same time “adultery”.

And because Jesus was returning marriage back to its original design, He very conspicuously only uses the singular form of the word “wife” even when listing it in among other plural words like “brothers, sisters, and children”. For example, Jesus said: **“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”** (*Matthew 19:29*)

And: **“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, “who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.”** (*Mark 10:29-30*)

And: **“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, “who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.”** (*Luke 18:29-30*)

And: **“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.** (*Luke 14:26*)

If Jesus had any intention of tolerating polygamy then these lists would say “wives” and not “wife”! And those who hear the Holy Spirit’s voice see this distinction as very important. Plus, the Holy Spirit also inspired the Apostle Paul to specifically use singular words when referring to husbands and wives.

For example, Paul wrote: **Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.** (1 Corinthians 7:2)

And: **Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.** (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

And Paul clearly has monogamy in mind, when he wrote: **But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.** (1 Corinthians 7:33) Consider, that in this chapter, where Paul repeatedly explains that it is better not to marry, because “he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife”, if polygamy was still accepted in the church, then Paul would have most certainly pointed out that the cares of the world would multiply if a man were to multiply wives for himself!

And Paul also wrote: **For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.** (Ephesians 5:23) However, if polygamy were still accepted in the church, then Paul would have written “the husband is the head of his wives”.

Also, monogamy was implied, when Paul wrote: **Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.** (Ephesians 5:33)

But monogamy was commanded when Paul explained: **A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;** (1 Timothy 3:2)

And - because bishops and deacons must serve as examples of blameless Christian behavior - Paul commanded: **Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.** (1 Timothy 3:12)

Not to mention that Paul told Titus he could only appoint a man as an elder: **if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.** (Titus 1:6)

But Paul also wrote: **The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.** (1 Corinthians 7:4) Now, with this verse, I would like to make two points.

First: Jesus taught “**No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.**” (Matthew 6:24) So, how

could two wives both have authority over the same husband's body in accordance with this Apostolic teaching?

And Second: If a man obeys this verse of the Holy Bible, he must ask his wife for her freely given permission to practice polygamy! And something tells me that just this verse being put into practice would be enough to prove polygamy is abolished in the New Covenant!

And we can add to all we have learned one more very important Messianic teaching, found in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said: **“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”** (*Matthew 7:12 NASB*)

How many polygamous men would like it if their wives were also polygamous? Enough said.



Another Nail in the Coffin:

Now that we have shown that polygamy is completely out of bounds in the New Covenant because the Final 27 Books of the Bible make that point fairly conclusively, we can add on to all we have seen so far, the command to: **Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. 1 Peter 2:13**

And that exhortation from Peter is a parallel passage to the words of Paul, who wrote: **Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.**

Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. (*Romans 13:1-5*)

So, Christians must submit to every ordinance of man that does not cause us to directly disobey God. And, about marriage in the Roman Empire in the first century, Wikipedia states: “Marriage in ancient Rome was a strictly monogamous institution: a Roman citizen by law could have only one spouse at a time”. So, even if someone doubts all we have discovered so far about the Lord's perspective on polygamy, and the perspective of His apostles, they must recognize that the Church was instructed to submit to every ordinance of man, and the Roman Empire decreed that monogamy was the standard. So this means that no one was practicing polygamy in the churches in the first century, or even later, and this is confirmed by multiple

early church writings. And because polygamy is illegal in the United States, this is an additional secular prohibition against its practice.



One Final Consideration:

We have seen that polygamy was tolerated in ancient Israel, before the Messiah came, but we have also discovered that the Messiah made it clear, during His ministry, that a man who marries two women at the same time commits adultery. And we have also seen that, while polygamy was tolerated in ancient Israel it was never endorsed or commanded in any way in the Scriptures.

However, there is one very specific situation that we have not yet discussed, which can seem to be an endorsement or command to engage in polygamy, and that situation is known as “Levirate Marriage”. And by the way, the word “Levirate” comes from the Latin word “levir”, which means “a husband’s brother.”

And about this practice - in Deuteronomy - Moses commanded: **“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband’s brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. “And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.”**

“But if the man does not want to take his brother’s wife, then let his brother’s wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, ‘My husband’s brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband’s brother.’ “Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But if he stands firm and says, ‘I do not want to take her,’ “then his brother’s wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, ‘So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother’s house.’ “And his name shall be called in Israel, ‘The house of him who had his sandal removed.’” (Deuteronomy 25:5-10)

This passage could properly be named: “the duty of a husband’s brother”, and while our society cannot easily relate to this practice today, at that time in history there were two main reasons that this practice was instituted. The first reason was one of inheritance, because God had distributed the Promised Land among the families of Israel, and an inheritance could be lost if a proper heir was not established. And the second reason was one of necessity for the widow.

In ancient patriarchal societies like Israel, a woman was taken care of by her father until she was married, and once she left the home, she was taken care of by her husband from then onward. However, if her husband passed away, her children – and especially her sons – would care for her. But if she had no surviving sons, she would find it very difficult to provide for herself. This was the position the widow Naomi found herself in, in the book of Ruth; and because of the great difficulties her mother-in-law faced, Ruth, who was also widowed, selflessly clung to Naomi to help her survive.

Also, if a woman was married and she became a widow, finding a willing husband was much more difficult because previously married women were considered less desirable in general. And this can be seen in the following passage referring to the marriage of the high priest, where it is written: **“And he shall take a wife in her virginity. ‘A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman or a harlot–these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife.”** (*Leviticus 21:13-14*)

So, for all of these reasons, Levirate marriage truly did help the widow, as a type of family based life insurance that guaranteed that she would be cared for if her husband passed away; even while the stated main purpose of the Levirate marriage was that the widow’s dead husband’s “name may not be blotted out of Israel”. This is why the firstborn son of a Levirate marriage takes the name of his deceased father, and succeeds him by inheriting his land.

And because a good brother wanted to protect the family name and keep their family’s lands in the hands of their family, they would have accepted the duty of the brother-in-law, and cared for their departed brother’s wife. But imagine if a close relative refused to marry a widow who had no sons, and she was forced to marry into another family! This would give the land of her deceased husband over to another tribe, and that is exactly what this custom was created to avoid!

So, in the book of Ruth, Boaz - a close relative of Naomi, and her son Mahlon who died without an heir, after marrying a Moabitess named Ruth – said: **“Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day.”** (*Ruth 4:10*)

And for similar reasons, God commanded: **“If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. ‘If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. ‘If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. ‘And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it.’ ”** (*Numbers 27:6-11*)

However, if the inheritance was passed along to a man’s daughters, when they married their inheritance could be lost, so in Numbers 36, it was decided: **“This is what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, ‘Let them marry whom they**

think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe.' "So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers."

"And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. "Thus no inheritance shall change hands from one tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance."

(Numbers 36:5-9)

Therefore, Levirate marriage was primarily about keeping each family's allotted lands in the hands of the families that God specified, and no Levirate passage ever mentions polygamy in any way! So, while it *is* possible that polygamy may have occurred occasionally in a family, when a man performed "the duty of a husband's brother", it was most certainly not sought after, because Levirate marriage is always caused by death.

However, since no one in Israel successfully passed down their inherited lands through two millennia of dispersion, we can safely assume that Levirate marriage ceased functioning in 70 AD, when the people were scattered.