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Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

POLYGAMY IN THE BIBLE WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MISSIOLOGY

A Project Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Ronald A. G. du Preez

July 1993

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version
BBE	Bible in Basic English
HSMT	Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation
JB	Jerusalem Bible
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version
S&G	Smith and Goodspeed (The Complete Bible: An American Translation)
TEV	Today's English Version (Good News Bible)
YLT	Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible

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ABSTRACT

POLYGAMY IN THE BIBLE WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MISSIOLOGY

by

Ronald A. G. du Preez

Adviser: Richard M. Davidson

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: POLYGAMY IN THE BIBLE WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MISSIOLOGY

Name of researcher: Ronald A. G. du Preez

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Richard M. Davidson, Th.D.

Date completed: July 1993

Problem

Polygamy, or marriage to more than one spouse at the same time, is a worldwide practice that still affects the lives of many people. As such it must be given serious attention by any Christian group involved in mission work. As a denomination with a global mission emphasis, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is often confronted with the issue of polygamy. The question as to how these practicing polygamists should be treated must be approached from a biblical perspective.

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Method

Accepting the Bible as the authoritative revelation of the will of God, this project set out to make a hermeneutically sound and contextually valid investigation of the passages and pericopes related to polygamy. Linguistic, grammatical, theological, historical, and cultural contexts were taken into account in order to determine which interpretation of the texts under consideration proved to be the most reliable based on the weight of evidence.

The writings of Ellen G. White were given serious consideration throughout this study. In addition, the many books, articles, and unpublished documents related to a biblical perspective on polygamy, as produced by Christians, Jews, and Muslims, were critically assessed and discussed. However, accepting the Bible as the final norm, none of these extra-biblical sources was given any authority over the text of Scripture itself.

Following an examination of the original institution of marriage in Eden and the form of marriage evident at the flood, the following Old Testament passages were sequentially analyzed: Exod 21:7-11, Lev 18:18, Deut 17:17, Deut 21:15-17, Exod 22:16, 17 and Deut 22:28, 29, Deut 25:5-10, Gen 38, Ruth 4, and Ezek 23:1-49. The accounts of the marriages of the antediluvians, Lamech, Abraham, Jacob, Esau, Moses, Gideon, Elkanah, David, Solomon, and Joash were examined. After a discussion of passages from Matt 19 and 22, Acts 15, 1 Cor 7, 1 Tim 3, and Titus 1, a synopsis of the principles arising from the research was made. Based on these biblical principles, missiological implications for a sound policy on polygamy were outlined.

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Results

This study shows that God was the originator of marriage. According to Genesis, monogamy was established as the law of marriage for all humanity. While every one of the passages related to marital forms harmonizes well with this monogamous standard, it was discovered that certain Old Testament laws as well as some New Testament passages prohibit the practice of polygamy for all. Close analysis of all texts related to marital forms indicated that none permits, promotes, or prescribes polygamy.

Careful examination of the lives of the major polygamists selected for this study showed that there is no evidence of any divine approval or sanction for their practice of polygamy. On the contrary, there are several indications of condemnation, judgment, or punishment on these polygamists for this violation of God's marital requirements. Those who responded to the divine intervention in their lives went through a transformation, resulting in the termination of polygamy, together with proper care for all members of the family.

Conclusions

Based on the fact that the Bible shows monogamy to be a universal moral requirement and polygamy to be a violation of the divine principle, it was concluded that all Christians are to abstain from polygamy. Furthermore, in order to have a scripturally reliable and missiologically sound policy on polygamy, the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to ensure that its position on this issue is in harmony with the fundamental theological principles that emerge from the Bible.

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CHAPTER I

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Ever since 1863 when the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church was officially organized, there has been a growing realization of the need to respond to the great commission that Jesus Christ gave to all of His followers:[1] "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15).[2] However, it was only in 1874 that the SDA Church sent its first official missionary, John Nevins Andrews, overseas.[3] Within seven years the issue of "how those who were polygamists before their conversion to Christianity were to be treated"[4] was raised in the official church press.

As part of an attempt to seek a solution to this problem, this chapter of general introduction provides the framework and background necessary for

---

[1]See P. Gerard Damsteegt, Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 285-286.

[2]Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

[3]Richard W. Schwarz, Light Bearers to the Remnant (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), 144-147.

[4]See "Polygamy and the Old Testament," The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 15 November 1881, 309.

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investigating this issue. First, the background to the issue of polygamy is addressed in order to show the current extent of the practice, as well as the relevancy of the topic. Following this, the specific problem to be addressed is clearly outlined. The purpose of this research project is then delineated. The various reasons justifying the present project are noted. Next, the scope and limitations are considered. This is done in order to establish the basic parameters of the restricted nature of this research. The methodology of the research is then explained. The basic presuppositions, principles, and procedures of biblical study are highlighted so as to indicate how the study will proceed. Following some definitions, an overview of the entire project is made. This overview indicates both the basic material to be covered as well as the purpose for its inclusion in the project.

Background to the Issue

Often it is assumed that polygamy is a rather restricted and outdated practice. In order to investigate such views, this section discusses the extent of polygamy throughout the societies of the world. The manner in which Christianity and culture come into conflict is addressed in relation to the issue of polygamy. The various views of polygamy that Christian churches take with regard to polygamy are then briefly outlined. A review of literature related to polygamy in the Bible is undertaken. Following this, the different policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are examined. This section concludes with a consideration of the

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call by some within the SDA Church for a reinvestigation of its policy on polygamy.

The Extent of Polygamy in the World

Even though polygamy is often thought of as an African issue, this custom is not confined to one continent. It is a universal marriage form, known and practiced among most of the societies of the world.[1] According to George Murdock's Ethnographic Atlas, more than 83 percent of the societies of the world allow polygamy.[2]

In 1987 it was reported that there were as many as 30,000 Latter-day Saints practicing polygamy in Utah alone, even though this form of plural marriage was officially discontinued by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints over a century ago and is illegal in the United States of America.[3]

---

[1]Jacques Maquet and Joan R. Rayfield, Africanity: The Cultural Unity of Black Africa, trans. Joan R. Rayfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 73; Bronislaw Malinowski, Sex, Culture, and Myth (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 31.

[2]Of the 862 societies analyzed by Murdock, 856 included data on marital forms. Of these, 139 (or 16.24 percent) were monogamous, while 717 (or 83.76 percent) were polygamous. Of these polygamous societies, 713 (or 83.3 percent) were polygynous, while only 4 (or 0.46 percent) were polyandrous. George Peter Murdock, Ethnographic Atlas (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967), 47-48, 62-122. Even though this information is admittedly 25 years old, it is apparently still being considered as valid. See, for example, Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, Cultural Anthropology, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985), 171. Unfortunately, more recent data on polygamy does not seem to be available.

[3]Pamela Abramson, "A Hand from the Grave: The Polygamy Murders," Newsweek, 21 December 1987, 45. The issue of Latter-day Saints polygamy is too involved to discuss at length here; but suffice it to mention the following:

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The world religion of Islam, with its almost one billion adherents,[1] does not limit the male partner in marriage to a single spouse.[2] In fact, Muslims are permitted to have up to four wives at one time.[3] This practice has resulted in difficulties for Christian missionaries. As one researcher in Islam put it, "Throughout the history of Muslim-Christian interaction, polygamy has been a point of deep division between the two groups."[4]

Polygamy was first introduced into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) in 1843 and was declared an official policy in 1852 (see Doctrine and Covenants, chap. 132). Some Latter-day Saints disagreed with this new doctrine and broke away, forming the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. In 1890, after polygamy had been outlawed in the USA, the LDS Church issued a manifesto ending polygamy as a practice endorsed by the church. (See Doctrine and Covenants, "Official Declaration".) However, many fundamentalist Latter-day Saints disagreed with the manifesto and have continued the practice of polygamy as a religious right. For further information on Latter-day Saints polygamy, see Elbert A. Smith, Utah Mormon Polygamy: Its Belief and Practice (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1941); Eugene England, "On Fidelity, Polygamy, and Celestial Marriage," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 20 (Winter 1987): 138-154; Ken Driggs, "After the Manifesto: Modern Polygamy and Fundamentalist Mormons," Journal of Church and State 32 (Spring 1990): 367-389; "No to Polygamy," The Christian Century, 23 May 1984, 545.

[1]David Barrett provides a specific figure of 961,423,280 Muslims. David B. Barrett, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1991," International Bulletin of Missionary Research 15 (January 1991): 25.

[2]See Lois Lamyā' Ibsen al Faruqi, "Marriage in Islam," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 22 (1985): 61.

[3]See Qur'an 4:3; Diane D'Souza, "The Muslim Practice of Polygamy," The Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies 8 (July-September 1985): 71.

[4]D'Souza, 68. Hinduism also accepts polygamy; see Arvind Sharma, "Marriage in the Hindu Religious Tradition," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 22 (1985): 71.

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Christianity and Conflicts with Culture

Over the years, the mission outreach of Christian churches has brought Christianity into conflict with different cultures. Many indigenous customs, such as ancestor veneration, the dowry, the practice of infanticide, and polygamy, have proven to be formidable barriers to the Christian gospel.[1]

That this is a problem facing many Christian denominations can be observed in the literature, both published and unpublished.[2] As an African leader in the Episcopal Church stated in 1981, "Polygamy is one of the principal obstacles to the evangelisation of many of our people."[3] Another African went so far as to say that "only God knows how many millions of Africans have been barred from entering the Kingdom by insisting on monogyny."[4]

---

[1]Schwarz, 362; John A. Kisaka, "The Adventist Church's Position and Response to Socio-Cultural Issues in Africa" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University, 1979).

[2]See, for example, Chidawa B. Kaburuk, "Polygyny in the Old Testament and the Church in Africa" (S.T.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), 52; Robert J. Hitchens, Multiple Marriage: A Study of Polygamy in Light of the Bible (Elkton, MD: Doulos Publishers, 1987); Tim Stafford, "Can Mr. Mombasa Keep All His Wives?" Christianity Today, 11 February 1991, 33-34.

[3]Michael Kpakula Francis, "Marriage Problems and the Local Church," African Ecclesial Review 23 (February-April 1981): 96.

[4]Daniel N. Wambutda, "Monogamy or Polygamy in African [sic]: A Biblical Investigation," West African Religion 18 (1979): 83.

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Christian Church Views on Polygamy

Christian churches have long wrestled with whether or not practicing polygamists should be admitted into their fellowship. Much depends on how polygamy is viewed. Adrian Hastings lists four "basic positions a Christian could take in regard to polygamous marriage."[1]

The first position is essentially that taken by the Anglican Church in the Lambeth Conference of 1888. This conference refused to admit male polygamists since polygamy was condemned as adultery, though their wives could be accepted into the church on the belief that they were involuntary victims of the social institution.[2] One hundred years later the Lambeth Conference revised its ruling so as to permit the baptism of practicing male polygamists as well.[3] A second view holds that polygamy is an inferior form of marriage, not sinful where it is the custom but always unacceptable for Christians. A third position is that polygamy is a form of marriage less satisfactory than monogamy, but one which Christians can tolerate. A fourth view is that polygamy is one form of marriage, monogamy another; each has its advantages and disadvantages and it is not the task of the church to make any absolute judgment between them.[4]

---

[1]Adrian Hastings, Christian Marriage in Africa (London: S.P.C.K., 1973), 73.

[2]A. O. Nkwoka, "The Church and Polygamy in Africa: The 1988 Lambeth Conference Resolution," Africa Theological Journal 19 (1990): 144.

[3]Ibid., 145, 153.

[4]Hastings, 73.

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Apparently, depending on how polygamy is viewed, different stances have been taken in relation to polygamists. Alan Tippett notes the following six "attitudes on the different mission fields of the world":[1]

1. Baptize the women and children but not the men.
2. Baptize none at all if they have anything to do with polygamy.
3. Baptize all on a testimony of faith--polygamists or not.
4. Let the husband retain the first wife and divorce the rest.
5. Let him divorce all but the preferred one.
6. For the first generation, baptize on a profession of faith, but demand monogamy thereafter.[2]

Documents on Polygamy in the Bible

A review of literature indicates that many documents have been produced concerning the Bible and polygamy. An analysis of this material reveals that over the centuries three principal, different views have been held.

One position is that the Bible does not condemn the practice of polygamy, even though it might regulate or restrict it carefully. For example, in 1786, in A Short Treatise on Polygamy, James Hamilton concluded that "as God has allowed, commanded, [and] regulated, such double marriages or polygamy, such double marriages or polygamy, must be conformable to his will."[3] Almost

---

[1]Alan R. Tippett, Introduction to Missiology (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), 340.

[2]Ibid., 340-341.

[3]James Edward Hamilton, A Short Treatise on Polygamy: Or, The Marrying and Cohabiting with More Than One Woman at the Same Time, Proved from Scripture, to Be Agreeable to the Will of God: And That Christ Was Not the Giver of a New Law; in Which Are also Considered, the Just Grounds for Divorce, and What Constitutes a Lawful Marriage, in the Sight of God (Dublin, Ireland: Booksellers, 1786), 4.

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two centuries later in 1975, Eugene Hillman, in his landmark book, Polygamy Reconsidered, came to a similar conclusion, stating that "in the Mosaic law polygamy is clearly regarded as a normal and licit practice."[1] Both authors based these conclusions on their understanding of regulations in the Pentateuch.[2] Likewise, they both found further support for this position in their interpretation of the polygamous practices of various Bible characters.[3]

Findings similar to those of Hamilton and Hillman have been suggested in the published articles of Manas Buthelezi,[4] Daniel Wambutda,[5] and Pamela Mann.[6] The view that the Bible permits monogamy as well as polygamy, has been followed by several major research projects produced since 1976 by Chidawa

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[1]Eugene Hillman, Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Churches (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), 145.

[2]James Hamilton (4) referred to Exod 21:10; Exod 22:16 and Deut 22:28, 29; and Deut 21:15; while Hillman (145) referred to Exod 21:10; Lev 18:18; and Deut 21:15-17.

[3]For example, James Hamilton, 7-8; Hillman, 146-147.

[4]Manas Buthelezi, "Polygyny in the Light of the New Testament," Africa Theological Journal 2 (February 1969): 69.

[5]Wambutda, 83.

[6]Pamela S. Mann, "Toward a Biblical Understanding of Polygamy," Missiology: An International Review 17 (January 1989): 17, 25.

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Kaburuk,[1] Douglas Welch,[2] Samson Obwa,[3] Phillip Turley,[4] Jean-Jacques Bouit,[5] Disani Senyonjo,[6] Darrell Wise,[7] and Vincent Nwankpa.[8]

Most of these writers are not advocating the acceptance of polygamy in the church as an alternate form of marriage. As Douglas Welch notes, "Most of them are not interested in justifying the practice of polygamous marriage. They are interested in justifying the baptism of polygamists."[9]

A second position on the matter of polygamy in the Bible was described by Geoffrey Parrinder in The Bible and Polygamy.[10] He suggested that the Old

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[1]Kaburuk, 43, 60.

[2]Douglas E. Welch, "A Biblical Perspective on Polygamy" (M.A. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1977), 103-104.

[3]Samson Osimbo Obwa, "Polygamy Among the Southern Luo of Kenya: A Critique of Both the Practice of Polygamy and the Reaction of Mission-Founded Churches to It in the Light of Biblical Teaching" (M.A. thesis, Columbia Graduate School of Bible and Missions, 1978), 32-40.

[4]Phillip Craig Turley, "The Status of Polygamy in the Old Testament" (M.Th. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), 58.

[5]Jean-Jacques Bouit, "A Christian Consideration of Polygamy" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University, 1981), 82.

[6]Disani Christopher Senyonjo, "Polygamy, Monogamy and Divorce" (D.Min. project report, Hartford Seminary, 1983), 69-71, 96-97.

[7]Darrell L. Wise, "African Polygamy Reexamined" (M.Th. thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 94-96.

[8]Vincent O. Nwankpa, "New Testament Perspective on Marriage and Polygamy" (M.A. thesis, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, 1988), 66.

[9]Welch, 128 (endnote #10).

[10]Geoffrey Parrinder, The Bible and Polygamy: A Study of Hebrew and Christian Teaching (London: S.P.C.K., 1950).

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Testament at times required polygamy,[1] while the New completely ruled it out.[2] This view is well summarized in Robert Hitchens' 1987 book, Multiple Marriage: "That which was temporarily permitted in Old Testament times was later prohibited in the New Testament."[3] In a more recent publication, Forms of Marriage: Monogamy Reconsidered, William Blum concurs that while polygamy was a legitimate practice in Old Testament times,[4] it was excluded in the New.[5] The following three scholars, all of whose studies deal specifically with polygamy in the Old Testament, have likewise come to similar conclusions: Gerhard Jasper,[6] Tryggve Kronholm,[7] and David Hall.[8]

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[1]Parrinder posits: "Although a man might wish to remain a monogamist, yet the system of Levirate inheritance might easily convert him into a bigamist, if he were already married, by obliging him to marry his brother's widow, if the brother had died without leaving children," 23.

[2]Ibid., 42-56.

[3]Hitchens, 58.

[4]William G. Blum, Forms of Marriage: Monogamy Reconsidered (Nairobi, Kenya: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1989), 186.

[5]Ibid., 247.

[6]Gerhard Jasper, "Polygyny in the Old Testament," Africa Theological Journal 2 (February 1969): 56-57.

[7]Tryggve Kronholm, "Polygami och Monogami i Gamla Testamentet: Med en Utblick over den Antika Judendomen och Nya Testamentet," Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok 47 (1982): 78-79, 86.

[8]David Michael Hall, "Polygamy in the Bible and the Ancient Near East: A Comparative Study" (M.Th. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), 48-51.

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A third perspective on plural marriage is held by some Bible students who have concluded that from beginning till end the Scriptures support only monogamy while prohibiting polygamy. Four documents have been located that undertake a biblical study and come to this conclusion.[1] The 1816 book by Samuel Wishard, The Divine Law of Marriage, holds that monogamy is promoted throughout the Bible, while polygamy is condemned.[2] Sereno Dwight, in The Hebrew Wife, maintains "that the Original Law of Marriage forbad Polygamy to mankind; [and] that no repeal of that law is found in the Scriptures."[3] J. P. Newman also agrees with the above position.[4] A fourth author who holds this view is David Smith in The Bible Versus Polygamy. He maintains that "the Bible [is] clear and free from the charge of teaching polygamy."[5]

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[1]In addition to these four documents Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser analyzes several of the passages addressed in this project. Therefore, serious consideration are given to his work. See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Toward Old Testament Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983).

[2]Samuel Ellis Wishard, The Divine Law of Marriage, Or, The Bible Against Polygamy (New York: American Tract Society, 1816), 63-64.

[3]Sereno Edwards Dwight, The Hebrew Wife: Or the Law of Marriage Examined in Relation to the Lawfulness of Polygamy and to the Extent of the Law of Incest (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1836), 49.

[4]Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy! [A Debate Between Orson Pratt and J. P. Newman] (Baltimore, MD: John S. Dye, 1874), 57-58.

[5]David Hyrum Smith, The Bible Versus Polygamy (Plano, IL: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, True Latter Day Saints' Herald Office, 1983), 14.

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The varying views of scholars, outlined above concerning the biblical position on polygamy, elicit the following question: Which, if any, of these positions is correct? Since it seems that most of these studies have not provided an indepth analysis of crucial texts, or a contextual consideration of the narratives of the major polygamists, there appears to be a need for a reinvestigation of the topic.

SDA Church Policies, 1926-1941

Russell Staples rightly notes that "polygamy is probably the most complex issue with which [Seventh-day] Adventism has had to deal in its missionary enterprise."[1] In order to seek a solution to the issue, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists set up various committees, which have produced three basically different policies.[2]

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[1]Russell Staples, "Must Polygamists Divorce?" Spectrum 13 (September 1982): 44. Confirmation of this statement can be seen in the writings of missionaries. See, for example, William McClements, who indicates that polygamy was the greatest hindrance to church growth in the early years of mission work in Nigeria. William McClements, "Nigeria," The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 25 September 1924, 9. Cf. Joseph Adebisi Ola, "Training for Evangelism Among the Yorubas of Nigeria" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University, 1989), 99-100. Barry Oliver states that "polygamy has been a consistent obstacle to evangelization in Papua New Guinea." Barry David Oliver, "Polygamy and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Papua New Guinea," 1986, TMs [photocopy], p. 4, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI (hereafter designated as AHC).

[2]For more detail on these policies, including an earlier non-binding recommendation, see Bouit, 118-149; Staples, "Must Polygamists Divorce?" 47-49.

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The 1926 resolution stated "that in no case should a man living in polygamy be admitted into the fellowship of the church."[1] In a dramatic reversal of this absolutist position, the 1930 Fall Council overruled the General Conference policy and adopted a stand that, upon recommendation of responsible field committees, permitted the baptism of newly converted polygamous people into the church as probationary members.[2]

Just over a decade later, the 1941 General Conference Session moved away from the more accommodating approach of 1930 to the following somewhat ambivalent policy: a man living in polygamy who wishes to join the church is required to become monogamous by putting away all but one of his wives.[3] Alternately, "wives who upon accepting Christianity are still not permitted to leave their husbands because of tribal custom, may upon approval of the local and union committees become baptized members of the church."[4] This policy superseded all

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[1]The rest of the recommendation stated "that preceding his entrance into the church a sufficient time of probation be given him to test out his sincerity in separating himself from this practice." Interestingly, this policy made no mention of the wives. See Minutes of the General Conference Committee, Milwaukee, WI, 13 June 1926, p. 13, AHC.

[2]Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee, Omaha, NE, 28 October to 3 November 1930, p. 74, AHC. Part of the resolution noted that these polygamists may "be admitted to baptism and the ordinances of the church, and may be recognized as probationary members. They shall not, however, be admitted to full membership unless or until circumstances change so as to leave them with only one companion."

[3]"Proceedings of the General Conference," The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 10 June 1941, 235.

[4]Ibid.

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previous resolutions on polygamy.[1] Without substantial change it has remained the current official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.[2]

SDA Concern for a Theological Basis

During the past few decades these policies on polygamy have been critically analyzed and evaluated. For example, in his doctoral project on polygamy, Jean-Jacques Bouit concluded that throughout the years when the SDA church formulated policies on polygamy, "theological considerations seem to have been virtually absent from the deliberations."[3] Or as Clifton Maberly put it: "The argument from [S]cripture is largely ignored."[4]

While these committees probably did have a biblical rationale for the policies they recommended, no account of biblical or theological studies on which the policies were based has been located in available documents from these meetings.[5] The Bible was repeatedly referred to in some of these committees,

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[1]Ibid.

[2]General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Working Policy (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990-1991), 73-74.

[3]Bouit, 147; see also, 124, 133.

[4]Clifton R. Maberly, "The Polygyny Variant III: The View of a Church," 1974, TMs [photocopy], p. 8a, Document File 2211, Ellen G. White Research Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, (hereafter designated as EGWRC).

[5]See the following documents: Minutes of the General Conference Session, Milwaukee, WI, 12 June 1926; "Missions Round Table," General Conference Session, Milwaukee, WI, 27 May to 12 June 1926, AHC; Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee; "Proceedings of the General Conference." See also, Maberly, "The Polygyny Variant III: The View of

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especially in regard to the polygamous practice of Old Testament characters and the counsel of Paul that a church officer should be the "husband of one wife."[1] However, there is no record of any broad-based theological considerations or fundamental biblical principles used as the basis for these policies. Furthermore, the policies themselves, including both preamble and resolution, do not supply any scriptural basis for the positions taken.

Believing that the present SDA policy on polygamy is not properly founded on biblical principles, some pastors, administrators, theologians, and laity have been calling for a serious reassessment of the church's position.[2] While a

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a Church;" F. Donald Yost to Clifton R. Maberly, 7 May 1975, AHC.

[1]See, for example, "Missions Round Table." See also "Informal Discussion on Dealing with Converts from Polygamous Families--at the Missionary Round Table," Takoma Park, MD, June 1913, AHC.

[2]See, for example the following unpublished documents: William Liversidge, "Polygamy and Adventist Mission," 1971, TMs [photocopy], pp. 16-18, Question and Answer File 37-D, EGWRC; Hans Varmer, "Polygamy and the Seventh-day Adventist Working Policy," 1973, TMs [photocopy], p. 14, Question and Answer File 37-D, EGWRC; Maberly, "The Polygyny Variant III: The View of a Church," 11-12; Arthur Malcolm Vine, "Christian Responsibility and African Marriage," 1974, TMs [photocopy], pp. 26-28, Question and Answer File 37-D, EGWRC; Joseph Adebisi Ola, "Polygamy and Seventh-day Adventists in West Nigeria," 1978, TMs [photocopy], pp. 35-37, Document File 2211, EGWRC; Kisaka, 90; Bouit, 160-164; John F. Bryson, "Polygamy and the Church in Africa," 1980, TMs [photocopy], pp. 8-10, Document File 2211, EGWRC; Russell L. Staples, "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa," 1981, TMs [photocopy], pp. 40-42, AHC; Mmagu Uduma Mmagu, "Polygamy in [the] Igbo Tribe of East Nigeria," 1982, TMs [photocopy], pp. 73-78, AHC; Hezekiel Mafu, "The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Its Adherents in Africa," 1986, TMs [photocopy], pp. 17-19, AHC; Oliver, 42-45; Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "Polygamy and the Church in Africa," 1987, TMs [photocopy], pp. 6-7, AHC; Ron du Preez, "Polygamy in the Writings of Ellen G. White with Implications for Church Policy," 1988, TMs [photocopy], pp. 35-40, AHC; Ola, "Training for Evangelism Among the Yorubas of Nigeria," 184-190; Arturo Schmidt, "Approach

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few of these writers suggest that no polygamists should be baptized,[1] the majority recommend the baptism of all newly converted practicing polygamists.[2] A review of these documents reveals that both sides maintain that their position is based on the Bible. Since these two positions are mutually exclusive, and since the current SDA policy does not include a theological basis for its stand, there appears to be a need to do a careful analysis of the biblical materials related to polygamy.

Statement of the Problem

As indicated above, polygamy is a worldwide practice that still affects the lives of many people. As such it must be seriously taken into account in the mission work of any Christian group. As a denomination with a global mission emphasis, the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to be able to demonstrate that its approach to the issue of polygamy is firmly founded on Scripture.

Specifically, the problem addressed in this dissertation is as follows: What fundamental principles emerge from the Scriptures on which a church policy for dealing with polygamists can be based?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to undertake a contextual investigation of the biblical passages and pericopes related to plural marriage in order to discover

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to Islam," n.d., TMs [photocopy], p. 17, AHC.

[1]See, for example, Koranteng-Pipim, 6-7.

[2]See, for example, Bouit, 158-164; Vine, 26; Oliver, 42-45.

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principles on which a scripturally reliable and missiologically sound policy can be based concerning how to deal with polygamy.

To accomplish this purpose, two crucial questions are considered: First, what do the Old and New Testaments teach about polygamy? And second, what theological principles emerge from this study which can provide the basis for a biblically sound policy on polygamy?

Justification for the Study

This study on polygamy in the Bible with missiological implications is justified for several reasons. First, as noted earlier, since polygamy is a worldwide form of marriage, and since many issues related to polygamy are continuing to arise in the SDA Church, this issue must be dealt with on the basis of biblical principles.

Second, current literature shows that the issue of polygamy is still alive in the SDA Church.[1] For example, in 1991 Josephat Siron posited: "There can be no genuine reason that we should deny people the privilege of salvation simply because they were polygamists when they heard the gospel."[2] Similarly, in June

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[1]See, for example, Borge Schantz, "One Message--Many Cultures: How Do We Cope?" Ministry, June 1992, 8-11; Josephat R. Siron, "Polygamy: An Enduring Problem," Ministry, April 1991, 23-24; Alden Thompson, Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1991), 99-100; Robert C. Kistler, Marriage, Divorce, and . . . (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), 105-122.

[2]Siron, 24; cf. Staples, "Must Polygamists Divorce?" 50-51.

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1992, Borge Schantz classified the unwillingness to baptize a polygamist as a "serious example of cross-cultural confusion."[1]

Since all available evidence indicates a lack of clear biblical background and theological support for the current policy, there appears to be a definite need to reinvestigate the subject of plural marriage in Scripture.

Among Christian denominations the question of polygamy is so sensitive that many independent churches have broken away from mainline denominations.[2] David Barrett says: "Typical of the majority attitude is that of the African Church of Israel in Rhodesia [Zimbabwe], which in 1948 broke off from the Seventh-day Adventist Mission with the expressed reason 'to help polygamists to enter heaven.'"[3] Several new religious groups in Africa, such as the Celestial Church of Christ, God's Kingdom Society, and Elijah Masinde's Dina ya Msambwa, actually encourage the practice of polygamy.[4] This phenomenon also highlights the seriousness of the topic considered in this study.

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[1]Schantz, 8.

[2]Edward G. Newing, "The Baptism of Polygamous Families: Theory and Practice in an East African Church," Journal of Religion in Africa 3 (1970): 138; see also Jocelyn Murray, "Varieties of Kikuyu Independent Churches," in Kenya Churches Handbook: The Development of Kenyan Christianity, 1498-1973, ed. David B. Barrett, George K. Mambo, Janice McLauchlin, and Malcolm J. McVeigh (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1973), 129; Kaburuk, 3; Turley, 3.

[3]David B. Barrett, Schism and Renewal in Africa (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1968), 118.

[4]Friday M. Mbon, "Olumba Olumba Obu and African Traditional Culture," Update 9 (September 1985): 44, 48 (footnote #36).

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Contrary to what some have suggested, it is no longer assumed that polygamy will simply vanish by itself.[1] Some say it is not on the decline,[2] or passing into oblivion.[3] As recently as 1988 one researcher pointed out that polygamy "is not destined to disappear quickly."[4] Polygamy remains a vital issue because people who are living in polygamous marriages are still requesting membership in the church.[5] As an African Seventh-day Adventist Church employee stated, "Any further delay on the part of the church in dealing with this issue is [a] betrayal of its sacred task because polygamy will be with us for a long time to come."[6]

It is hoped that this research will, by means of a more comprehensive and analytically sound investigation, assist in establishing a valid and secure biblical basis for a policy concerning polygamy.

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[1]See, for example, Hubert Horan, "Polygamy Comes Home to Roost," Missiology: An International Review 4 (October 1976): 452.

[2]Francis, 96.

[3]Staples, "Must Polygamists Divorce?" 53. Hitchens agrees, noting that "even in societies that have been exposed to Christianity it still survives, and shows few signs of disappearing soon," 93.

[4]Vernon R. Dorjahn, "Changes in Temne Polygyny," Ethnology 27 (October 1988): 383.

[5]See Kisaka, 59; cf. Josphat Yego, "Polygamy and the African Church: A Survey," East African Journal of Evangelical Theology 3 (1984): 63; Patrick Iteka, "Polygamy and the Local Church, African Ecclesial Review 23 (February-April 1981): 106-107;

[6]Mafu, 18.

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Scope and Limitations

This research focused primarily on polygamy in the Bible. This dissertation does not deal with every biblical reference to polygamy or with all the concerns falling within the range of this topic in Scripture. Discussion is limited to the major Old and New Testament passages that relate to marital forms, as well as to other passages that provide theological principles for the Church concerning its policy on polygamy.

This project was not a comprehensive study of the entire subject of polygamy. It does not provide a discussion of the variety of anthropological, sociological, ethnological, and cultural aspects of plural marriage. Yet, some of these aspects are referred to as they relate to the issue of biblical polygamy.

It is recognized that issues such as divorce and remarriage are closely related to the topic. However, these matters are not dealt with, except as they are necessary and relevant to the main purpose of this research.

In addition, the practical application of this project is not aimed at the population of any specific location. However, the principles emerging from this study should have universal application.

Methodology of the Research

In the introduction to his master's thesis on polygamy in the Bible, Douglas Welch correctly notes that:

> Any consideration of a specifically biblical perspective on polygamy must, of necessity, begin with a consideration of the problem of Biblical interpretation. All [Christians] who are involved in the polygamy debate

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ultimately appeal to the Scriptures in support of their position. The question of how the Scriptures are to be interpreted thus becomes a crucial question.[1]

Fundamental to a proper understanding of the inspired writings is a belief in the basic unity of the Bible. Because "all Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim 3:16) or "God-breathed" (*theopneustos*) and "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet 1:21) in the prophetic word of Scripture, there is essential unity throughout the entire Bible.[2] Ellen White put it thus: "The Old and the New Testament are inseparable, for both are the teachings of Christ."[3]

Grounded in the concept of the unity of the Bible is the view that Scripture interprets itself. White noted that "the Bible is its own interpreter. Scripture is to be compared with scripture."[4] This understanding of the self-interpretation of Scripture based on such passages as Luke 24:27 and 2 Pet 1:20 operates as a safeguard against imposing one's own views on the Bible.[5]

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[1]Welch, 1.

[2]Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Totality of Scripture Versus Modernistic Limitations," Journal of the Adventist Theological Society 2 (1991): 46.

[3]Ellen G. White, The Spirit of Prophecy, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1877; reprint, Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969), 2:254.

[4]Ellen G. White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 462. See also, idem, Fundamentals of Christian Education (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 187.

[5]Gerhard F. Hasel, Biblical Interpretation Today (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), 103.

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This project dissertation utilizes the following essential procedures of biblical interpretation in its research work:

1. It aims at doing a contextually valid analysis of all passages under consideration. The context considered includes not just the literary setting of the text but also its linguistic, theological, historical, and cultural frameworks.[1]

2. As necessitated by the material being evaluated, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and units are taken into account in order to better understand God's will and purpose on the issue under investigation.[2]

3. Difficult passages are interpreted by reference to clearer passages. Thus, "by comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident."[3] The interpretation that emerges as the most correct according to the "weight of evidence"[4] is accepted as the most reliable.

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[1]See Welch, 21.

[2]See Gerhard F. Hasel, "General Principles of Interpretation," in A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974), 184.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ellen White says: "Those who desire to doubt will have plenty of room. God does not propose to remove all occasion for unbelief. He gives evidence, which must be carefully investigated with a humble mind and a teachable spirit, and all should decide from the weight of evidence." Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 3:255.

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4. Parallel accounts, as seen for example in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, are compared and contrasted in order to obtain as complete a picture as possible.

5. Where it is warranted, the chronological sequence of events is taken into account to provide a better understanding of the pericopes being analyzed.

6. An attempt is made to discover not just the more obvious and explicit statements regarding polygamy, but also any clear implications or indirect allusions to the issue as it relates to missiological concerns. This is especially necessary where there are no direct references to plural marriage, as is the case in the New Testament.

The English translation used in this project is the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted. Whenever it is deemed appropriate, recourse to the original Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament is made.

The writings of Ellen G. White, accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as "a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction,"[1] are given serious consideration in this project.

Even though emphasizing the primacy of the Bible, this study does not ignore the articles, books, and unpublished documents of Christians, Jews, and

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[1]General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990), 28.

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Muslims who have written on polygamy over the centuries. Their works are discussed as they relate to the biblical materials. However, since the Bible is the final norm for discovering the will of God, none of these extra-biblical sources have any authority over the text of Scripture itself.

Definition of Terms

For the sake of clarity it is necessary to define the manner in which certain crucial words are used in this project. Here are the terms with their precise dictionary definitions:

Monogamy: "The state or custom of being married to one person at a time."[1]

Polyandry: "The state or practice of having two or more husbands at the same time."[2]

Polygamy: "The state or practice of having two or more spouses at the same time; plural marriage."[3]

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[1]Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, rev. ed. (1974), s.v. "Monogamy." The term "monogyny," which is infrequently used, refers to the state or custom of having only one wife at a time.

[2]Webster's New World Dictionary, 3d ed. (1988), s.v. "Polyandry." According to Peter, polyandry can be located in Africa, America, Polynesia, and Asia. Peter, Prince of Greece and Denmark, A Study of Polyandry (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton & Co., 1963), 517.

[3]Webster's New World Dictionary, 3d ed. (1988), s.v. "Polygamy."

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Polygyny: "The state or practice of having two or more wives at the same time."[1]

In connection with the meaning and understanding of the last two terms, one researcher notes: "Polygamy is the popular term by which polygyny is almost exclusively known, no doubt because it is in this form that it is most generally encountered."[2] Thus, in line with popular usage, the term "polygamy" is generally used throughout this document. The technically correct word "polygyny" is employed wherever it may seem helpful for the sake of clarity or when it forms part of a quotation from another source.

The dictionaries show that the identical qualifying words, "at the same time," are used above when defining the non-monogamous forms of marriage. Since a person who is divorced and remarried is not married to more than one spouse at the same time, this form of marriage is not labeled polygamous.

Overview of the Project

Part One, which immediately follows this introductory chapter, addresses the biblical materials that provide the theological basis for this study. It is divided into four parts, covering chapters 2 through 5. Chapter 2 considers the original marriage in Eden in order to determine God's purpose in establishing this

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[1]Ibid., s.v. "Polygyny."

[2]Peter, Prince of Greece and Denmark, 21.

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institution. In addition to this, the type of marriage evident at the time of the worldwide flood is taken into account.

Chapter 3 consists of an analysis of Old Testament regulations and allusions to marriage which may have implications for marital structures. This includes the legislation located in Exod 21:7-11, Lev 18:18, Deut 17:17, Deut 21:15-17, and Deut 22:28, 29. Special attention is given to the levirate law in Deut 25:5-10, as well as to the practice of this custom among the people of the Bible. The polygamous marriage symbolism of Ezek 23:1-49 is also studied.

Chapter 4 begins with a survey of polygamy in the Ancient Near East, as well as an outline of the extent of plural marriage in the Bible. It then examines the accounts of the polygamists in Scripture, in order to understand the manner in which God dealt with them on this issue. In addition to the antediluvians in general, the record of the marriages of the following ten men are considered: Lamech, Abraham, Jacob, Esau, Moses, Gideon, Elkanah, David, Solomon, and Joash.

Since there is no specific reference to polygamy in the entire New Testament, chapter 5 consists of a study of the topic of marriage in general. In this connection, certain passages on marriage, divorce, and remarriage are addressed. The levirate, as mentioned in Matt 22:23-33, is also examined. The meaning and importance of *porneia* in Acts 15 is considered. The issue of marriage in 1 Cor 7 is addressed. Special attention is given to the passages in

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Paul's writings that require a church officer to be the "husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6).

Part Two of the project, which deals with the missiological implications of the findings in Part One, consists of the following two chapters. Chapter 6 provides a synopsis of the principles emerging from the research. Issues to be addressed include the form of marriage as divinely instituted, the regulations dealing with polygamy, other passages related to marital forms, the manner in which the Bible speaks of practicing polygamists, and the missiological implications of these findings for a theologically sound policy on polygamy. Finally, chapter 7 concludes this project with a summary of its findings, recommendations for further research, as well as a final conclusion.

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PART ONE

ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL PASSAGES RELATED TO POLYGAMY

CHAPTER II

MARITAL FORM AS INSTITUTED IN THE BEGINNING

The book of Genesis provides a concrete account of the institution of marriage. In the first two chapters of the Bible the question of human sexuality is directly dealt with. These opening chapters of Scripture are determinative for a biblical theology of sexuality, since here the pattern is established and pronounced "very good" (Gen 1:31).[1]

In this research the historicity of the Genesis account is accepted. On this basis an attempt is made in this chapter to examine the two "beginnings" of the world as recorded in the first nine chapters of Genesis, the book of beginnings. To begin with, the primary passages related to the marriage of Adam and Eve are analyzed so as to determine what conclusions may be reached in regard to the kind of marital structure originally instituted. Following this, the account of the

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[1]See Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2," Andrews University Seminary Studies 26 (Spring 1988): 5.

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worldwide deluge is considered with a view to noting the type of marriage evident at the beginning of the new world, as well as any implications from this record. A short summary then closes this chapter.

The Pattern Established in Eden

Information concerning the first marriage is located in Gen 1 and 2. While some information is to be found in Gen 1, the primary focus of this study is on Gen 2, where most of the data relating to marital form is located. First, the question of who instituted marriage and what its significance was, is addressed. Second, the grammar used to describe the original marriage is analyzed so as to observe the form of this union. Third, the reciprocal nature of the edenic marriage is considered. Fourth, the significance of this first marriage for the rest of humanity is discussed. Finally, a brief summary ends this section.

The passages that specifically relate to the institution of the first marriage are located in Gen 2:18, 21-24 and 1:27, 28:

> Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."
> So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place.
> And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.
> And the man said,
> "This is now bone of my bones,
> And flesh of my flesh;
> She shall be called Woman,
> Because she was taken out of Man."
> For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh.
> And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

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> And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Various biblical scholars have analyzed these passages and have come to several conclusions regarding the essence and meaning of marriage.[1] In this study, however, only the factors relating to the actual structure of the marital relationship are examined here from the biblical record.

The Originator of Marriage

Some have posited that marriage is merely a societal or cultural institution. For example, J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson give the following definition: "Marriage is the state in which men and women can live together in sexual relationship with the approval of their social group."[2] If this is so, then whatever form of marriage a society approves must be considered acceptable.

However, beyond being simply a sexual relationship approved by society, marriage in the first chapters of Genesis involved a divine dimension. Gen 1:27 says that God created them, "male and female," and charged them to be "fruitful and multiply" (1:28). This implied marital relationship is explicated further in the following chapter. Gen 2:18 records the words of God: "'I will make him a helper.'" In other words, it was God who decided to create "a suitable

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[1]See, for example, Obwa, 50-56; Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2;" Samuel H. Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation," Judaism 40 (Summer 1991): 309.

[2]J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson, "Marriage," The New Bible Dictionary (1962), 786.

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companion" (2:18, TEV) for the man. Then, it was God who "brought her to the man" (2:22) to be his wife. Thus, both passages specifically state that God is the originator of the marriage relationship.

Clearly, as Geoffrey Bromiley states, "God was the author of this union."[1] He was the one who instituted marriage in the beginning.[2] William Blum is correct when he remarks that the Old Testament creation accounts "show that monogamy is the form of marriage willed by God from the beginning, and that it is not simply a cultural institution, dependent upon the customs and conditions of a particular society."[3] Or, as Ellen White observed, "God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe."[4]

Form of the First Marital Union

From Gen 2:21-24 it becomes clear that this marriage took place between one man and one woman. The repeated use of singular nouns and pronouns in this passage is noteworthy: God decides to make "a helper" for "the man" (2:18); He selects "one" rib from "the man" (2:21), and fashions it into "a woman" whom He then takes to "the man" (2:22); "the man" says that "she shall be called woman"

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[1]Geoffrey W. Bromiley, God and Marriage (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 3.

[2]Jasper, 50; also, Hitchens, 3.

[3]Blum, 276-277.

[4]Ellen G. White, The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), 46.

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(2:23); thus, "a man" leaves his parents and is joined to "his wife" (2:24).[1] In this distinct way the original marital form can be seen to be monogamous. As John Calvin stated:

> But though here no mention is made of two, yet there is no ambiguity in the sense; for Moses had not said that God has assigned many wives, but only one to one man; and in the general direction given, he had put the wife in the singular number. It remains, therefore, that the conjugal bond subsists between two persons only, whence it easily appears, that nothing is less accordant with the divine institution than polygamy.[2]

Wright and Thompson correctly note that "monogamy is implicit in the story of Adam and Eve, since God created only one wife for Adam."[3] O. J. Baab concurs, stating: "The creation account in Genesis writes of the first marriage in clearly monogamous terms."[4] Even Eugene Hillman, who persuasively posits that polygamy was legitimate according to Mosaic Law, admits that "if we accept it as divinely revealed truth that our species started from only one pair of human beings, then certainly the original marriage must have been monogamous."[5]

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[1]George Bush comments: "As for polygamy, it is clearly forbidden by the fact that a single pair only were created, and by the terms of the command, that a man shall cleave to his wife (not wives) only," George Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Genesis; Designed as a General Help to Biblical Reading and Instruction, 2 vols. (New York: Newman and Ivison, 1852), 1:69 (emphasis original).

[2]John Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of Genesis, vol. 1, trans. John King (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 136.

[3]Wright and Thompson, "Marriage," 787.

[4]O. J. Baab, "Marriage," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962), 3:281.

[5]Hillman, 151.

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Based on the fact that God made only one wife for Adam, Robert Hitchens suggests: "Had He intended for man to be polygamous He would have created several wives."[1] Similarly, Mavumilusa Makanzu, aware that God "did not create two or more women, but one,"[2] maintains that this divine institution of monogamy has been clearly expressed ever since creation.[3] As Walter Wegner aptly remarks:

> If we are correct in viewing the union of Adam and Eve of Genesis 1 and 2 as the family as God wants it to be, then there can be no doubt about the fact that the marriage held up for the emulation of ancient Israel was a monogamous one.[4]

Thus, as Parrinder concludes: "The fact that the first human beings are represented as having been one man, with one wife, clearly sets up monogamy as the original intention of God for the human race."[5] In Ellen White's words: "This first marriage is an example of what all marriages should be. God gave the man one wife. Had he deemed it best for man to have more than one wife, he

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[1]Hitchens, 15.

[2]Mavumilusa Makanzu, Can the Church Accept Polygamy? (Accra, Ghana: Asempa Publishers, 1983), 58.

[3]Ibid., 58, 62. Furthermore, Makanzu notes, additional support for monogamy comes from the fact that the Song of Songs "cannot be understood in the context of a polygamous marriage," 59.

[4]Walter Wegner, "God's Pattern for the Family in the Old Testament," in Family Relationships and the Church: A Sociological, Historical, and Theological Study of Family Structures, Roles, and Relationships, Marriage and Family Research Series, ed. Oscar E. Feucht (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 29 (emphasis original).

[5]Parrinder, 30.

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could as easily have given him two; but he sanctioned no such thing."[1] Since the first marriage is seen to be unambiguously monogamous, this marital form is thus understood as representative of the "will of God."[2]

A Reciprocal Conjugal Relationship

Gen 2:18 records God's words: "'I will make him a helper suitable for him.'" The fact that marriage involves a reciprocal relationship is more clearly expressed by the REB rendering: "'I shall make a partner suited to him.'" Similar to the REB, other versions interpret the phrase most vital to the issue of reciprocity as "a suitable companion" (TEV), "one like himself" (BBE), and "who is like him" (S&G). These Bible versions better capture the true essence of the Hebrew term *kᵉnegdô*, which means a "counterpart,"[3] one "'corresponding to him.'"[4]

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[1]Ellen G. White, "Marriages, Wise and Unwise," The Youth's Instructor, 10 August 1899, 437.

[2]Kaiser, 182; Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 24; cf. Walter Trobisch, who calls monogamy "God's original and final will," Walter Trobisch, My Wife Made Me a Polygamist, "Here Is My Problem," Series 1 (Kehl/Rhein, Germany: Editions Trobisch, 1980), 21.

[3]Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 591.

[4]Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, vol. 1, The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 149. Further support for the corresponding nature of the relationship between man and woman can be seen in the "ring construction" of the entire creation account of male and female. See Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2," 14.

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Commenting on this matter of reciprocity, Old Testament scholar Tryggve Kronholm observed: "It was the Creator's intention that the woman should totally match the man, not only physically and mentally--[but] also numerically!"[1] It is possible to conclude from this stress on equal partnership, that for a marital relationship to be genuinely reciprocal, it would need to be monogamous.

Significance of the First Marriage

The evidence observed thus far in Gen 1 and 2 indicates that the divinely instituted original marriage was clearly monogamous. In addition, these passages show that only monogamy can fulfill some of the basic expectations of marriage. The significance of this first monogamous marriage for the rest of humanity bears consideration.

The passage in Gen 2:24, which forms the closing statement about the first marriage, begins with the Hebrew term *ᶜal-kēn*. While in the NASB it is interpreted "for this cause," several English Bibles render it "therefore."[2] An investigation of the Pentateuch indicates that the Bible writer frequently utilized this concept when making explanatory statements about an occurrence. This happened when people or place names were being identified.[3]

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[1]Kronholm, 73.

[2]See, for example, KJV, RV, ASV, RSV, NKJV, and NRSV.

[3]See, for example, Gen 19:22; 25:30; 26:33; 29:35; 30:6; 31:48; 33:17; Exod 15:23.

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More importantly, this usage also occurs in passages where the writer explains the reason behind the observance of certain regulations and laws.[1] In this regard, Angelo Tosato points out the use of *ᶜal-kēn* in the fourth commandment of Exod 20:11: "On the seventh day of creation he rested; for this reason [*ᶜal-kēn*] he ordered that the sabbath should be observed."[2] Tosato recognizes that Gen 2:24 is similarly structured.[3] He posits: "The initial *ᶜal-kēn* ('therefore'), in fact, certifies beyond any doubt that he intends here to explain something."[4] Thus, he concludes that this passage is an antipolygamous matrimonial legislation,[5] one that "speaks of marriage in a normative way."[6]

Other scholars have likewise noticed the significance of *ᶜal-kēn* in Gen 2:24.[7] Nahum Sarna notes that this term introduces an observation on the part of the writer, in which some "fundamental aspects of the marital relationship are

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[1]See, for example, Exod 13:15: Because God freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, "therefore" (*ᶜal-kēn*), they were to celebrate the Passover. The "therefore" thus establishes the law. Other passages, such as the following, reveal a similar type of structure: Gen 32:32; Lev 17:11, 12; Num 18:24; Deut 15:11.

[2]Angelo Tosato, "On Genesis 2:24," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 52 (July 1990): 406.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., 398 (emphasis original).

[5]Ibid., 409.

[6]Ibid., 404.

[7]See, for example, James Comper Gray and George M. Adams, eds., The Biblical Encyclopedia, 5 vols. (Cleveland, OH: F. M. Barton, 1903), 1:18; Robert Davidson, Genesis 1-11, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 37-38.

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traced to God's original creative act and seen as part of the ordained natural order."[1] Similarly, Herbert Ryle recognizes that this "sentence beginning with 'therefore' supplies the application, or relation, of the ancient narrative to later times."[2] Thus, just as God had instituted the monogamous marriage of the first parents of the human race, He established this pattern for marital relationships for the rest of humanity. In the words of Charles Fritsch, "Monogamy is rooted in the very order of the universe as created by God."[3]

An additional matter concerning the grammar of Gen 2:24 needs consideration. The first verb, *ya^{c}azāḇ* ("he will leave"), is in the imperfect tense, followed by two consecutive perfects, as normal. When this type of tense is understood as a frequentative imperfect, it is rendered, as the RSV has it, as something occurring customarily: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."[4] However, the Hebrew imperfect can also be interpreted in other ways. It can express actions to

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[1]Nahum Sarna, Genesis, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 23.

[2]Herbert E. Ryle, The Book of Genesis, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 39. See also, Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 70.

[3]Charles T. Fritsch, Genesis, The Layman's Bible Commentary (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 30.

[4]See Robert B. Lawton, "Genesis 2:24: Trite or Tragic?" Journal of Biblical Literature 105 (1986): 97.

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be repeated in the future, as the ASV puts it:[1] "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

The imperfect tense may also be used to express a command, informing people of what ought or ought not to be done.[2] Gen 2:24 could thus be legitimately translated: "Therefore a man should leave his father and mother, and cling to his wife, and they should become one flesh." Robert Lawton concludes that when rendered this way, "the verse can be understood as a description of divine intention."[3] Since this text begins with the introductory term, "therefore," the Hebrew imperfect would be more faithfully translated as expressing a command, thus indicating that here a standard is being set.[4]

Even though these words in Gen 2:24 were evidently penned by a human, since they are the utterance of divine revelation, "Christ could quote them,

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[1]See also, KJV, NIV, NKJV, NASB.

[2]S. R. Driver, A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions, 3d ed. (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1892), 43. See, for example, Gen 2:17; 3:14; Exod 20:3-17; 21:12; Num 15:14.

[3]Lawton, 98.

[4]This type of construction can be found in passages such as Exod 22:30, Deut 22:3, and 2 Sam 13:12. For example, in Gen 34:7 the word *kēn* precedes the imperfect, and the phrase is rendered as a prohibition, "for such a thing ought not to be done."

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therefore, as the word of God (Matt. xix. 5)."[1] Thus, since it is a clear expression of God's will, this statement is of great import for all.

Gordon Wenham correctly understands this verse as "applying the principles of the first marriage to every subsequent marriage."[2] Another commentary notes: "These words express the deepest physical and spiritual unity of man and woman, and hold up monogamy before the world as the form of marriage ordained by God."[3] According to Sereno Dwight: "This is the Great Original Law of Marriage binding on the whole human family."[4] As Merrill Unger aptly observes: "Polygamy was never in the divine order for man."[5] By the declaration of Gen 2:24 polygamy was implicitly "ruled out."[6]

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[1]C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 3 vols., Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), 1:90. See also, Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 1:14; A. Cohen, ed., The Soncino Chumash (Surrey, England: Soncino Press, 1947), 12; Howard F. Vos, Genesis (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 25; F. D. Nichol, ed., Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, rev. ed., 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976-1980), 1:227 (hereafter designated as SDA Bible Commentary). For a more detailed study of Matt 19:5 see chapter 5 of this project.

[2]Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 70.

[3]SDA Bible Commentary, 1:227. See also, Keil and Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 1:90.

[4]Dwight, 9.

[5]Unger, Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament, 1:14.

[6]Vos, 25. Bush states: "As for polygamy, it is clearly forbidden by the fact that but a single pair only were created," Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical on the Book of Genesis, 1:69. Dwight says Gen 2:24 "prohibited Polygamy," 13.

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The marriage institution as set up in Eden has been studied by many Bible scholars who have concluded that monogamy was God's intention[1] and will,[2] His plan[3] and design[4] for humanity. Moreover, monogamy was the ideal,[5] model,[6] and example[7] for all subsequent marriages. In addition, others have spoken of monogamy as a "prototype,"[8] or as "the form of marriage ordained by God."[9] Emil Brunner speaks of monogamy as part of the divine "order" of creation.[10] Ellen White used the same word when she wrote: "God gave to Adam one wife--showing to all who should live upon the earth, his order

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[1]Parrinder, 30.

[2]See Kaiser, 182; de Vaux, 24.

[3]Francis Foulkes, The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 161.

[4]Note that Ellen White says: "He [God] never designed that man should have a plurality of wives," Ellen G. White, The Story of Redemption (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 75 (emphasis added).

[5]J. F. McLaughlin, "Marriage--Biblical Data," The Jewish Encyclopedia, (1904), 8:336. See also, Kaburuk, 6; Bernard Haring, The Law of Christ, vol. 3, Special Moral Theology, trans. Edwin G. Kaiser (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1961), 316.

[6]See Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 20; Pierre Grelot, "The Human Couple in Scripture," Theology Digest 14 (Summer 1966): 138.

[7]White, "Marriages, Wise and Unwise," 437.

[8]Grelot, 138; Hall, 43.

[9]Keil and Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 1:90. See also, Jasper, 50.

[10]Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), 345.

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and law in that respect."[1] White went a step further than Brunner, and, like Dwight,[2] called monogamy a "law"[3] of God--one that had universal application, for "all who should live upon the earth."[4] As Samuel Wishard put it: "Here God has settled the law of one wife for one husband."[5]

Thus, contrary to the understanding that monogamous marriage is merely one of the traditions of the Christian church,[6] Gen 1 and 2 indicate that

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[1]Ellen G. White, "The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels: The Flood," The Signs of the Times, 27 February 1879, 66. See idem, The Story of Redemption, 75; idem, Spiritual Gifts, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864; reprint, Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945), 3:63.

[2]See Dwight, 3, 8, 10, 11, 13, 24, 32, 36, 38-41, 49, 106, 125, 127, 154.

[3]Apparently, the word "law" is used here as one of "the body of commandments which express the will of God with regard to the conduct of His intelligent creatures." See A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles (1903), s.v. "Law."

[4]White, Spiritual Gifts, 3:63.

[5]Wishard, 9; see also, 10. Other commentators also understand Gen 2:24 as establishing a "law" of marriage. See, for example, D. Stuart Briscoe, Genesis, The Communicator's Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 52; John Peter Lange, Genesis, trans. Taylor Lewis, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 209, 210; Robert Jamieson, Genesis-Deuteronomy, A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945), 47.

[6]See Donald A. McGavran, "What Says the Word of God?" Church Growth Bulletin 5 (March 1969): 359; cf. Joseph Omoregbe, "Is Polygamy Incompatible with Christianity?" African Ecclesial Review 21 (December 1979): 368.

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monogamous marriage was originally established by God as the model and norm for all marital relationships. In the words of W. White, "There is no question throughout the rest of the Bible that the monogamy of the Garden of Eden is the situation to be considered 'normal' and the ordained law of marriage."[1] Or as Calvin concluded in his comments on Gen 2:24, "Wherefore, there is no doubt that polygamy is a corruption of legitimate marriage."[2]

The Model Evident at the Flood

Even though a considerable amount of Genesis is devoted to the story of the worldwide deluge,[3] it is apparent that not much is recorded about the marital status of those involved in the narrative. However, the few facts that are mentioned need to be carefully examined.

The Genesis record is clear, not only that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (6:8), but that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; [and] Noah walked with God" (6:9). Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (6:10). When God decided to destroy the earth with a flood because of its corruptness, God called upon Noah to build an ark to preserve selected animals and human beings. The record simply states that, when the ark and all the necessary preparations had been made, "Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the

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[1]W. White, Jr., "Family," The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (1975), 2:497.

[2]Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of Genesis, 1:137.

[3]See Gen 6-9.

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sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark" (7:13). That there were precisely eight persons saved in the ark is clear from both Old and New Testaments (Gen 7:13; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5). On this issue Ellen White notes:

> Noah had but one wife, and their united family discipline was blessed of God. Because Noah's sons were righteous, they were preserved in the ark with their righteous father [see Ezek 14:14, 20]. God has not sanctioned polygamy in a single instance. It was contrary to his will.[1]

Kronholm concurs, saying that "Noah himself as well as his three sons are described in an unambiguous way as monogamous."[2] Apparently, by preserving in the ark only those who were monogamous, God was conveying His divine approval on the marital pattern that He had established in Eden.[3] Clifton Maberly is thus correct when he recognizes that the monogamy of Noah and his sons "is very significant to an understanding of God's will and dealing with the

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[1]White, Spiritual Gifts, 3:100.

[2]Kronholm, 66.

[3]Some scholars have recognized something rather unusual in connection with the Hebrew terms used to refer to the clean and unclean animals taken into the ark. In Gen 7:2, instead of the normal words for male (*zāḵûr*) and female (*nᵉqēḇāh*), the phrase *ʾîš wᵉʾištô* ("a man and his wife") is used to describe the animals. It has been suggested that this phrase, "male and his mate" (NRSV), was used by the writer to indicate that all living creatures that entered the ark, whether birds, animals, or human beings, were classified as being in a "monogamous" relationship. See Dresner, 313; Nkwoka, 147. Cf. Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, part 2, From Noah to Abraham, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1964), 73-74.

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polygamous marriage variant."[1] Moreover, this monogamous emphasis stands in sharp contrast to the implication of polygamy on the part of the antediluvians.[2]

When the flood waters subsided, "Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him" (8:18). Here was the beginning of the new world, with Noah as the second founder of the human race.[3] Schillebeeckx notes:

> Yahweh, so to speak, set about doing his work all over again. Noah became the new "first man" and, like Adam, "walked with God" (vi.9). This creation was an explicit covenant (ix.9) and God gave a renewed blessing to the marriage of the new "first man and woman" (ix.7).[4]

The identical charge that God gave to the world's first couple, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28), He now repeated to Noah and his sons (9:1), all of whom were monogamous. Samuel Dresner posits that, "in this, the pattern of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is replicated."[5] In choosing these monogamous couples to be the progenitors of the new race on

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[1]Clifton R. Maberly, "The Polygamous Variant: The Policy and Practice of a Church," 1975, TMs [photocopy], p. 5, AHC; see also, Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 15.

[2]See the discussion of Gen 6 in chapter 4 of this project dissertation.

[3]See Obwa, 30; Wishard, 13; David R. Mace, Hebrew Marriage: A Sociological Study (London: Epworth Press, 1953), 136.

[4]Edward Schillebeeckx, Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery, vol. 1, Marriage in the Old Testament, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 72-73.

[5]Dresner, 313.

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earth,[1] God was in a sense repeating history.[2] As Dresner so fittingly concludes: "The message seems clear: human society is meant to be composed of families, of monogamous families."[3]

Summary of the Marital Form in Genesis

The investigation of Gen 1 and 2 covered the issue of marriage in the creation story. The various factors related to the actual form and structure of marriage provided some significant insights. First, it was the Creator God Himself who originated and established the institution of marriage. Second, the use of singular nouns and pronouns indicated that this divinely instituted first marriage was unambiguously monogamous. Third, a monogamous marriage may afford the closest truly reciprocal relationship, in which a woman is man's counterpart. And fourth, Gen 2:24 establishes monogamy as the divine design and standard for all future marital unions. By implication therefore, as Kaiser puts it, "polygamy is expressly prohibited by God in his ordination of the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24."[4]

The examination of the flood narrative of Gen 6-9 likewise revealed some important elements related to marital form and structure. First, God apparently displayed His approval of monogamy by saving only monogamous couples in the

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[1]Wishard, 11.

[2]Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 15.

[3]Dresner, 313.

[4]Kaiser, 186.

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ark. And second, by charging Noah and his three sons, all of whom were monogamous, to begin the new world, God once again set up the marital pattern that He had originally established in Eden. Thus the new world began as the old world had, with the righteous example of marriage as God had originally designed it.[1]

In brief then, by means of the manner in which He instituted the original marriage in Eden, God established monogamous marital relationships, in the words of Ellen White, as His "order and law"[2] of marriage for all ages and all generations. In the flood narrative monogamy was replicated and reinstituted at the start of the new world as God's standard.

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[1]See Maberly, "The Polygamous Variant: The Policy and Practice of a Church," 5.

[2]White, Spiritual Gifts, 3:63.

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CHAPTER III

OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES CONCERNING MARITAL FORMS RELATED TO POLYGAMY

The previous chapter contained a description of the manner in which God Himself initially established monogamous marriage in Eden and subsequently reaffirmed it at the time of the flood. This chapter considers the legal stipulations as well as related allusions that have implications for the issue of polygamy. More specifically, this section examines the major passages of the Old Testament that have frequently been discussed in relation to polygamy.

First, the issue of the concubine in Hebrew society is looked at. Then, the Pentateuchal legislation related to polygamy, from Exodus through Deuteronomy, is considered. This includes the law concerning the female slave (Exod 21:7-10), the regulation on marriage to two sisters (Lev 18:18), the legislation regarding the marital status of the king (Deut 17:17), the law of the firstborn and his rights (Deut 21:15-17), and the statute concerning sexual relations with an unengaged woman (Exod 22:16, 17; Deut 22:28, 29). A special section is devoted to a study of the levirate, in which the law of Deut 25:5-10 is investigated, as well as the practice of this custom among the people of the Old Testament.

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Following this, the matter of polygamous marriage symbolism of Ezek 23 is examined. Finally, to conclude this chapter, a brief summary is made.

The Concubine in Hebrew Society

Many questions have been raised about the issue of concubinage in the Bible. How is the word "concubine" used in Scripture? What is the legal status of the concubine? Are the offspring of a concubine considered legal heirs or merely illegitimate children? And, what similarities and differences are there between a wife and a concubine? These questions are considered from a biblical perspective.

Various scholars have done research into the origin of the word *pîlegeš* (concubine).[1] Their findings are quite agreed that this word is not of Semitic origin.[2] As to the meaning of this term, some have concluded that a concubine

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[1]See, for example, Louis M. Epstein, "The Institution of Concubinage Among the Jews," Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research 6 (1934-1935): 153-188; Chaim Rabin, "The Origin of the Hebrew Word *Pîlegeš*," Journal of Jewish Studies 25 (Winter 1974): 353-364; Saul Levin, "Hebrew {*Pi(y)legeš*}, Greek [*Pallakē*], Latin *Paelex*: The Origin of Intermarriage Among the Early Indo-Europeans and Semites," General Linguistics 23 (1983): 191-197; Julian Morgenstern, "Additional Notes on '*Beena* Marriage (Matriarchat) in Ancient Israel'," Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 49 (1931): 46-58.

[2]See Rabin, "The Origin of the Hebrew Word *Pîlegeš*," 353-357; Levin, 194-196.

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was simply "a secondary or inferior wife,"[1] or a "slave girl who belonged to a Hebrew family and bore children."[2]

The term *pîlegeš* appears thirty-seven times in the Old Testament refering to approximately seventeen different cases.[3] Saul Levin correctly recognized that "the word is conspicuously absent from the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy."[4] This is significant, since the Mosaic Law is only expounded in these four books. Thus, as Levin rightly concluded, the Mosaic law "took no cognisance of such a woman."[5]

Even though biblical legislation did not consider concubinage, actual family chronicles indicate that it was practiced by at least some of the Hebrew people. From these accounts the status and rank of the concubine can best be ascertained.

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[1]Unger's Bible Dictionary (1960), s.v. "Concubine." See also, R. Allan Killen, "Concubine," Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia (1975), 1:373.

[2]O. J. Baab, "Concubine," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962), 1:666.

[3]See Gen 22:24; 25:6; 35:22; 36:12; Judg 8:31; 19:1, 2, 9, 10, 24, 25, 27, 29; 20:4, 5, 6; 2 Sam 3:7 (twice); 2 Sam 5:13; 15:16; 16:21, 22; 19:5; 20:3; 21:11; 1 Kgs 11:3; 1 Chr 1:32; 2:46, 48; 3:9; 7:14; 2 Chr 11:21 (twice); Esth 2:14; Cant 6:8, 9; Ezek 23:20.

[4]Levin, 192-193.

[5]Ibid., 193.

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Concubines as Distinct from Wives

First, it is clear that a definite distinction is frequently made between a wife and a concubine. Notice these examples: (1) Nahor had a "wife," Milcah (Gen 11:29), as well as a "concubine," Reumah (Gen 22:24); (2) Gideon had "many wives" (Judg 8:30) as well as a "concubine" (Judg 8:31); (3) when David became king over all of Israel, he "took more concubines and wives" (2 Sam 5:13); (4) Solomon (1 Kgs 11:3), as well as his son Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:21), had many wives and concubines. Obviously these two distinct terms are used in order to indicate some difference between concubines and wives.

Though the evidence is admittedly scant, one crucial difference between a wife and a concubine appears to relate to the issue of a formal wedding. For example, in the cases of marriage to a wife, this was often a public affair, sometimes including celebrations, as in the cases of Jacob (Gen 29:21-28) and Samson (Judg 14). Also, the marriage was formalized by the dowry,[1] as in the marriages of Isaac (Gen 24:53), Jacob (Gen 29:18-20), David (1 Sam 18:20-27), and Solomon (1 Kgs 9:16). However, none of these events is noted in relation to the taking of concubines. Martin Madan expressed this view by saying that

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[1]Exod 22:16 states: "He must pay a dowry for her to be his wife." This seems to have already been a custom from before the Mosaic law, as seen in Gen 34:12, where Shechem says: "Ask me ever so much bridal payment and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; but give me the girl in marriage." On the dowry, see de Vaux, 26-29; Kisaka, 33-35; O. J. Baab, "Dowry," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962), 1:867; Cyril W. Emmet, "Marriage," Dictionary of the Bible (1963), 625.

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concubines seem "to have been taken without the formality of dowry, or any other outward circumstance whatsoever."[1]

Concubines as Similar to Wives

Further study seems to indicate that on several occasions the terms "concubine" and "wife" are used somewhat interchangeably. For instance, Gen 25:1 indicates that, after the death of Sarah, "Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah." In 1 Chr 1:32, however, this same woman is called a *pîlegeš*, a concubine. Similarly, while Gen 35:22 refers to Bilhah as Jacob's concubine, Gen 37:2 says that she was one of Jacob's wives.

This mixing of the two terms is also evident later on in the David-Bathsheba incident. Here, the prediction that someone "shall lie with your wives in broad daylight" (2 Sam 12:11) was fulfilled when "Absalom went in to his father's concubines" (2 Sam 16:22).[2] As Madan put it: "A concubine was frequently styled ʾ*iššāh*--a wife."[3] However, the word *pîlegeš* is never used to refer to a first, original wife.[4]

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[1]Martin Madan, Thelyphthora (London: J. Dodsley, 1781), 280.

[2]See White, who notes: "Thus was fulfilled the word of God to David by the prophet," White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 739.

[3]Madan, 280.

[4]For example, Keturah is called a wife (Gen 25:1) apparently since Abraham married her after Sarah's death. But, she is also called a concubine (1 Chr 1:32) probably because she was not the original wife. Likewise, Michal, David's original wife is never called a concubine.

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Schulim Ochser indicates that in biblical times a concubine "enjoyed the same rights in the house as the legitimate wife."[1] This can be seen from the fact that all of Jacob's sons, whether from wives or concubines, were considered legal heirs.[2] As Raphael Patai noted: "The children of a concubine had the same status as the children of full wives."[3] Furthermore, the concubine commanded the same respect and inviolability as the wife, as evident from the Reuben-Bilhah incident (Gen 35:22; 49:4), the account of Ishbosheth taking Saul's concubine (2 Sam 3:6-11), and the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam 16:21, 22).[4]

A final evidence of the similarity between the terms "wife" and "concubine" comes from an examination of the manner in which these two words are directly linked in the Hebrew language. Though the word *pîlegeš* is used in nine books of the Bible, only in the books of Judges and 2 Samuel is it used together with the Hebrew word for "wife" (*ʾiššāh*), thus a "wife-concubine."[5] That this double term is a legitimate rendition of the Hebrew can be supported by its contextual usage in both Judges and 2 Samuel. For example, the ten

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[1]Schulim Ochser, "Pilegesh," The Jewish Encyclopedia, (1905), 10:35. Welch says: "Concubines were, for all intents and purposes, 'wives'," 47.

[2]See Gen 46; 49; Exod 1; Deut 33; etc.; Turley, 2. See also, "Polygamy Among the Jews," Calcutta Review 93 (1891): 416.

[3]Raphael Patai, Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1959), 42.

[4]Cf. Ochser, 35.

[5]See Judg 19:1, 27. In 2 Sam 15:16, and 20:3 the plural forms are used, "wives-concubines" (*nāšîm pilagᵉšîm*).

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"wives-concubines" mentioned in 2 Sam 15:16 and 20:3 are specifically called "wives" in 2 Sam 12:11, while in 2 Sam 16:21, 22 they are referred to as "concubines."[1]

In short, a study of concubines in Hebrew society reveals several factors. The Mosaic laws make no mention of concubines. However, the narrative portions of Scripture indicate that the terms "wife" and "concubine" were sometimes used to describe distinct categories, while at other times they were used interchangeably. The difference relates primarily to the more formal aspects of the marriage, while the legal status of a concubine and her children was the same as that of the wife and her children.[2] In fact, these terms are so similar that at times they are linked together to form a "wife-concubine." Only the original wife is never called a concubine. Thus, both wives and concubines formed part of the polygamous homes of certain characters of Scripture.

The Law Concerning the Female Slave

Following immediately on the Decalogue of Exod 20:1-17 is a section of ordinances and stipulations that expands on these ten fundamental moral laws. One of these regulations, which has often been discussed in relation to polygamy, is

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[1]In the Judges chronicle, the spouse of the concubine is referred to as her "husband" (Judg 19:3; 20:4), as well as the "son-in-law" of her father (Judg 19:5), who is in turn referred to as the "father-in-law" (Judg 19:4, 7, 9), all of which are terms used in the case of one who is married to a "wife." See Unger, who concludes that this shows "how nearly the concubine approached to the wife," s.v. "Concubine." See also, Patai, 43.

[2]Cf. Welch, 47; Epstein, 168; "Polygamy Among the Jews," 415-416.

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located in Exod 21:7-11. The passage is first considered in light of English translations and then with regard to crucial considerations arising from the Hebrew text.

The Law in English Translations

These regulations of Exod 20:22-23:33 are recorded as the word of God through Moses (Exod 20:22). The passage in Exod 21:7-11 dealing with the female slave, reads:

> And if a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do.
> If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her.
> And if he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters.
> If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.
> And if he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

The most debated concept in this passage is found in the tenth verse. Rendered more interpretively in the NRSV, it reads: "If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife."[1] Several scholars have concluded that this stipulation of the Mosaic law supported and legalized the practice of polygamy.[2] As Douglas Welch noted:

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[1]Thus almost all English versions render the text.

[2]See, for example, Hillman, who says: "In the Mosaic law polygamy is clearly regarded as a normal and licit practice (cf. Exod. 21:10; Lev. 18:18; Deut. 21:15-17)," 145. Omoregbe posits: "The Old Testament itself recognizes polygamy as a valid lawful form of marriage along with monogamy [Ex 21:10

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"The necessity of such legislation indicates (a) that a man could marry polygamously, and (b) that a significantly large number of men were doing so."[1] The question is, does Exod 21:7-11 really support such conclusions?

Accepting the passage as it stands in the English translation, Samuel Wishard has challenged this type of reasoning, noting that those who say that God is here legitimizing polygamy do so on the basis of incorrect logic.[2] Using Exod 22:1 for comparison, he points out that this case law begins with the contingency: "If a man steals an ox or a sheep. . . ." Then Wishard concludes that, if plural marriage is considered to be legitimized simply because the case law mentions its possibility, then it must be concluded that God is sanctioning stealing as well, since the case law in Exod 22:1 likewise considers the possibility of theft.[3] Clearly, case law does not condone all that it treats. Since this is an unacceptable method of reasoning, as Wishard has rightly shown, one needs to seek for a more correct meaning of this law.

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footnoted]," 364. Alden Thompson states: "The examples cited above in my after-church conversation--slavery, polygamy [as in Exod 21:10], and blood vengeance--are all customs supported by Old Testament law codes," 100. See also, Mann, 17; Mace, 132; cf. Hall, 25.

[1]Welch, 53.

[2]Wishard, 46-47.

[3]Ibid., 47. Wishard's argument has been challenged since the case law in Exod 22:1 has a clearly stated penalty, while the one in Exod 21:7-11 supposedly does not. However, a careful reading of this latter passage reveals that the specific actions to be taken include the loss of material goods (see especially vs. 10).

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An Examination of the Hebrew Text

Like several other case laws, the one in Exod 21:7-11 consists of a basic regulation followed by a series of contingencies.[1] Vs. 7 notes, in contradistinction to the Hebrew male slaves who were to be set free after six years (vs. 2), that female slaves were to be treated differently. The verses that follow vs. 7 then set out various contingencies. A review of the literature on Exod 21:7-11 reveals that several commentators are aware of the various translational difficulties in this passage.[2] Some of these are germane to a clearer understanding of the issue of polygamy.

The first problem is located in vs. 8. Walter Kaiser correctly observes that in this verse, "translators follow the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text and substitute for the small but extremely significant 'not' (*lō*ᵓ), the reading *lô*, 'for himself',"[3] thus totally changing the meaning. However, as Kaiser notes, "the preferred and majority reading is 'not' in most Hebrew manuscripts,"[4] where the first part of vs. 8 reads: "If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master, so that

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[1]See, for example, the laws in Exod 21:12-22:17.

[2]See, for example, Kaiser, 184-185; Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1967), 268-289; Jamieson, Genesis-Deuteronomy, 363-364.

[3]Kaiser, 184.

[4]Ibid.

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he does not betroth her to himself, he must let her be bought back."[1] Thus, this first contingency states that the slave master who does not designate the woman as a spouse for himself because she is displeasing to him, must permit her to be freed by means of payment.

A second contingency appears in vs. 9. This verse has not been controverted, and simply reads: "And if he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters."

The third contingency, located in vs. 10, has come under continued scrutiny. This verse contains two basic problems. The beginning of the text in English says: "If he takes to himself another woman." As used here, the Hebrew term ʾ*aḥeret* ("another") has been understood by many to mean "another in addition to," thus implying that the master therefore has two wives at the same time. This perspective need further investigation.

The word ʾ*aḥeret* appears only 12 times in the Old Testament outside of its usage in Exod 21:10. An examination of these 12 occurrences indicates that in five instances ʾ*aḥeret* seems to mean "another in addition to,"[2] while in seven other cases it appears to denote something "different and distinct from."[3] Clearly

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[1]Young's Literal Translation renders this first part of the verse thus: "If evil in the eyes of her lord, so that he hath not betrothed her. . ." (emphasis added).

[2]See Gen 26:21, 22; 1 Sam 21:9; 1 Chr 2:26; 2 Chr 32:5.

[3]See Num 14:24; Deut 29:28; Judg 11:2; Isa 28:11; Jer 22:26; 36:28, 32. That one of the meanings of ʾ*aḥeret* is "different" is recognized by Hebrew lexicons; see Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, eds., A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press,

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then, whether ʾ*aheret* means an additional or a different woman must be determined from the immediate setting and wider context of this law.

Before this can be attempted, however, one other difficulty in this third contingency must be addressed. This problem lies in the last part of Exod 21:10, which reads: "He may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights." The phrase "conjugal rights" is an interpretation of the Hebrew word, ʿ*ōnāh*, which is unique in the Hebrew Bible.[1] That the meaning of this *hapax legomenon* is rather uncertain[2] can be deduced from the variety of suggested translations.

David Smith has understood this term to refer to the dowry. But he has provided no support for this position.[3] Shalom Paul suggests that ʿ*ōnāh* be rendered "oil" or "ointments" since many Sumerian and Akkadian texts list the three items of "food, clothing, and oil" as the basic necessities of life.[4] While one commentator thinks that Shalom Paul's view could be correct,[5] another

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1906), 29; William L. Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 10.

[1]See Kaiser, 185; W. Gunther Plaut, Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, The Torah (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 567; J. Philip Hyatt, Exodus, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1971), 230; Nahum M. Sarna, Exodus, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 121.

[2]See Hyatt, 230.

[3]David Smith, 7.

[4]Shalom M. Paul, "Exod. 21:10: A Threefold Maintenance Clause," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 28 (January-October 1969): 48-53.

[5]Hyatt, 230.

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observes that this concept is "yet philologically unsustained."[1] A third view, found in most English Bible versions, and mentioned above, is that *ʿōnāh* means "marital rights" or "conjugal rights,"[2] and includes sexual intercourse. Nahum Sarna notes that even though the Septuagint, Peshitta, and Targums all understood this word to mean conjugal rights, this interpretation also has no philological support.[3]

A fourth perspective posits that *ʿōnāh* means "dwelling" or "habitation." Jamieson notes that lexicographers have derived this meaning from the old Hebrew verb *ʿōn*.[4] Sarna states that Rashbam and Bekhor Shor, biblical exegetes of the twelfth century, favored rendering "*ʿōnāh* as 'dwelling,' [or] 'shelter,' which is supported etymologically by the Hebrew noun *māʿôn*, *mᵉʿônāh*, 'dwelling, habitation.'"[5] Cassuto concurs with this view, interpreting the concept as "the conditions of her abode."[6] Apparently recognizing this more linguistically

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[1]Sarna, Exodus, 121.

[2]Ronald Allen posits that *ʿōnāh* derives from *ʿānāh* ("answer"), and means "cohabitation," Ronald B. Allen, "*ʿānāh*," Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (1990), 2:679. Kaiser maintains that this view of "*ʿōnāh*" as sexual relations is "almost certainly an improper guess," 185.

[3]Sarna, Exodus, 121.

[4]Jamieson, Genesis-Deuteronomy, 364.

[5]Sarna, Exodus, 121. See also Brown, Driver and Briggs, 732-733.

[6]Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, 269. Cassuto adds: "This appears to be the real meaning of the word *ʿōnāthah*, and not as later tradition interpreted it: times of cohabitation," 269. See Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, where J. P. Newman understands the word as "dwelling," 34. See also, Jamieson, who renders it "lodging," Genesis-

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reliable interpretation of ʿ*ōnāh*, Robert Young renders the verse: "If another woman he take for him, her food, her covering, and her habitation, he doth not withdraw" (YLT). Since this fourth suggestion is the only one based on philological and etymological data, it seems to have the greatest weight of evidence in its favor.

Based on this more dependable rendition of ʿ*ōnāh*, it thus appears that the slave master was required to continue to supply the slave woman with the basic necessities of life: "The normal food, clothing and quarters."[1] Since no marital or sexual relations are mentioned in this part of the passage, it appears as though the slave woman is here considered as single and not married to the master. This contextual factor suggests that the term ʾ*aḥeret* in Exod 21:10 means "different," rather than "another in addition to."

A consideration of the basic content of the first two contingencies of this legislation likewise appears to provide further support for this rendition of ʾ*aḥeret*. In vs. 8 the slave woman does not marry the master, because she is displeasing to him. In vs. 9 she does not marry him, because he gives her to his son. Finally, it appears that, just as in the first two cases, the slave woman does not marry the master; this time, however, it is because he has found another, that is, a different, woman to wed. When this third contingency is understood in this manner, which is consistent with the Hebrew as well as the context, it can be

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Deuteronomy, 364.

[1]Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, 269.

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concluded that ʾ*aheret* in Exod 21:10 should be rendered as "different." The complete verse would then read: "If he marries a different woman, he must not deprive her [i.e., the slave woman] of food, clothing, or shelter." If he does not provide these three things, however, vs. 11 states that the master would then have to let the slave woman go free without any payment.

In summary: Based on English Bible versions, many have interpreted the rule concerning "marital rights" in Exod 21:7-11 as supportive of or even legitimizing polygamy.[1] However, as has been observed, even from a consideration of the passage in English, it is incorrect to conclude that polygamy was permissible merely because a case law might be interpreted as mentioning it.

Further light is shed on this passage by an examination of the various contingencies in this case law according to the Hebrew text. In the first the slave woman is rejected as a spouse because she displeases her master, and is thus freed by being bought back. The second contingency noted that she had to be treated as a daughter if the master's son were to marry her. The third contingency discussed how this slave woman was to be treated if the master were to marry "another" woman.

In this connection, the unique word ʿ*ōnāh* was investigated. While rendered in different ways, such as "dowry," "oil" or "ointments," and "conjugal rights," none of these interpretations was accepted as probable because of a lack of philological support. However, since the rendering of ʿ*ōnāh* as "dwelling,"

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[1]See Hillman, 145; Alden Thompson, 100; Omoregbe, 364.

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"habitation," "shelter," "abode," or "lodging" does have plausible etymological support from within Scripture, this view is to be preferred. This fact, together with the contextual interpretation of the term ʾ*aheret*, indicated that the third contingency dealt with an unmarried slave woman. If the slave master married a different woman and did not properly care for the slave woman, she would have to be set free without any remuneration for the slave master.

Thus, it is not proper to refer to Exod 21:7-11 as a clear passage that permits or promotes polygamy. The weight of evidence suggests that Exod 21:10 refers to a slave master who is required to provide food, clothing, and lodging for the female servant who is not married. When thus translated, this law does not contradict the model of monogamy instituted in the beginning. Rather it seems in full harmony with God's established pattern of marriage.

The Regulation on Marriage to Two "Sisters"

A second passage which has implications for polygamy is found in the laws on immoral relations in Lev 18. The specific verse most often discussed is Lev 18:18, which prohibits a man from marrying two "sisters." First, the two distinctly different ways in which the passage has been understood are briefly mentioned. Second, a literary analysis of Lev 18 is undertaken in order to observe the basic structure of the passage, to better determine what this regulation relates to. Third, the content of Lev 18:18 is examined so as to observe the time duration of this law. Fourth, the meaning of "sister" in the Old Testament is considered in order to understand its range of meaning. Fifth, the manner in which "sister" is

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defined in Lev 18 is addressed. Sixth, an ancient and broader understanding of the term "sister" is considered. Seventh, the figurative usage of the crucial phrase of Lev 18:18 is discussed. Eighth, the universal nature of this legislation is investigated. Finally, a short summary follows.

Various Understandings of Lev 18:18

Lev 18:18 reads: "And you shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness." The NIV renders it: "Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living."

This text "has given occasion for much dispute."[1] The specific point in contention is the correct interpretation and meaning of the phrase *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōṯāh*, literally "a woman to her sister."

Using this passage as support, Joseph Omoregbe posits that "the Old Testament itself recognizes polygamy as a valid form of marriage."[2] Many see this absolute prohibition as limited to a specific case involving marriage to two sisters, and thus conclude that it does not prohibit polygamy in general.[3] As one biblical scholar put it: "The command that a man must not have two sisters as

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[1]John Murray, Principles of Conduct (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 251. Jamieson says: "The subject has provoked much discussion," Genesis-Deuteronomy, 486. See also Kaiser, 116.

[2]Omoregbe, 364. See also Mann, 17; Hillman, 145.

[3]See, for example, Hall, 24; Wise, 75-76.

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wives at the same time (Lev. XVIII. 18) implies that he may have two wives who are not sisters."[1]

If the phrase *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōṯāh* is translated literally, and understood in the narrow sense of referring to only blood relatives, then it can legitimately be viewed as a prohibition of marriage to two consanguine sisters, which is technically known as sororal polygyny.[2] It may then be interpreted as leaving open the possibility of marriage to two or more women who are not literal blood sisters.[3]

However, if the contested phrase is understood in the broader sense of "sister," as indicating a female citizen in general, or if it is interpreted figuratively as "a wife in addition to another," then this passage would become a prohibition of all polygamy. The question is, what is the most reliable and valid interpretation of *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōṯāh*? In order to better respond to that question, the context and literary structure of the passage are examined below.

Literary Analysis of Lev 18

Most frequently Lev 18:18 has been interpreted and classified as one of the laws against incest. This can be seen from the manner in which vss. 6-18 have

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[1]M. M. Kalisch, Leviticus, part 2, A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament with a New Translation (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1872), 373.

[2]See Stephen A. Grunlan, Marriage and the Family: A Christian Perspective (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 38.

[3]This, of course, would only be the case if the monogamous marriage as instituted in Gen 2:24 is not taken as normative.

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been grouped together in English Bible translations,[1] as well as from the comments of biblical scholars.[2] A careful literary analysis of Lev 18 as a unit, and vs. 18 on its own, calls into question such a categorization.

There is basically no dispute about the fact that Lev 18 begins with an exhortation and an opening statement, presents two series of laws covering vss. 7-23, and then ends with final words of warning. The question is whether vs. 18 belongs to the obviously anti-incestuous laws of vss. 7-17 or is a part of the more general prohibitions in vss. 19-23.

Angelo Tosato has done a close examination of this chapter in order to determine where vs. 18 belongs.[3] A critical analysis of Lev 18 confirms Tosato's findings that, from vs. 7 through vs. 17, every verse begins with the identical term, *ʿerwaṯ* (meaning "nakedness of"), and culminates in *lôʾ ṯᵉgallêh* (rendered "you are not to uncover"). The understanding of these two concepts (i.e., "nakedness of . . . you are not to uncover") indicates that sexual intercourse with relatives is here being prohibited. In fact, that this is the reason for disallowing

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[1]See the following: RSV, NAB, ASV, NASB, NEB, REB, NRSV, and TEV.

[2]See, for example, R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus," The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 2:596-599; R. K. Harrison, Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 185-190; Gordon J. Wenham, The Book of Leviticus, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 249-258; Stephen F. Bigger, "The Family Laws of Leviticus 18 in Their Setting," Journal of Biblical Literature 98 (1979): 187-203.

[3]Angelo Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 46 (1984): 199-214.

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such sexual unions is specifically mentioned in almost every text.[1] Thus, the usual classification of these laws as anti-incestuous appears appropriate. Tosato rightly notes that "this series can be easily distinguished and separated from the rest for the homogeneity and peculiarity of its formation and content."[2]

In contradistinction to the above, vss. 18-23 open with the conjunction *waw* and close with various permanent prohibitions regularly introduced by the negative *lô*. Tosato again correctly posits that the two distinct and formally unifying elements of this new list suggest that the second series of laws, although not identical, are to be considered as a unit.[3] These laws prohibit sexual union,[4] yet the prohibitions are not made on the basis of a bond of kinship, even though the state or identity of the prohibited partner is clearly indicated.

Thus, the structure of the passages suggests that vs. 18 belongs to the second series of laws. Many scholars recognize this,[5] as George Bush correctly

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[1]For example, the reason given in vs. 7 is that "she is your mother." The only place where no such reason is explicitly stated is in vs. 9.

[2]Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," 203.

[3]Ibid., 205-206.

[4]Vs. 21 seems to be an exception. Tosato thinks this could be a prohibition of sexual union with a foreign woman. See Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," 206.

[5]See, for example, J. P. Porter, Leviticus, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 148; S. H. Kellogg, "The Book of Leviticus," The Expositor's Bible (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1908), 2:383; Christopher Wordsworth, The Five Books of Moses, 3d ed., vol. 1, The Holy Bible, in the Authorized Version; with Notes and Introductions (London: Rivington's, Waterloo Place, 1869), part 2, 59; Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 31.

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stated: "The prohibition in the 18th [verse] respects altogether another subject, and is as distinct from incest as any of the other crimes mentioned and forbidden in the remaining parts of the chapter."[1] If vs. 18 had belonged to the rules on incest, the more restricted translation of *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾāḥōṯāh*, as "a woman to her [literal, blood] sister," would have been required. However, since vs. 18 belongs to the more general set of regulations, the interpretation of the crucial phrase, "a woman to her sister," must likewise be open to its broader sense.

Temporary Nature of the Regulation

The rules on incest in Lev 18:7-17 indicate no time period. By implication, marriage between relatives is forbidden even if one spouse becomes eligible for remarriage due to the death or divorce of the other. These regulations are therefore correctly understood as permanent prohibitions against incestuous relationships.[2]

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[1]George Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Leviticus: Designed as a General Help to Biblical Reading and Instruction (New York: Ivison & Phinney, 1857), 196. Even though Bush recognized that "the whole law concerning incest closes with the 17th verse" (196), he still maintained that the marriage forbidden here was with an actual sister, a blood relation.

[2]The levirate legislation of Deut 25:5-10 appears to conflict with Lev 18:16: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness." However, the levirate, as later discussed in this chapter of the project, was to be voluntarily followed only in the case where the deceased brother had no children. Thus, while Lev 18:16 sets forth the basic law, it is modified somewhat by the levirate system. On this, Kaiser notes that "only [God] can modify his own directives," 192.

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In distinction to all the preceding regulations, vs. 18 mentions a specific time period during which this law was to apply. A man was not to marry this "sister" while the first wife "is alive." But after her death he could do so. The temporary nature of this law, therefore, further differentiates it from those on incest, which are implicitly of perpetual duration.[1] Thus, an examination of the content of this verse, which verifies that this law belongs to the section on general sexual prohibitions, confirms that "sister" should not be understood as simply a literal "sister," but must be open to its wider meaning.

"Sister" in the Old Testament

English dictionaries indicate that the noun "sister" can have a variety of meanings. Beginning with the most common usage of the term, as referring to "a female human being having the same parents as another person," the definitions include a "half sister," "a stepsister," "a female fellow member, as of a church," "a kinswoman," and "a fellow woman."[2]

This spread of interpretations, from the narrower definition to the broader meanings, is similarly evident in the manner in which the word "sister" is used in

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[1]See Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," 207; Kellogg, 382-383.

[2]See The Random House College Dictionary, rev. ed. (1975), s.v. "Sister"; Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1974), s.v. "Sister"; The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, (1969), s.v. "Sister."

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the Old Testament.[1] In its narrower sense *ʾāḥôṯ* (sister) describes the relationship of one female person to one or more persons born of the same parents (Gen 4:22; Num 26:59). It can also refer to a half sister (Gen 20:12; Lev 18:9), or a kinswoman (Gen 24:59, 60). Beyond these immediate blood relatives, *ʾāḥôṯ* can be used in a general sense to refer to a female fellow citizen (Num 25:18; Hos 2:1). In addition to these more literal meanings, "sister" can also be used symbolically as in referring to the relationship between two cities (Ezek 16:48-61), or to the close bond between husband and wife (Cant 4:9-12; 5:1, 2). A further figurative usage of *ʾāḥôṯ* is discussed later.

Since the word *ʾāḥôṯ* can have various definitions, from an immediate female blood relative to a fellow citizen, the correct interpretation of "sister" cannot be determined without carefully taking into consideration the context in which the word appears.

The immediate context of the word "sister" in vs. 18 can be derived from the analysis of Lev 18. First, as Tosato aptly observes, from the point of view of context as well as literary structure, vs. 18 belongs to the set of laws dealing with general sexual prohibitions, and not with incest.[2] Thus, "it seems more likely that the expression *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾăḥōṯāh* maintains here its broader sense."[3] That

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[1]See Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (1979), s.v. "Sister"; K. E. Corley, "Sister," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed. (1988), 4:534.

[2]Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," 203.

[3]Ibid.

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is, it does not relate to consanguine sisters, but to women in general. John Calvin similarly interpreted this term as not restricted "to actual sisters."[1] In addition, since the temporary nature of vs. 18 infers that this law does not deal with incest, the wider meaning of "sister" is more likely.[2] Thus, as Tosato rightly concludes, "*ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōṯāh* should be interpreted here according to its more proper meaning (the broader one),"[3] which he renders as "two women (fellow citizens) in general."[4]

The Definition of "Sister" in Lev 18

The term *ʾāḥôṯ* occurs five times in Lev 18. Besides appearing in vs. 18, this word is found in vss. 9, 11, 12, and 13. In every one of these four passages the word "sister" is clearly defined and distinctly described. For instance, while in vs. 9 a "sister" is designated as "your father's daughter or your mother's daughter," vs. 12 defines a "sister" as a "blood relative."[5] The same explicit definition of *ʾāḥôṯ*, as referring to a literal blood relative, is likewise

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[1]John Calvin, Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses: Arranged in the Form of a Harmony, vol. 3, trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), 105.

[2]Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," 207.

[3]Ibid., 208.

[4]Ibid., 203.

[5]Literally, "flesh," or "one near of kin." See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 984-985.

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provided for the occurrences of this term in Lev 20, which also deals with sexual matters.[1]

In contrast to the lucid explanations in these verses, which delimit ʾāḥôṯ to mean a literal consanguine sister, it is significant that Lev 18:18 has no such qualifying terminology. It thus appears that the undefined ʾāḥôṯ should not be limited to a blood sister, but should be recognized as referring to any female person.[2]

Ancient Broader Understanding of "Sister"

Although it is hermeneutically inappropriate to determine the best interpretation of a phrase by relying on extra-biblical materials, it is sometimes instructive to observe how people in the past understood Bible passages. In his study of the Qumran community, Louis Ginzberg indicates that the Damascus Document 4:20-21 paraphrased Lev 18:18 as "taking two wives during their lifetime."[3] Concurring with this idea, Angelo Tosato concludes that at Qumran

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[1]See Lev 20:17, 19 (twice). The only other occurrence of ʾāḥôṯ in this book is located in Lev 21:3. Just as in the six other passages mentioned, the word ʾāḥôṯ here obviously refers to a literal "sister" since it is defined as a blood relative.

[2]This usage of ʾāḥôṯ, in which there is an unannounced transition from a consanguine sister to a woman in general, is similar to the usage of "brother" in Deut 25:5-12, where a sudden shift occurs from a reference to literal brothers to a discussion of men in general.

[3]Louis Ginzberg, An Unknown Jewish Sect (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1976), 19. See also, Chaim Rabin, ed., The Zadokite Documents (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1954), 17. Rabin translates the phrase from this document as "marrying two women in their (masc.) lifetime," 16.

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this passage "was interpreted as a law against polygamy."[1] Tosato thus maintains that Qumran's interpretation of Lev 18:18 is "more faithful to the original sense than the interpretation commonly given today."[2] Ginzberg observes that this type of translation is "linguistically quite possible and indeed occurs in Scripture several times with this meaning."[3] Yigael Yadin, in his study of the Qumran Temple Scroll 57:17-19 came to a similar understanding about Qumran's interpretation of this passage. He observed that:

> The language of the scroll indicates that the source of the scroll's ban is Lev 18:18: "And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is yet alive." Thus the scroll interprets the Bible's "her sister" to mean not a blood sister but "another woman," the "sister" simply serving as a term to define the gender; and so our author [of the scroll] forbids the taking of "another wife" while the first is alive.[4]

These observations, if correct, would mean that Lev 18:18 has been understood by some people since at least two thousand years ago, as discussing two women in general, and not merely blood sisters.

Accepting this broader definition as outlined in the sections above, a reliable paraphrase of the Mosaic law of Lev 18:18 would be: "While your wife is

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[1]Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," 200 (emphasis original). See the Damascus Document 4:20-21, which paraphrases Lev 18:18 as, "two wives during their lifetime."

[2]Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," 208.

[3]Ginzberg, 19.

[4]Yigael Yadin, The Temple Scroll: The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect (New York: Random House, 1985), 200. See also, Yigael Yadin, ed., The Temple Scroll, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1983), 2:258.

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alive, do not marry another woman, for she will be a rival to your wife." Thus, based solely on the literal interpretation of *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōṯāh*, it can be concluded that this levitical regulation prohibits the practice of polygamy.[1]

Figurative Use of *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōṯāh*

Several scholars recognize that the linking of words together in the phrase *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōṯāh* may require an idiomatic interpretation.[2] Besides this occurrence in Lev 18:18 *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōṯāh* appears only eight other times in the Hebrew Bible.[3] There is a general agreement among scholars that these eight references should be idiomatically translated in a reciprocal sense as "each other," or "one another." However, on the interpretation of this phrase in Lev 18:18 there is a divergence of opinion.

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[1]According to Kaiser, "the Septuagint, the Samaritan, Syriac, Arabic, and the Targum of Onkelos" all prefer the literal rendering of the phrase. Kaiser, 116. See also Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Leviticus, 194; Kalisch, 397.

[2]See, for example, Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Leviticus, 193; Dwight, 108; Kalisch, 397-398; Kaiser, 116-117, 185-186; Wordsworth, vol. 1, part 2, 58-59; Jamieson, Genesis-Deuteronomy, 486; John Murray, 250-256; Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination;" H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 2, Leviticus, Numbers (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 274-275.

[3]See Exod 26:3 (twice), 5, 6, 17; Ezek 1:9, 23; 3:13. Kaiser notes that a similar expression, *ʾiššāh rēʿûṯāh*, occurs in Isa 34:15, 16 and Jer 9:20, Kaiser, 185 (footnote #13).

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Those who feel that this verse must be interpreted literally rather than idiomatically give several reasons for their position.[1] These reasons are almost exclusively based on a comparison with the other eight undisputed feminine cases of this phrase, *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōtāh*.[2] However, since each of these eight cases deals with inanimate objects, while in Lev 18:18 people are being referred to, a more reliable comparison of the unique syntactical usage would appear to be with the similar masculine phrase, which occurs twelve times in the Hebrew Bible.[3]

There are at least two distinct ways in which this idiom can be rendered. First, and most frequently, this masculine phrase, *ʾîš ʾel-ʾāḥîw* (literally, "a man to his brother"), is translated in a reciprocal sense as "each other,"[4] "one

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[1]See, for example, Kaiser, 116; Kalisch, 397; Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Leviticus, 194.

[2]In brief, the major argument is as follows: The usage of *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōtāh* in Lev 18:18 must be compared with the other eight cases where this phrase occurs. Since this passage is different in that, human beings are under consideration here, no subject is mentioned at the start of the verse, and no plural noun and plural verb precede the phrase, a literal translation of "a woman in addition to her sister" is argued for. See, Kaiser, 116; Kalisch, 397; Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Leviticus, 194. However, as indicated in the main body of this document, this is not necessarily so.

[3]Gen 37:19; 42:21, 28; Exod 16:15; 25:20; 37:9; Num 14:4; 2 Kgs 7:6; Jer 13:14; 25:26; Ezek 24:23; 33:30. See also the similar feminine phrase, *ʾiššāh rēʿûṯāh*, which has been translated as "one another," Zech 11:9. Cf. Isa 34:15, 16; Jer 9:20.

[4]Jer 13:14.

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another,"[1] "to one another."[2] A slight variation of the phrase, ʾîš ʾel-ʾāḥîw, appears fourteen times in the Old Testament.[3] In most cases it too is rendered similarly as a reciprocal idiom: "each other,"[4] or "one another."[5]

A second, yet less frequent, idiomatic interpretation must be recognized. For example, in Jer 25:26 ʾîš ʾel-ʾāḥîw is translated as "one with another." This interpretation concurs with the lexical meaning of the preposition ʾel: "in addition to."[6] The slight variation of ʾîš ʾel-ʾāḥîw is likewise at times interpreted in this manner.[7] Though still idiomatic, this non-reciprocal, figurative interpretation is different from the reciprocal rendering mentioned above. The similar feminine phrase of Lev 18:18 could likewise be rendered in a non-reciprocal, idiomatic manner: "one in addition to another." As George Bush

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[1]Exod 25:20.

[2]Gen 37:19; 42:21, 28; Exod 16:15; Num 14:4; 2 Kgs 7:6; Ezek 24:23. Similar concepts occur in Exod 37:9 ("toward each other"), and Ezek 33:30 ("each to his brother [in a general sense]").

[3]See Gen 13:11; 26:31; Exod 10:23; Lev 7:10; 25:14, 46; 26:37; Deut 25:11; Neh 4:19; Job 41:17; Jer 34:14; Ezek 4:17; 47:14; Joel 2:8.

[4]See, for example, Gen 13:11; Exod 26:37.

[5]See, for example, Exod 10:23; 25:14, 46; Neh 4:9.

[6]See Koehler and Baumgartner who note that this preposition can be rendered "in addition to," or understood as, "with terms of adding." Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 48.

[7]See, for example, Deut 25:11 ("a man and his countryman"), and Ezek 47:14 ("each one equally with the other").

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acknowledges, this phrase is "used idiomatically to signify the adding of one thing to another."[1]

Thus, outside of the passage under discussion, it can be observed that in either its feminine or its masculine usage this phrase is always rendered idiomatically, either reciprocally or non-reciprocally. Furthermore, as Christopher Wordsworth correctly observes, these phrases are never used to "designate blood relationships of two sisters or two brothers, but simply the addition of one person or thing to another of the same kind."[2] Therefore, from simply a point of translational consistency it can be argued that Lev 18:18 should likewise be rendered in a figurative manner as "one in addition to another."[3]

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[1]Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Leviticus, 193 (emphasis original). See also Dwight, who maintains that this phrase does not refer to "a sister, in the literal sense, but always, one thing to another of the same kind," Dwight, 108 (emphasis original).

[2]Wordsworth, vol. 1, part 2, 58.

[3]Kalisch notes that after the Protestant Reformation this non-reciprocal, idiomatic translation was again suggested by Old Testament translators Franciscus Junius and Emmanuel Tremellius in 1575 (see Kalisch, 397). Wordsworth indicates that the following also held to this figurative interpretation of Lev 18:18: Johannes Drusius (1550-1616), Professor of Hebrew at Oxford; Abraham Calovius (1612-1686), Professor of Theology at Wittenberg; Theodore Beza (1519-1605), Old Testament translator, and Professor of Greek at the Academy of Lausanne; Henry Ainsworth (1560-1623), a Hebrew scholar; Henry Hammond (1605-1660), Chaplain to Charles I; and Johann Friedrich Schleusner (1759-1831), lexicographer, and Theology Professor at Göttingen (see Wordsworth, vol. 1, part 2, 58). In addition to those mentioned in the text, more recent scholars who have held to the non-reciprocal, idiomatic rendition include 19th century U.S. Senate Chaplain J. P. Newman (see Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 31), and Presbyterian Systematic Theologian John Murray (see John Murray, 250-252).

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Universal Application of Lev 18:18

Besides beginning with an exhortation and an introductory statement Lev 18 closes with final words of warning:

> Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all of these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled.
> For the land has become defiled, therefore I have visited its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants (vss. 24, 25).

This warning, together with the broader context of the passage, indicates that the practices outlined here "are not just destructive for Israel. They are universal abominations."[1] As Gerhard Hasel appropriately notes: "In Leviticus 17-18 there are a number of regulations that apply to both Israelite and non-Israelite."[2] Based on the repeated reference to "aliens" in these regulations, Hasel concludes that these laws are not ceremonial, ritual or cultic, "cannot be restricted to Israelites," but "are universal in nature."[3] Thus, the prohibition of polygamy in Lev 18:18 can be seen as a universal law applicable to all.

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[1]Richard M. Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' Model," in Issues in Revelation and Inspiration, Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), 121.

[2]Gerhard F. Hasel, "Clean and Unclean Meats in Leviticus 11: Still Relevant?" Journal of the Adventist Theological Society 2 (Autumn 1991): 103-104.

[3]Ibid., 104. See also Kaiser on the issue of universal law in connection with sexual matters, 117-119, 196, 197.

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Summary of the Law in Lev 18:18

In summary, the following should be noted: Retaining a literal translation of Lev 18:18 it was shown that the structure and context of the chapter, together with the content and undefined nature of *ʾāḥôṯ* in this law, reveal that the word "sister" indicates "a fellow female citizen," thus outlawing polygamy. In addition, in harmony with the manner in which this phrase is invariably translated, the figurative rendering of *ʾiššāh ʾel-ʾaḥōṯāh* as "a wife in addition to another," would likewise forbid polygamy. Therefore, whether this universal law is rendered literally and understood in its broad sense, or translated in the non-reciprocal idiomatic sense, the same conclusion is reached: Lev 18:18 distinctly prohibits polygamy.

On the basis of the evidence presented here, Lev 18:18 should read as the alternative NASB rendering puts it: "And you shall not take a wife in addition to another to be a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness."[1] This translation, as John Murray notes, is an "express condemnation" of polygamy.[2] The weight of evidence thus suggests that this levitical legislation is clearly in harmony with the monogamous model set up originally by God.[3]

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[1]Or "a woman unto another," YLT. The alternate rendering in the KJV similarly states: "Neither shalt thou take one wife to another."

[2]John Murray, 253.

[3]See John Murray, who notes that this "interpretation would hark back to the original ordinance of monogamy," 253.

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Legislation on the Marital Status of the King

The book of Deuteronomy consists primarily of Moses' delineation of God's guidance of the Israelites and the presentation of many laws and statutes. While several of these regulations are a repetition of laws contained in the four preceding books,[1] some information is recorded here for the first time. One of these regulations relates to royal polygamy.

In order to better understand the issue debated here, the two conflicting ways in which this law has been interpreted by scholars are outlined. Then, the language and content of the passage are investigated so as to determine the preferred rendering of the law. Ancient interpretations are considered in order to demonstrate the broader manner in which this legislation has been understood. This section ends with a short summary.

The law concerning royal polygamy, which was written prior to the institution of the monarchy in Israel, yet looked forward to the time when future kings would need certain instructions, is found in Deut 17:16, 17:

> Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, "You shall never again return that way."
> Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.

In response to those who maintain that this law clearly prohibits polygamy among royalty, Jean-Jacques Bouit posits that this passage also warns

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[1]Compare, for example, Deut 25:5-10 with Gen 38; Deut 5:6-21 with Exod 20:1-17; Deut 14 with Lev 11; Deut 17:6 with Num 35:30.

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against acquiring an excessive number of horses, as well as much gold and silver. He concludes that "the context, therefore, indicates that it is rather a warning against abuse of the practice than against polygamy per se."[1] Eugene Hillman, furthermore, suggests that this regulation is "against the king's taking too many wives, foreign wives specifically, because they would turn his heart toward their foreign gods (cf. 1 Kings 11:1-8)."[2] David Hall puts forward the idea that this law "leaves room for a king to have several wives without violating the command."[3] These scholars conclude, as Disani Senyonjo put it: "This is not a verse against polygyny."[4]

Several other scholars, however, disagree with the position outlined above.[5] For instance, A. O. Nkwoka says: "If God forbade the king who had the command of his nation's resources from going into polygyny, then most of the reasons for justifying polygyny cannot hold."[6]

This section aims at determining which of these two opposing viewpoints is more faithful to the biblical text. In order to accomplish this, an examination of

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[1]Bouit, 79-80.

[2]Hillman, 145 (emphasis original). See also Senyonjo, 58; Bouit, 80.

[3]Hall, 26-27.

[4]Senyonjo, 58.

[5]See, for example, Nkwoka, 147; David Smith, 9; Hitchens, 128.

[6]Nkwoka, 147.

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the crucial terms in the Hebrew language and the content of this passage is undertaken here.

Language and Content of the Law

The most crucial Hebrew word in this royal legislation is the verb *rāḇāh*, rendered three times as "multiply" and once as "increase" in the NASB translation of Deut 17:16, 17.[1] The root of the term *rāḇāh* appears over two hundred times in the Old Testament.[2] At times, *rāḇāh* may be used to refer to literally thousands in number[3] or in connection with rather small amounts used to indicate a number probably not more than twice as much.[4] The idea of "increase" is the fundamental sense of the word,[5] without indicating the extent of increase. The immediate and broader contexts must be taken into account in order to determine how much increase is implied. On three occasions the verb *rāḇāh* is used in the hiphil infinitive together with the hiphil imperfect future tense to form *harbāh*

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[1]Three times the verb appears as *yarbeh*. This is the hiphil future, 3d person, singular, masculine interpreted "he must multiply." Once *harbôṯ* appears. This is the hiphil infinitive construct, rendered "to multiply."

[2]R. Laird Harris, ed., Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:828. By actual count, 231 times.

[3]See, for example, Judg 16:24 (cf. 15:16; 16:26-30); Eccl 12:9 (cf. 1 Kgs 4:32).

[4]See, for example, 2 Sam 18:8; 2 Chr 25:9; Jonah 4:11.

[5]See Harris, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, 2:828. See also Brown, Driver and Briggs, 912. The Jerusalem Bible renders Deut 17:17a: "Nor must he increase the number of his wives, for that could lead his heart astray."

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ʾarbeh (literally "to increase, I will increase"), and is translated as "I will greatly multiply" (Gen 3:16; 16:10; 22:17). In other instances the hiphil infinitive *rāḇāh* is connected with *mᵉʾôḏ* and rendered "very great" (Gen 15:1; 1 Chr 20:2).[1]

Since *rāḇāh* is used repeatedly and in different ways in Deut 17:16,17 it is vital to consider the context of each usage of the term. First, the law against accumulating silver and gold must be examined. *Rāḇāh* in combination with *mᵉʾôḏ* is used in Deut 17:17 in connection with the accumulation of silver and gold. As the NIV puts it: "He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold." In other words, this prohibition is not against possessing silver and gold per se, but rather against hoarding great amounts of wealth.[2]

A second prohibition in the law of Deut 17:16, 17 that needs analysis is the one related to the multiplying of horses. The text reads: "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses" (Deut 17:16). While the underlying reason for this command is nowhere clearly indicated in Deut 17, other passages shed light on this prohibition. For example, Isa 31:1 states: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, . . . but they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the

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[1]Cf. 2 Chr 11:12 which renders it "greatly." Note that in Gen 17:2 *rāḇāh*, in the hiphil future, is connected to the double usage of *mᵉʾôḏ*, thus translated "multiply exceedingly."

[2]See David Smith, 9; Lewis Grout, A Reply to Bishop Colenso's Remarks on the Proper Treatment of Cases of Polygamy as Found Already Existing in Converts from Heathenism (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: May & Davis, 1855), 16.

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Lord."[1] The issue here was reliance on others rather than on God. As Ps 33:17 noted: "A horse is a false hope for victory."

Several commentators recognize that a multiplication of horses would represent "a dependence upon Egypt in time of war, and a consequent withdrawal of trust and confidence in God."[2] In describing the apostasy of Solomon many years after this regulation had been given, Ellen White noted:

> As a safeguard against dependence on the arm of flesh, the Lord had warned those who should rule over Israel not to multiply horses to themselves. But in utter disregard of this command, "Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt" [2 Chr 1:16 KJV].[3]

The prohibition on multiplying horses had a specific underlying objective: to ensure that the Israelites put their dependence only on God.[4] As Grout suggested: "The design of the prohibition was to prevent intercourse with Egypt,

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[1]See also, Ps 20:8; Isa 2:7-9; 30:1-7; Amos 2:15; 4:10; Mic 5:10-15.

[2]Jamieson, Genesis-Deuteronomy, 662. See also, Wordsworth, vol. 1, part 2, 242; Cohen, The Soncino Chumash, 1081; Patrick Miller, Deuteronomy, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 148; J. Ridderbos, Deuteronomy, trans. Ed M. van der Maas, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 200; Peter Craigie, The Book of Deuteronomy, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 255; A. D. H. Mayes, Deuteronomy, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1979), 272.

[3]Ellen G. White, The Story of Prophets and Kings (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 56.

[4]See SDA Bible Commentary, 1:1014; Grout, 16.

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. . . lest, also, they should learn to look there for assistance in difficulty, instead of looking to God."[1]

The use of *rāḇāh* in a third prohibition in Deut 17:16, 17 can now be addressed: "Neither shall he *rāḇāh* wives for himself, lest his heart turn away." Since there is nothing in the immediate context to define the term *rāḇāh*, the other biblical marital regulations need to be taken into account. The study of the establishment of the marriage institution in Gen 1 and 2 demonstrates that it is God's design and standard that a man should have only one wife.[2] In addition, the above investigation of Lev 18:18 concluded that polygamy is universally prohibited. Thus, with these factors in mind, together with the evidence that *rāḇāh* ("increase" or "multiply") covers a range from twice as much on upwards, it appears evident that this law prohibits the king from becoming polygamous.[3]

Some authors have suggested that this prohibition dealt with foreign wives specifically.[4] Nothing in the text or the context necessitates such a limited interpretation.[5] The ruling against marrying non-believers is stated several

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[1]Grout, 16.

[2]See chapter 2 of this project dissertation.

[3]As David Smith put it: "Twice one are two, and this is multiplication," 9. See also, Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 50; Grout, 16. Note, however, that the root meaning of *rāḇāh* is "increase," and not necessarily "multiply" in the mathematical sense.

[4]See Bouit, 80; Senyonjo, 58; Hillman, 145.

[5]Furthermore, to limit this law to only "foreign" wives might be seen as permitting the ruler to marry more than one Israelite woman, a practice contrary to Gen 2:24 and Lev 18:18.

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chapters earlier, in Deut 7:3, 4, and is not discussed in this law of Deut 17:17. Even though it is true that Solomon's foreign wives did turn his heart toward foreign gods, it would be hermeneutically incorrect to interpret the text so as to conform to what happened in the life of one man centuries later when he violated the law's requirements. According to Deut 17:17, it appears that polygamy itself, and not just marriage to a non-believer, results in a turning away of the heart.[1]

Ellen White's comments reveal that Solomon's sin was in the practice of polygamy per se, and not merely in his marriage to foreigners. Note how she relates Solomon's polygamy to the law of Deut 17:17:

> Hundreds of years before Solomon came to the throne, the Lord, foreseeing the perils that would beset those who might be chosen as rulers of Israel, gave Moses instruction for their guidance. . . .
>
> In connection with this instruction the Lord particularly cautioned the one who might be anointed king not to "multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away."[2]
>
> Solomon walked for many years uprightly before God. . . . [Later] he fell into the sinful practice of other kings, of having many wives, which was contrary to God's arrangement. . . . "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away."[3]

The language and content of Deut 17:16, 17 show that this royal legislation does not address merely the acquisition of silver and gold, and horses. Rather, it is concerned with the "excessive" accumulation of precious metals, as

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[1]It is not explicitly indicated in the text whether this "turning away of the heart" be to foreign gods, as in the case of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:3), or towards "sensuality," as suggested by Hitchens, 128.

[2]White, Prophets and Kings, 52.

[3]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:100. Ellen White notes that to marry "more than one wife" is to go contrary to God's arrangement, i.e., His law of monogamy as established in Eden. See ibid., 3:63; 4a:86, 100.

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well as depending on horses instead of trusting in God. The prohibition about increasing wives is best understood in relation to previously given marital norms that limit a person to one spouse. Thus it is concluded that this law completely outlaws polygamy for the king.

Ancient and Broader Understandings

Some scholars have posited that the Qumran Temple Scroll understood Deut 17:17 as a clear stipulation against polygamy.[1] Joseph Fitzmyer notes that among the statutes for the king is listed a regulation clearly precluding polygamy: "And he shall not take in addition to her another wife."[2] The Damascus Document[3] prohibits "'the taking of two wives in their lifetime'."[4] This is seen by Fitzmyer as "'contravening Gen 1:27, 7:9, and Deut 17:17."[5] This conclusion, if correct, indicates that this ancient document records an early interpretation of Deut 17:17 as being against polygamy.

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[1]See James R. Mueller, "The Temple Scroll and the Gospel Divorce Texts," Restoration Quarterly 10 (1980): 248; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 92, 93; Harold Ray England, "Divorce and Remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 120.

[2]See Fitzmyer, To Advance the Gospel, 93. This is from 11QTemple 57:17-19.

[3]Damascus Document 4:20-21, according to Fitzmyer, To Advance the Gospel, 96.

[4]Fitzmyer, To Advance the Gospel, 96.

[5]Ibid.

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However, James Mueller asks, "Would this interdict necessarily also apply to the commoner" in the eyes of these early interpreters?[1] Mueller suggests two lines of evidence that point to an affirmative answer:

> First, it was not uncommon in ancient times for the royal behaviour and lifestyle to serve as a model for the "man on the street." Second, when the Damascus Document V, 1 quotes Deuteronomy 17, 17, the prohibition is applied to *hnśyʾ* (the prince). Rabin has correctly identified this figure as "the prince of the whole congregation" (Dam. Doc. VII, 20). Also, in the Damascus Document the term "king" is equated with "the congregation." Thus in the sect the prohibition against multiplying wives has been extended beyond the king to the members of the community.[2]

Fitzmyer indicates that for the Qumran community the anti-polygamous law for the king would be applied to the common people as well.[3] As Yigael Yadin put it: "The Dead Sea sect, for its part, insisted on monogamy for king and commoner."[4] It would be appropriate to investigate the biblical support for the broadening of the royal law.

Just as the essential responsibility of the king was to read and study the law constantly, so "that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law" (Deut 17:19), so the people had been instructed to do likewise (Deut 6:7; 8:1; 11:1). Just as the king was warned "that his heart may not be lifted up" (Deut 17:20), so Israel had received the same caution (Deut 8:14). Even the prohibition against multiplying silver and gold

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[1]Mueller, 251.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Fitzmyer, To Advance the Gospel, 93.

[4]Yadin, The Temple Scroll: The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect, 201.

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(Deut 17:17) is reminiscent of the counsel given to all the people (Deut 8:14-17). So also the warning to not "turn aside from the commandment," either to the left or to the right (Deut 17:20), is similar to words addressed to each Israelite (Deut 5:32; 11:28; 28:14).

Based on evidence such as this, Patrick Miller, in a recent Bible commentary, has concluded that Deut 17:17 places upon the king "the obligations incumbent upon every Israelite. In that sense, Deuteronomy's primary concern was that the king be the model Israelite."[1] Such a broader understanding of the deuteronomic prohibition of polygamy is also evident in the thinking of Ellen White. Commenting on Solomon who "fell into the sinful practice of other kings, of having many wives,"[2] she observed: "God commanded Moses to warn the people against having a plurality of wives. 'Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away.'"[3]

In short then, the legislation found in Deut 17:16, 17 prohibits polygamy; at the very least, it forbade kings to marry more than one spouse. However, if the biblical concept of the king as a model is taken into account, as recognized in Ellen White's comments on this passage, then this law can be seen in its broader application as outlawing the practice of polygamy for the entire community.

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[1]Miller, 148-149 (emphasis original). See also Hitchens, 128.

[2]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:100 (emphasis added).

[3]Ibid.

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Law of the Firstborn and His Rights

Another passage that has frequently been referred to in the discussion on polygamy is the one relating to the true firstborn son and his legal rights. After a few brief introductory remarks showing the relevancy of this passage for the study of polygamy, the passage is looked at in light of common English translations. Next, an examination of translational issues of the legislation in the Hebrew text is carried out. Following this, the question of what can appropriately be concluded from case laws is discussed. This section is then summarized.

Located in Deut 21:15-17, this legislation concerning primogeniture rights, states:

> If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, if the first-born son belongs to the unloved,
>
> then it shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the first-born before the son of the unloved, who is the first-born.
>
> But he shall acknowledge the first-born, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the first-born.

Eugene Hillman refers to this passage as an indication that polygamy was regarded as a normal and licit practice according to the Mosaic law.[1] Joseph Omoregbe posits that by this passage "the Old Testament itself recognizes polygamy as a valid lawful form of marriage."[2] On the other hand, some scholars maintain that the text does not regulate polygamy at all.

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[1]Hillman, 145. See also, Mann, 17; Hall, 25.

[2]Omoregbe, 364.

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The Regulation in English Versions

Arguing from the English translation, Lewis Grout posits that the phrase "if a man has two wives" does not provide positive proof that the case revolves around a man who had two wives "at one and the same time."[1] Grout bases his case on a comparison with two New Testament statements: (1) "For all seven [brothers] had her as wife" (Mark 12:23); and, (2) "For you have had five husbands" (John 4:18). Recognizing that in these two phrases there is no mention of time or sequence, Grout reasons that just because Mark 12:23 states that "all seven had her as wife" it would be fallacious to conclude that the seven brothers were all simultaneous husbands to one wife. Likewise, it would be wrong to deduce that the woman mentioned in John 4 had five husbands at one and the same time. Similarly, Grout observes, it would be wrong to determine that this deuteronomic law necessarily dealt with a man who had two wives simultaneously, merely based on the phrase "if a man has two wives."[2]

Thus, considering the legislation solely as rendered in English, it becomes evident that it would be inadvisable to dogmatically conclude that Deut 21:15-17 undoubtedly deals with or discusses the issue of polygamy.

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[1]Grout, 13 (emphasis original).

[2]Ibid., 13.

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The Hebrew Text and Context

A study of the passage in Hebrew suggests an alternative interpretation. The crux of the discussion is the interpretation of the phrase, "if there will be to a man two wives (vs. 15)." This phrase, *kî-ṯihyeynā lᵉ⊃îš šᵉtê nāšîm*, is normally more smoothly rendered, "if a man has two wives." But, notes Walter Kaiser:

> Hebrew is notoriously disinterested in our Western preoccupation with the tense of the verb and time in general. The fact that a man has children who were born of two wives is enough to think about without making the point that one wife has been deceased and another, perhaps the favored one, is living. But it definitely is wrong to insist that both wives are living, for that would be asking the imperfect verb form (future or continuous action of the verb) to bear a load it was not meant to carry.[1]

Several scholars favor this interpretation.[2] For example, Robert Jamieson notes: "Moses, therefore, does not here legislate upon the case of a man who has two wives at the same time, but on that of a man who has married twice in succession, the second wife after the decease of the first."[3] Another possibility, in line with this view, is that this could be a case relating to a man who marries again after the divorce of the first wife. Since the Mosaic regulation of

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[1]Kaiser, 187 (emphasis original).

[2]Among others, see Grout, 13; Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 33; Gray and Adams, 1:512.

[3]Jamieson, Genesis-Deuteronomy, 670. David Hall, in disagreeing with this perspective, says: "Hebrew grammar, however, argue [sic] otherwise since the translation of the imperfect tense verb *ṯihyeynā* is correct. If the author had wanted to express a past perfect nuance he most certainly would have used the Hebrew perfect tense," 26. This reasoning is not correct, since the perfect tense, like the imperfect, would still not differentiate between the two wives.

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Deut 24:1-4 recognizes the issue of divorce, this option is also a plausible one.[1] This non-polygamous understanding of the regulation is not merely a modern notion, since the Samaritan Version, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate rendered the passage as concerned with a man who had two wives in succession and not simultaneously.[2]

Thus, based upon "the history of exegesis (as indicated in the major translations),"[3] as well as the openness of the Hebrew verb form, it is possible to suggest that Deut 21:15-17 may deal with the rights of the firstborn of a woman who is deceased or divorced. If this suggestion is correct, then Deut 21:15-17 would not be addressing a polygamous home but rather a case in which a man has had two wives, a second after the death or divorce of the first.

Deductions Based on Case Law

A second manner of understanding this statute of inheritance rights is based on the interpretation of case law. The primary question is this: Is an action

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[1]Jacob Rabinowitz also suggests this option, as a result of his study of a fourth century B.C. Demotic marriage contract from the reign of Alexander IV. This document discusses the treatment of a firstborn son of an unloved woman who was apparently divorced. From his research, Rabinowitz has concluded that it is possible that the Egyptians borrowed this marriage legislation from the Jews. He proposes, on linguistic grounds, that Deut 21:15-17 is not discussing a polygamous situation but rather a home in which a man has had two wives, a second after the divorce of the first. See Jacob J. Rabinowitz, "Marriage Contracts in Ancient Egypt in the Light of Jewish Sources," Harvard Theological Review 46 (January 1953): 91-97.

[2]See Kaiser, 187; Jamieson, Genesis-Deuteronomy, 670.

[3]See Kaiser, 187.

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sanctioned or legitimized simply because it is mentioned in a case law? In other words, if one ignores the above argumentation, and maintains that Deut 21:15-17 deals with a polygamous household, what appropriate conclusions can be made concerning polygamy?

In connection with this issue, Sereno Dwight observed that those who hold that Deut 21:15-17 approves polygamy, use the following syllogistic reasoning:

> Major premise: Moses here legislates on the case of a man who has two wives at the same time;
> Minor premise: But he could not lawfully legislate upon that which might not lawfully exist;
> Conclusion: To have two wives at the same time, was therefore lawful.[1]

A critical assessment of this type of logic can be made by examining another law in this book. Deut 23:18 prohibited the Israelites from bringing the wages of a prostitute into the temple in payment of any vow. Using the above syllogism, Dwight finds the logic as follows: Moses here legislated on the wages of a prostitute; but, he could not legislate on that which might not lawfully exist; therefore, to be a wage-earning prostitute was lawful.[2] This conclusion is seen to be incorrect when one compares it with the consistent condemnation of prostitution in the Bible.[3]

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[1]Dwight, 20. The phrases "major premise," "minor premise," and "conclusion," are added by Kaiser, 186.

[2]Dwight, 20.

[3]See, for example, Lev 19:29; 21:7; cf. 1 Cor 6:15-18. See also, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (1979), s.v. "Harlot."

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Just as the legislation concerning prostitutes in no way authorized prostitution, even though it recognized the reality of such a practice, so the law related to "two wives" likewise did not legalize polygamy,[1] even though it acknowledged its existence.[2] This example illustrates the danger of misreading case law.

The issue at stake in Deut 21:15-17 is the fair treatment of the true firstborn. The law merely states that regardless whose son he is, the father must provide his actual firstborn with all the rights and inheritance that are his due. Thus, Kaiser is correct in his assessment that the concern of this law is "inheritance rights, not polygamy."[3]

This investigation has considered Deut 21:15-17 from three main perspectives. The English text suggests that this passage cannot logically be proven to definitively support polygamy. An examination of the Hebrew language, as well as the ancient versions, seems to indicate that two wives in succession may be what are considered here, a second after the possible death or divorce of the first. The legitimate use of case law, together with the actual content of the legislation, reveals that this passage does not address the legality of polygamy.

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[1]See Kaiser, 186-187. Notice the similar dismissal of false syllogistic reasoning in Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 33.

[2]See Kaburuk, 15; cf. Kaiser, 187. If the phrase, "the one loved and the other unloved," implies two wives at the same time, then it would be clear that a case of polygamy is being addressed here. However, as noted above, the law, if seen in this way, would then be merely recognizing the existence of polygamy without in any way legitimizing it.

[3]See Kaiser, 187.

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Together these three considerations provide sufficient evidence to conclude, as Jamieson states, that "this case has no bearing on polygamy."[1]

From the above evidence, one can see that it would be unwise to appeal to Deut 21:15-17 as clear biblical support for polygamy. This Mosaic stipulation, says Kaiser, does not suggest even a "tacit approval of polygamy."[2] As Chidawa Kaburuk noted: "This law does not indicate that God approves polygyny."[3] On the contrary, this law appears to be consistent with all the other scriptural injunctions concerning monogamous marriage.

Statutes on Sexual Relations with an Unengaged Woman

The Pentateuch contains various laws and statutes regarding sexual relationships. A variety of activities are prohibited, such as, adultery,[4] incest,[5] bestiality,[6] and prostitution.[7] In addition, the issue of sexual relations with an

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[1]Jamieson, Genesis-Deuteronomy, 670.

[2]Kaiser, 187.

[3]Kaburuk, 15.

[4]See, for example, Exod 20:14; Deut 22:22.

[5]See, for example, Lev 18:6-17; 20:11-21.

[6]See, for example, Lev 18:23; 20:15, 16.

[7]See, for example, Lev 19:29; Deut 23:17, 18.

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unengaged woman is also addressed.[1] Passages related to this problem are examined in this section.

The first passage that deals with unlawful sexual intercourse with an unengaged girl is found in Exod 22:16, 17:

> And if a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife.
> If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins.

The second passage that relates to this issue, is found in Deut 22:28, 29:

> If a man finds a girl who is a virgin, who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her and they are discovered,
> then the man who lay with her shall give to the girl's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall become his wife because he has violated her; he cannot divorce her all his days.

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[1]Some writers have referred to Deut 23:2 as evidence that polygamy was not forbidden in Old Testament times. See Oliver, 12; Kaburuk, 46. This verse indicates that a *mamzēr* was not allowed to enter the assembly of the Lord. Understanding this term to refer to "one of illegitimate birth" (NIV), these writers have concluded that since the children of polygamists were allowed into the assembly, polygamy could not have been an unlawful practice. The term *mamzēr*, which occurs only here and in Zech 9:6, is "of uncertain etymology," S. R. Driver, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 260. Other commentators agree. See, for example, Gerhard von Rad, Deuteronomy, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 146; Craigie, Deuteronomy, 297. Based on the reference to prostitution a few verses later, as well as a possible etymology, Craigie suggests that "the children [*mamzēr*] would have been conceived and born in an environment directly related to the cult of a foreign religion, and therefore would be an abomination in the eyes of the Israelites and God," ibid. Studies such as Craigie's show that the term *mamzēr* is quite restricted in scope, and does not simply mean "one of illegitimate birth," as the NIV has it. The more restricted meaning of *mamzēr* in essence invalidates the conclusion that Deut 23:2 implicitly legitimizes the practice of polygamy.

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Based on these passages, Martin Madan posited more than two centuries ago that, apparently even in his own day, polygamy was a practice which "God not only allows, but in many cases commands."[1] Other writers have noted that if a married man was guilty of rape or seduction, the Mosaic law in Deuteronomy would force him to become a polygamist.[2] As one author concluded: "One could assume that this regulation would require polygamy in some situations."[3]

Some have suggested that these are two distinct laws,[4] the first dealing with seduction, and the second with rape. If these two are indeed different laws, then, since Deut 22:28, 29 requires the man committing the sexual crime to marry the woman, it would be correct to conclude that this law would require polygamy in the case of a man already married. However, if these are complementary regulations, then Exod 22:16, 17, which provides another option for the sex offender, would not make polygamy mandatory in this case.

As seen in the passages outlined, the words describing the crimes in these two passages are different. According to the NASB, in Exodus the man "seduces" (*pāṯāh*) the woman and lies with her; yet in Deuteronomy, he "seizes" (*tāpaś*) her

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[1]Madan, 276 (emphasis original). Madan did not include Exod 22:17 in his reference.

[2]See Turley, 36-37; Hall, 27. Cf. John Cairncross, After Polygamy Was Made a Sin: The Social History of Christian Polygamy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 158.

[3]Turley, 37.

[4]See, for example, Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 35-36; Mayes, 313.

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and lies with her. While it is correct to observe that *pāṯāh* refers to a milder form of coerced sexual intercourse than *tāpaś*, it should be noted that a third and more powerful word is used in a different law in Deut 22:25. In this case, the man "forces" (*ḥāzaq*) a woman and lies with her.

An examination of the use of these three words in the Old Testament shows that *ḥāzaq* often implies the overpowering of a weaker one by a stronger one.[1] In the context of sexual encounters it indicates a case of rape.[2] In distinction to *ḥāzaq*, the less forceful word *tāpaś* can, among other things, mean "catch" (Gen 39:12), "take" (2 Kgs 10:14), or "seize" (Deut 21:19), while *pāṯāh* refers to psychological pressure, and can be translated "entice" (Judg 14:15), "allure" (Hos 2:14), "persuade" (Prov 25:15), or even "deceive" (2 Sam 3:25).

Of the two laws concerning sexual intercourse with an unengaged woman, neither makes use of the term *ḥāzaq* (to overpower). Rather, the man in the Exodus passage uses psychological pressure, while the man in Deut 22:28, 29 uses physical power to induce the woman to have sex with him.[3] Since in different places in the Bible, the word *pāṯāh* clearly implies that the one being

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[1]See, for example, Gen 19:16; 2 Sam 17:50; 1 Kgs 16:22; 2 Kgs 25:3; Isa 4:1.

[2]See this usage in Deut 22:25. Note especially the use of *ḥāzaq* in the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13:11-14).

[3]Note that in Gen 39:12 the word *tāpaś* is used, to indicate that while Potiphar's wife "seized" Joseph by the coat, she could not overpower him.

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"enticed" has the choice of resisting,[1] it is very likely that in Exod 22:16, 17 there was a certain amount of complicity or willingness on the part of the woman. The passage in Deut 22:28, 29 could be indicating some similar kind of acquiescence on the part of the woman by noting that here the man takes her, lies with her, "and they are discovered" (Deut 22:28, emphasis added).

J. Ridderbos thus appears correct in his conclusion that the law in Deut 22:28, 29 relates to a case of seduction, not rape.[2] In other words, even though they use different terms, these laws are analogous in that both of them have to do with a case of sexual seduction. The emphasis in both passages is not placed on the type of coercion but rather on the issue of the woman being unengaged.[3]

If this evidence of affinity is accepted, then the law of Deuteronomy may be regarded as simply a repetition and extension of that in Exodus.[4] When thus placed together, this combined law covers all circumstances, from psychological

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[1]In various texts *pāṯāh* (persuade) is used in a manner that shows it can clearly be resisted, if the one being "enticed" chooses to do so. See the warning of Prov 1:10: "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent." See also 1 Kgs 22:20-22; 2 Chr 18:19-21; Hos 2:14.

[2]Ridderbos, 227.

[3]See G. R. Driver and John C. Miles, eds., The Assyrian Laws (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1935), 53.

[4]See Mace, 228. Others also see these laws as referring to essentially the same issue. See Ridderbos, 227; Turley, 35; Lee Haines, Genesis and Exodus, The Wesleyan Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 241. Later Rabbinic laws also placed these two regulations together. See J. Poucher, "Crimes and Punishments," A Dictionary of the Bible, 1:522.

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through physical pressure. Thus, these passages seem to be dealing with the same basic issue.

Moreover, the dowry mentioned in Exodus is now specifically spelled out in Deuteronomy as "fifty shekels of silver." G. R. Driver and John Miles suggest that when the nature of the penalty is taken into account, it seems "that the penalty in Deuteronomy merely defines that in Exodus, in which case there is no clear distinction between the offences in these two passages."[1]

As noted earlier, taking Deut 22:28, 29 in isolation, some have concluded that this Mosaic law can be seen as at times requiring a man to become polygamous. This would be the case if the seducer were already a married man, since this law required that he marry the woman. However, once the deuteronomic regulation is understood as a repetition and extension of the law in Exod 22:16, 17, this difficulty can be resolved. In Exodus it was specifically spelled out that, regardless of the reason, the father had the right of absolutely refusing to let the seducer marry his daughter, even though the seducer was still required to "pay money equal to the dowry for virgins" (Exod 22:17). As Keil and Delitzsch put it: "The omission to mention the possibility of the father refusing to give him his daughter for a wife makes no essential difference [to this law in Deuteronomy]. It is assumed as self-evident here, that such a right was possessed by the father."[2]

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[1]Driver and Miles, 53.

[2]Keil and Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 3:412.

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In other words, when these laws on sexual seduction in Exodus and Deuteronomy are seen as complementary to each other, it becomes clear that the man who seduced a woman was not absolutely required by law to marry her. The Exodus enactment provided a way out. Thus, for instance, if he were already married, he could be required by the father to pay the dowry equivalent; yet, he could not be required to marry the woman since this would violate both the marital pattern established by God, as well as the levitical regulation forbidding a man to marry more than one spouse.

In brief then, when understood in this manner, these laws dealing with seduction do not need to be seen as condoning or commanding the practice of polygamy. Rather, they appear to be framed in such a way as to provide a means of properly treating the seduced woman without necessarily violating the institution of monogamy.

Levirate Law and Practice

In the discussion of polygamy in the Old Testament, perhaps the most frequently mentioned issue is the practice commonly referred to as the "levirate."[1] To begin with, this section briefly notes the existence of the levirate in other cultures. Following this, the official regulation as outlined in Deut 25:5-10 is investigated. In addition to this examination of the law, the practice of the levirate

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[1]The word "levirate" comes from the Latin *levir*, meaning "husband's brother," or "brother-in-law." See Webster's New World Dictionary, (1988), s.v. "Levirate."

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in the times of the patriarchs and the judges is considered. A summary concludes this section.

Much has been written about the levirate system in relation to polygamy. Some writers are cautious, and merely say that the law of Deut 25:5-10 "may even have required polygyny in some instances, although this is not certain."[1] Others maintain, as Edward Westermarck put it, that "in the case of the levirate marriage the Pentateuch actually ordains a second marriage, a man being compelled to marry his childless brother's widow whether he be married or not."[2] Geoffrey Parrinder stated this view well:

> Although a man might wish to remain a monogamist, yet the system of Levirate inheritance might easily convert him into a bigamist, if he were already married, by obliging him to marry his brother's widow, if the brother had died without leaving children. Among the Hebrews this was a frequent cause of polygamy.[3]

In basic agreement with Parrinder's perspective, Eugene Hillman posits that in the Bible, polygamy "is dictated by the levirate law."[4] Similarly, Bernard Haring suggests that "leviratic marriage, which in the final analysis is a form of

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[1]Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 273. See also David Gitari, "The Church and Polygamy," Transformation 1 (January/March 1984): 6; Hall, 28.

[2]Edward Westermarck, The History of Human Marriage, 5th ed., 3 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1921), 3:41-42. See also Anatosi Katuramu, "Polygamy and the Church in Africa" (Chicago: N.p., 1977), 16.

[3]Parrinder, 23. See also Marcus Cohn, "Marriage," The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, (1942), 7:369-376.

[4]Hillman, 158.

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polygamy, is considered a sacred duty."[1] The conclusions of these writers need to be investigated.

The Levirate in Other Cultures

The levirate was not an exclusively Hebrew phenomenon. Over time, other cultures have had similar customs. These include the Greeks and Persians, the Hittites, the Ugarits, the Assyrians, the Moabites, the Hindus, the New Caledonians, Mongols, Afghans, Abyssinians, and some of the later American Indians.[2]

In his published thesis on the levirate and *gôʾēl* institutions in the Old Testament, Donald Leggett notes that there is evidence that three ancient near-eastern societies practiced the levirate at the same time as did the Israelites.[3] These were the Assyrians, the Hittites, and the Ugarits.[4] For example, article 193 of the Hittite Code of 1450-1200 B.C. reads:

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[1]Bernard Haring, Evangelization Today (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1974), 153. See also the following writers, who hold similar views: Kronholm, 78; Oliver, 11; Mace, 124; Welch, 55; Jasper, 39; Staples, "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa," 23-25; Norman L. Geisler, Ethics: Alternatives and Issues (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 206; M. D. W. Jeffreys, "Polygny [sic] in the Christian Fold," Practical Anthropology 19 (March-April 1972): 85.

[2]Dale Manor, "A Brief History of Levirate Marriage as It Relates to the Bible," Restoration Quarterly 27 (3d Quarter 1984): 130-131.

[3] See Donald A. Leggett, The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing Company, 1974).

[4]Ibid., 12-27.

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> If a married man dies, then his brother must marry the widow; if his brother dies, then his father must marry her; if his father dies, then one of his brother's sons must marry the widow. No crime has been committed.[1]

Based on codes such as the above, Leggett and others have correctly recognized that the law and practice of the levirate operated differently in Hebrew society than among its neighbors.[2] Since the specific purpose of this project is to investigate polygamy in the Bible, this extra-biblical material is not considered in further detail here. However, the current practice of the levirate in some African cultures merits attention. Some who have studied African levirate habits seriously question the correctness of calling this custom a "marriage." As a result of his empirical study of African widows, Michael Kirwen concluded:

> There is a great deal of evidence, therefore, supporting the claim that the African leviratic union is not a marriage in any ordinary sense of the term and should not be described as such. The African leviratic union is more accurately described as a marital adjustment in a continuing marriage in which a brother-in-law substitutes temporarily for a deceased legal husband.[3]

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[1]Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 71. See also James B. Pritchard, ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1950), 196.

[2]See Leggett, 19, 20, 27; see also footnotes 40, 51, and 61 of chap. 1. Manor concurs, 131.

[3]Michael C. Kirwen, African Widows: An Empirical Study of the Problems of Adapting Western Christian Teachings on Marriage to the Leviratic Custom for the Care of Widows in Four Rural African Societies (New York: Maryknoll, 1979), 165-166 (emphasis original).

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G. K. Falusi concurs, noting that the majority of Africans "now feel that the levirate is a way of caring for widows and is not a new marriage."[1] While the conclusions of these scholars are not doubted, the important point to investigate is whether or not the levirate as legislated in Scripture is likewise not a new marriage but merely the continuation of the previous marriage by means of substitution for the dead man, as well as a way of caring for widows. Furthermore, the question concerning the obligatory nature of this law also requires attention.

The Deuteronomic Legislation

The only law concerning the levirate is located in Deut 25:5-10, where it is delineated at length:

> When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.
>
> And it shall be that the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out from Israel.
>
> But if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, "My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me."
>
> Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And if he persists and says, "I do not desire to take her,"
>
> then his brother's wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, "Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house."
>
> And in Israel his name shall be called, "The house of him whose sandal is removed."

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[1]G. K. Falusi, "African Levirate and Christianity," African Ecclesial Review 24 (October 1982): 307.

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In order to systematically analyze this passage, four basic questions are asked: (1) Was the levirate merely a sexual union, or was it a formal marriage? (2) What was the stated purpose of this institution? (3) Was this a binding legal obligation, or an optional custom? (4) Did this regulation sometimes require married men to become polygamous, or was it for single men only?

Sexual union or formal marriage?

In the very first verse of this regulation in Deut 25:5-10 it is specifically recorded that the woman's "husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife" (emphasis added). This phrase in Hebrew, *l^eqāḥāh lô l^eʾiššāh*, occurs frequently in the Old Testament and is the normal terminology used for a marriage.[1] Thus, the Mosaic law specifically identifies the levirate as a "marriage." This phrase is abbreviated to *l^eqāḥāh* (to take), and is repeated two more times during the regulation (Deut 25:7, 8), again implying that this was to be a regular marriage.

Vs. 6 states that only the firstborn from this union was to carry on the name of the woman's dead husband. As Leggett says: "The most natural explanation of the term firstborn would suggest other children and permanent marriage."[2] In short, this law indicates that the levirate was not just a sexual union but was a full and regular marriage.

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[1]See, for example, Gen 24:4, 38; 25:20; 28:6; Deut 21:11; 1 Sam 25:39, 40; 1 Chr 7:15.

[2]Leggett, 51 (footnote #52).

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Care for widows or to have a son?

A second issue to be addressed is the purpose of the biblical levirate. Was this ancient system "designed to provide for the welfare of the widows," as some have suggested?[1] R. K. Harrison theorized that the levirate law "was actually a humane way of dealing with what was frequently the desperate plight of widows by keeping them within the family and tribe, without which they would almost certainly have starved or been callously exploited."[2] Based on this perspective it has been concluded that the social security of the widow "demanded that the closest appropriate male relative fulfill his obligation whether he was already married or not,"[3] thus promoting the practice of polygamy.

The Hebrew word ᵓ*almānāh* (widow) is not used in this entire legislation. This is significant, especially when the Old Testament carefully defines how widows were to be cared for. For example, the whole community was instructed that widows were to be treated with justice (Deut 27:19), and were to be provided with the basic necessities of life: food (Deut 14:29), clothing (Deut

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[1]Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, (1986), s.v. "Levirate Marriage." See also Jasper, 39; Anthony Phillips, "The Book of Ruth--Deception and Shame," Journal of Jewish Studies 37 (Autumn 1986): 3.

[2]R. K. Harrison, "Polygamy," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed. (1986), 3:901-902.

[3]Oliver, 11-12.

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24:17), and shelter (Lev 22:13).[1] The levirate, however, was not listed as one of the ways in which "widows" were to be cared for.[2]

Roland de Vaux notes that the discussion about the purpose of the levirate seems to be endless. But then he rightly adds that "the Old Testament gives its own explanation, which seems sufficient."[3] A critical reading of Deut 25:5-10 indicates, as Falusi himself recognized, that "the object of the levirate is made quite clear in the passage. It is to produce offspring for the dead man 'that his name not be blotted out of Israel.'"[4] This is the only purpose that is outlined in this legislation, and that repeatedly in vss. 6, 7, and 9. In the words of de Vaux: "The essential purpose is to perpetuate male descent."[5]

Thus, the purpose of the levirate was not to ensure the care of widows. The biblical record indicates that this law's only stated purpose was to raise up offspring for the deceased.

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[1]Exod 22:22 states: "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan."

[2]Admittedly, if the purpose of the marriage were to raise up offspring for the deceased, the net result would be that the woman would be taken care of as well. However, if the widow already had a son, even though she might be sorely in need, she was not to be married to her brother-in-law.

[3]De Vaux, 38.

[4]Falusi, 302.

[5]De Vaux, 38. See also Eryl W. Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 1," Vetus Testamentum 31 (1981): 139.

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An obligatory or optional custom?

A third question relates to whether or not the levirate was compulsory. Some have understood the levirate statute as "a binding obligation,"[1] in which a man was "compelled to marry his childless brother's widow whether he be married or not."[2] This idea needs examination. Deut 25:5-10 shows that the stipulation is divided into two parts: one-third of the law lays down the expectation, while two-thirds explains the formal steps to be followed in case the brother-in-law declines to marry his deceased brother's wife. This suggests that this law "allows the brother the option of refusing."[3]

In vs. 7 the law anticipates a refusal: "But if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders." If the brother-in-law persisted in his refusal to marry her and thus raise up a son for his dead brother, the widow was to pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and state: "Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house." In addition, he would now be called by the title: "The house of him whose sandal is removed" (vs. 10).

While it was evidently considered something of a disgrace for a man not to marry the childless widow, yet the law allowed him to legitimately excuse

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[1]Oliver, 11. See also Turley, 38. Haring posits that the levirate was "obligatory under heavy sanction," Evangelization Today, 153.

[2]Westermarck, 41-42.

[3]Wright and Thompson, 789. See also Mace, 97; Craigie, Deuteronomy, 314-315; Cohn, 370.

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himself.[1] In fact, there was no penalty to pay. Leggett correctly notes that "the elders had no power of compulsion, only that of persuasion."[2] Eryl Davies, expressing similar sentiments, recognizes that "the levirate law was not regarded as binding in the strict sense, for no penalty was imposed upon the brother-in-law who refused his obligation."[3] Clearly the levirate duty entailed a sacrifice of love,[4] and for this reason might not have been compulsory. Undoubtedly, this system of levirate marriage was "not one which could be enforced at law."[5]

For married men or singles only?

A fourth and final issue needs consideration: Even if the levirate institution was not a binding law, did "this practice frequently, perhaps even more often than not, involve polygamy,"[6] as Hillman and others have claimed?[7] While this question can be properly answered only after all the cases of the actual

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[1]See Mace, 97. See also Craigie, who notes that the man "had a legal right to refuse his obligation," Deuteronomy, 314.

[2]Leggett, 58.

[3]Eryl W. Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 2," Vetus Testamentum 31 (1981): 260.

[4]Leggett, 53-54.

[5]F. C. Cook, ed., Leviticus-Deuteronomy, vol. 1, part 2, The Holy Bible According to the Authorized Version (A.D. 1611), with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary and a Revision of the Translation, by Bishops and Other Clergy of the Anglican Church (London: John Murray, 1877), 888.

[6]Hillman, 163.

[7]See Oliver, 11; Turley, 38; Welch, 55; Parrinder, 23; Staples, "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa," 23-25.

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practice of the levirate have been examined, an investigation of Deut 25:5-10 can reveal whether such a possibility was considered or not.

The introductory statement of the law specifies that the levirate duty was to be considered only "when brothers live together." One Bible commentator wonders whether this statement indicates that the levirate was "required only if the surviving brother was single"?[1] In commenting on this phrase, Anthony Phillips remarks: "Until a younger brother married and had children of his own, he would have remained in his father's or elder brother's house."[2] This apparently was what transpired in the case of Judah and his three sons (Gen 38). If this view is correct, then, as Old Testament exegete Herbert Leupold observed, the levirate system implied that "the brother of the deceased, if unmarried, would take the widow to wife."[3] Other scholars hold a similar view, noting that the brother-in-law who was to marry the widow had to be single.[4] Thus, if the introductory

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[1]Harris, "Leviticus," 599.

[2]Anthony Phillips, Deuteronomy, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 168. See also Victor Hamilton who notes that the idea of the brothers "who dwell together" refers to brothers "who have not yet established families of their own," Victor P. Hamilton, "Marriage," The Anchor Bible Dictionary (1992), 4:567.

[3]Herbert C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 980 (emphasis added).

[4]See Lyle Eslinger, "More Drafting Techniques in Deuteronomic Laws," Vetus Testamentum 34 (1984): 224; Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, 6 vols. (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 1:827. See also Phillips, "The Book of Ruth--Deception and Shame," 3.

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phrase of this law means that only single brothers were asked to carry out of this institution, this law would not require polygamous unions.

In summary, according to the law in Deut 25:5-10, the levirate was established as a regular marriage. Its basic purpose was to raise up an heir to perpetuate the lineage of the childless, deceased man. While not to perform this duty subjected the brother-in-law to community disgrace, the levirate was clearly optional and the man did not have to pay a penalty for refusing to marry the widow. Moreover, the opening statement seems to indicate that this non-obligatory custom was to be practiced only if the brother were not already married.

Besides this single mention of the levirate law in the Bible, two narratives in the Old Testament deal with leviratic practices and help to shed more light on the issue. De Vaux perceptively notes that the stories of Tamar and Ruth are "difficult to interpret and only imperfectly correspond to the law in Deuteronomy."[1] But since they are the only Old Testament stories related to this custom, they need to be investigated. It is to be recognized, however, that the manner in which people acted did not necessarily correspond to the true meaning and interpretation of any law. Nevertheless, the practical application of a regulation can be of assistance in observing how Bible characters may have understood and applied that law.

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[1]De Vaux, 37.

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The Levirate in Patriarchal Times

According to the biblical account, the levirate custom was practiced as early as the time of the sons of Jacob. This occurred approximately three centuries prior to the time the formal legislation was recorded, as outlined in Deut 25:5-10.

The narrative found in Gen 38 is as follows: Judah found a wife, Tamar, for his oldest son Er. Before Er had any children, God took his life because of his evil deeds. Judah then instructed the next son, Onan, to go in to Tamar and raise up an heir for Er. But since Onan knew that the child would not be his, "when he went into his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground, in order not to give offspring to his brother" (Gen 38:9). As a result God took his life also. Judah then told Tamar to go back to her home and wait until the next son, Shelah, grew up. Tamar did so, but after some time realized that Judah did not intend for her to marry Shelah. So, by acting as a prostitute, she got Judah to impregnate her, and bore twins.

The same four basic questions posed before are asked about the levirate custom in this story. The first question deals with the nature of the levirate: Was this simply a temporary sexual union in order to raise up an heir, or was it a regular marriage?

Gen 38:8 seems to suggest the levirate as a temporary union for the purpose of producing an heir: "Then Judah said to Onan, 'Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for

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your brother.'" Taken in isolation, this verse does not seem to view the levirate as a regular marriage.

However, just as the father, Judah, personally "took a wife for Er" (Gen 38:6), so he himself ordered Onan to "'go in to your brother's wife'" (Gen 38:8). The Hebrew word *bō*ᵓ, translated here as "go in," is often used to refer to sexual intercourse. Though at times it may connote sexual relationships outside of marriage,[1] this term is frequently so closely associated with marriage that it is sometimes used as a synonym for it.[2] Thus it appears that Onan married Tamar. De Vaux noted: "It is the duty of his brother Onan to marry the widow."[3] Similarly, Gerhard von Rad stated: "According to the practice of levirate marriage, the second son took Tamar as his wife."[4]

Besides the suggestion that Onan was actually to marry Tamar, explicit evidence that the levirate was considered a regular marriage comes from Gen 38:14. Talking about Tamar, the second part of the passage reads: "For she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife."[5] The phrase "given to him as a wife" (*nitnāh lô l*ᵉᵓ*iššāh*) is repeatedly used in relation

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[1]See, for example, Gen 19:33, 34, where it refers to a case of incest, and Gen 38:16, 18, where it is used in the context of purchased sex, or prostitution.

[2]See, for example, Gen 16:2, 3; 29:21; 29:28-30; 30:3, 4.

[3]De Vaux, 37.

[4]Gerhard von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, trans. John H. Marks, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 353.

[5]See Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 1," 143.

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to marriage.[1] Thus it can be clearly seen that even in patriarchal times the levirate was considered a regular marriage.[2]

A second question relates to the purpose of the levirate. As in the deuteronomic legislation, Gen 38:8 specifically states that the purpose of this practice was to "raise up offspring for your brother." This concept is repeated two more times in vs. 9. As Leggett observes: "This threefold reiteration makes it abundantly clear that the child of such a union was reckoned as the legal offspring of the deceased, and that such was the purpose of the levirate as recorded in this story."[3] Also, as in Deut 25:5-10, no mention whatsoever is made of the levirate having anything to do with the provision for widows.[4] As pointed out above, there were other provisions made for these unfortunate women.

A third concern relates to whether or not the levirate was a binding obligation.[5] The story provides insufficient information to determine whether or not the levirate was a binding obligation. However, two facts can be seen. First, Onan tried to act as though he was fulfilling this duty by taking Tamar and having

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[1]See, for example, Gen 29:28; 30:9; 34:8, 12.

[2]Even S. R. Driver sees this levirate union as a marriage. See Driver, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy, 281.

[3]Leggett, 34.

[4]Admittedly, the word ʾ*almānāh* (widow) does appear in this pericope, but only in connection with Tamar remaining a widow in her father's house (Gen 38:11).

[5]Davies posits that in Gen 38 the levirate "was regarded as an unavoidable obligation," "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 2," 267.

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intercourse with her. But, "he wasted his seed on the ground, in order not to give offspring to his brother" (Gen 38:9). In this way he tried to avoid the full responsibility of the levirate, while still doing part of it. This type of manipulative abuse of Tamar resulted in Onan's death. A more direct avoidance of the levirate can be observed in the fact that Judah, though deceptively, withheld Shelah from marrying Tamar.[1] There was apparently no penalty for such an avoidance.

If the levirate had been a binding obligation required by law, then Tamar would have been able to appeal her case. Instead, she took matters into her own hands, and by playing the harlot got Judah to impregnate her. De Vaux suggests that "Tamar's intercourse with Judah may have been a relic of a time when the duty of levirate fell on the father-in-law if he had no other sons."[2] There is, however, no biblical evidence to support such a theory. On the contrary, the text carefully notes that Judah was totally unaware of the identity of the "prostitute" (Gen 38:15-26). The twins born to Tamar are not called Er's sons, but rather

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[1]Gen 38:11 implies that Judah had no intention of letting Shelah marry Tamar, because he was afraid that his youngest son might die as well. Yet he told Tamar to wait until Shelah grew up.

[2]De Vaux, 37. See also Parrinder, who says: "The duty then fell to the father of the dead man," 24. Such a practice of the levirate was apparently followed by other ancient near eastern societies. See the Middle Assyrian Laws, A:33, and the Hittite Laws, 193, Pritchard, 182-196.

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Judah's (Gen 46:12), thus suggesting that this action was not leviratic at all.[1] As Walter Kaiser put it: "Tamar's act was not a levirate relationship."[2]

Finally, and vital to this research, is the question regarding whether the levirate was practiced monogamously or polygamously in this case. The narrative does not directly state what the marital status of Onan was when he was called upon to perform the levirate duty. However, since no other spouse is mentioned as being passed on when Onan died, it seems that the levirate was practiced monogamously here.

In the case of Onan's younger brother, Shelah, the evidence is less clear. In Gen 38:11, Judah maintained that Shelah was too young for marriage and Tamar needed to wait until he grew up. This would indicate that Shelah was still single at this point in time. Only when old enough for marriage would Judah have Shelah fulfill the levirate, apparently in a monogamous way. No evidence of polygamy occurs in this entire narrative. As Samuel Wishard stated: "There is no polygamy here. It was the first marriage of each son."[3]

This brief investigation of Gen 38 indicates that in its earliest recorded form, the levirate was a regular marriage with the purpose of raising an heir for

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[1]This point is made by Kaburuk, 30. See also Leggett, 37. The record repeatedly refers to these children as Judah's sons: Gen 46:12; Num 26:20; 1 Chr 2:4. In a levirate marriage they should have been called the sons of Er; see Gen 38:8-9; cf. Deut 25:5-10.

[2]Kaiser, 191.*p2845Y

[3]Wishard, 50. See also Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 34.

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the deceased. The institution appears not to have been obligatory. Also, there is no evidence in this narrative that it in any way involved polygamy. These factors coincide with the law as given centuries later, and recorded in Deut 25:5-10.

Practice in the Time of the Judges

There has been some debate as to whether the book of Ruth deals with the levirate custom or not. While some scholars, such as S. R. Driver, feel that due to the differences with the law as outlined in Deuteronomy, the marriage of Ruth and Boaz was not a levirate marriage,[1] others posit that it was. Davies, for instance, states that "it is probable that the narrative of the book of Ruth does, in fact, illustrate an extension of the levirate practice prescribed in Deut. xxv 5-10."[2] The peculiarities are probably due to the fact that three institutions are exemplified in this one marriage, namely: the levirate, redemption, and inheritance.[3]

Even though the story shows that the levirate custom now extended further than the immediate brothers of the deceased husband, there can be no doubt that "the story is based on the same general principles as those set out in other

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[1]Driver, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy, 285. See also Baab, "Marriage," 282.

[2]Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 2," 266.

[3]E. Neufeld, Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1944), 38. See also Samuel Belkin, "Levirate and Agnate Marriage in Rabbinic and Cognate Literature," The Jewish Quarterly Review 60 (1969-1970): 285-286; Kaiser, 191; Leggett, 292-298; Lev 25.

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accounts [of the levirate]."[1] This broadening of the understanding of the levirate application is not inconsistent with the manner in which the term "brother" is used in the Hebrew language. For, besides being used for males who have the same parent or parents (Gen 27:11; Judg 8:19), "brother" is also applied to another male of the same kindred, race, or nation (Deut 23:7; Neh 5:7; Jer 34:9).

In considering the story of Ruth and Boaz, the same four questions raised in connection with the levirate in Gen 38 and Deut 25 are discussed. While the complete story encompasses the entire book of Ruth, only the passages directly related to marital structures are to be addressed.

The first question relates to whether or not this relationship was perceived as a full marriage. Ruth 4:13 says: "So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her." This clear statement reveals that the union of Ruth and Boaz was a regular marriage, and not merely a sexual union.[2]

Second, what was the purpose of this marriage? Besides the redemption of the land, which was the responsibility of the kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 3:12-4:4), Boaz recognized that the purpose of marriage to Ruth was "in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance" (Ruth 4:5). He repeated this concept when he took Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:10). As in the former pericopes dealing

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[1]Falusi, 302. That earlier on Naomi had had some form of the levirate in mind can be deduced from her statement: "If I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying?" Ruth 1:12-13.

[2]Leggett, 40 (footnote #25).

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with the levirate, no mention is made of the care of widows. On the contrary, the proper treatment of widows, as outlined in Deut 24:19, is noted earlier in the story, when Ruth is permitted to glean in the fields (Ruth 2:2-23).

The third question is whether or not the levirate, as practiced here, was seen as a compulsory institution. The first hint as to the optional nature of this custom is shown in Boaz's statement regarding the nearer kinsman: "If he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you" (Ruth 3:13). Later, when given the choice of marrying Ruth so as to produce an heir for the deceased, the unnamed kinsman replied: "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I jeopardize my own inheritance" (Ruth 4:6). Both statements indicate that in this story the levirate was not considered a binding obligation.

Finally, was Boaz already married by the time he met Ruth, thus making this marriage into a polygamous one? Since Boaz is described as a wealthy, older man who had several servants (Ruth 2:1-3:10), it has been assumed that he must already have been married, and therefore Ruth must have become his second wife.[1] Due to the lack of information, it is difficult to unequivocally establish the marital status of Boaz prior to his marriage with Ruth. However, a few hints in the text give some indication of the probable marital status of Boaz when he married Ruth.

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[1]See Jasper, 39; Kaburuk, 31.

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That no other wife or children are even suggested seems to imply that Boaz's marriage to Ruth was a monogamous union.[1] Further evidence of Boaz's childlessness is noted by Davies, who states that he "had no children of his own, and thus any son born of this levirate marriage would be fully Boaz's heir as well as the heir of Elimelech."[2]

Some have argued that in the culture of that time it was unthinkable for any man of Boaz's age and status to be single.[3] Therefore, it has been concluded that in this case the levirate was practiced in a polygamous manner. However, this view does not take into account the indications of singleness listed above. Also, it does not seriously consider the possibility that, like Jacob, Boaz might have waited

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[1]See Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 35.

[2]Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 2," 259. See also Ruth 4:14-22. Some have thought that the response of the unnamed relative, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I jeopardize my own inheritance" (Ruth 4:6), indicates that he was already married, and that had he not chosen to decline to act the part of the kinsman-redeemer, the levirate custom would have obligated him to become polygamous. That this is not necessarily the case can be observed through some of the comments of Robert Hubbard: "He would, first, here buy Naomi's property from assets eventually part of his estate--only to lose that inheritance when Ruth's first child claimed it, presumably without cost, as Elimelech's heir. Meanwhile, that child's care and feeding would further drain his wealth. Similarly, besides the lost investment in land and child, he may have faced additional expense in caring for Ruth, other children born to her, and Naomi, too. Had he bought only the property, he would not only have enlarged his inheritance but recouped his initial investment from its produce. Hence, the prospect of a wasted investment (whatever its social value) plus additional mouths to feed proved too expensive for him," Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., The Book of Ruth, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 245. Interestingly, nowhere does the biblical text state or suggest that the unnamed kinsman already had a wife.

[3]See, for example, Kaburuk, 31.

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until later in life to get married, or like Abraham, he might have been a single widower ready to marry again. In both the Midrash Rabbah and the Babylonian Talmud, the ancient Jewish rabbis held that Boaz was a single widower when he married Ruth.[1] As Wishard aptly asserts, "Boaz was unmarried when he took the widow of his kinsman, Mahlon."[2]

This examination of the levirate in the book of Ruth reveals that this custom was definitely seen as a regular marriage in which an heir was to be raised up for the childless deceased man. It appears as though, in this incident, this optional practice was probably carried out in a monogamous manner.

An overview of the three passages that deal with the levirate custom reveals a considerable degree of harmony relating to issues connected with marital structures. First, the research indicates that the biblical levirate was viewed and practiced as a full and regular marriage, and not merely as a sexual union. Second, the unique purpose of this custom was to raise up an heir for the dead man, with no mention of caring for widows. Third, while this institution was strongly encouraged, it was never, as far as recorded in Scripture, considered obligatory. And fourth, there is no evidence that the levirate resulted in polygamy.

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[1]See Midrash Rabbah Ruth 7.8; Babylonian Talmud Kethuboth 7a; Baba Bathra 91a.

[2]Wishard, 51. See also Parrinder, 26; Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 35; Davies, "Inheritance Rights and the Hebrew Levirate Marriage, Part 2," 259.

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W. White concurs, noting that the biblical levirate marriages "appear to have been monogamous."[1]

In brief then, this Old Testament study suggests that there is no scriptural proof that the levirate institution required, caused, or permitted polygamy. To the contrary, the weight of biblical evidence points to the fact that, both in its promulgation and in its practice, this system harmonized well with the rest of the models and mandates of monogamy as instituted by God at creation.

Symbolism and Marital Forms

In the latter part of the Old Testament, God's relationship to His people is often described in terms of family ties. He is called "Father" (Jer 31:9), compared with a mother (Isa 49:15), and classified as a "husband" (Isa 54:5). The use of marriage as a representation of God's relationship to His people is significant in the discussion of polygamy.

In order to better understand the importance of this figurative usage, this section briefly considers the use of polygamous marriage symbolism in the Bible. Especially significant is the marriage symbolism used in Ezek 23.

While several of those who have argued against polygamy have referred to the many times that monogamy has been used as symbolic of God's relationship

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[1]W. White, 498. See also Wishard, who observes that "in every instance the kinsman who took in marriage the widow of the deceased kinsman was unmarried," 50.

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to His people,[1] others have noted that "it is significant that on some occasions a similar context pictures Yahweh as the husband of plural wives at the same time."[2] Of the various passages noted, the one most frequently pointed out is Ezek 23:1-4:

> The word of the Lord came to me again saying,
> "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother;
> and they played the harlot in Egypt. They played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed, and there their virgin bosom was handled.
> And their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibamah her sister. And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And as for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibamah."[3]

Ezek 23 is an allegory of the disobedience of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). It tells of their lack of trust in God and their desire to seek peace and security from the great international powers of the day, Assyria and Babylon.[4]

Joseph Blenkinsopp warns that "in reading the story, all we can do is concentrate on the point of the allegory, which is Israel's history of infidelity and

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[1]See, for example, Hitchens, 129-130. Cf. Blum, 214-221. Some passages containing monogamous marriage symbolism are, Isa 54:4-6; Jer 2:2, 32; 3:1; Hos 2:19, 20.

[2]Oliver, 10. See also Bouit, 65; Robert Holst, "Polygamy and the Bible," International Review of Missions 56 (April 1967): 209-210.

[3]Other passages cited as including polygamous symbolism are Jer 3:6-10; 31:31-32; Ezek 16.

[4]Douglas Stuart, Ezekiel, The Communicator's Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1986), 220.

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failure."[1] Roland de Vaux, noting that the prophet compares Yahweh's dealing with Samaria (Israel) and Jerusalem (Judah) to a marriage with two sisters, cautions that this comparison "is merely to adapt the allegory of chapter 16 to the historical conditions which prevailed after the political schism."[2] Douglas Stuart further suggests that it is unwise to draw any unintended conclusions from an allegory that "simply makes use of that familiarity with polygamy to symbolize the history of a divided nation."[3]

Robert Hitchens rightly recognizes that this image of God's marriage to these two sisters actually "only applies the symbolism of the marriage relationship which was begun before the division of the kingdom. All Jews were still God's chosen and regarded as one people, though divided into two kingdoms."[4] If this concept were to be taken out of its figurative setting, then it would mean that God would be guilty of violating His own law of monogamy.[5]

As Stuart states, "Neither Ezekiel nor anyone in his audience would have assumed that this imagery of the Lord's two wives meant that God favored

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[1]Joseph Blenkinsopp, Ezekiel, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 99.

[2]De Vaux, 26. See also Kronholm, 70.

[3]Stuart, 223.

[4]Hitchens, 137, (footnote #11, emphasis original). See passages such as Isa 54:4-6. See also Kronholm, 70.

[5]White, "The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels: The Flood," 66. See also the studies done above on Gen 2:24 and Lev 18:18.

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polygamy."[1] In fact, if these two kingdoms were to return in faithfulness to the Lord, they would come back as one united people. Thus the illustration would end with God in a monogamous relationship with His chosen nation, just as at the first.

In brief then, the meaning of the polygamous marriage symbolism of Ezek 23 must be considered within the specific context of its use. As utilized here, the marital relationship of God to His people was symbolized in such a way as to emphasize "the iniquities of Jerusalem and Samaria and not the marriage ideal."[2] Thus, it would be inappropriate to conclude that the use of this allegory implies that God condones or sanctions polygamy in any manner.[3]

Summary of Old Testament Laws Related to Polygamy

This chapter has considered the various Old Testament legal stipulations as well as related passages that have implications for the issue of marital structures. As an introduction to this study, the issue of the concubine in Hebrew society was examined. No laws appear to have been given in connection with concubines. Biblical narratives show, with minor differences, that the concubine was seen as another wife. The concubine, therefore, seems to have been an integral part of the practice of polygamy.

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[1]Stuart, 223.

[2]Kaburuk, 17.

[3]Note that the allegory used by Jesus in Luke 16:19-31 faces similar dangers if taken literally and interpreted without a recognition of its contextual usage.

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From a study of the English translations, but more especially from a scrutiny of the Hebrew text, it appears that the laws relating to the female slave, the firstborn, and illicit sexual relations with an unengaged woman, did not either permit or promote polygamy. On the contrary, two laws do seem to prohibit the practice of polygamy. Based on the weight of evidence, this study suggests that the universally applicable law of Lev 18:18 is best rendered as the alternate NASB reading puts it: "And you shall not take a wife in addition to another to be a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness." When taken in its broader context, Deut 17:17, which prohibits the ruler from increasing wives, similarly appears to forbid all from becoming polygamous.

Taking account of all explicit statements as well as indirect indications, it was concluded that the weight of the evidence shows that in the Bible the levirate institution did not support or require the practice of polygamy. Rather, this optional custom was a regular monogamous marriage, which had as its purpose the raising up of an heir for the childless, deceased man.

A brief consideration of the marriage symbolism utilized in Ezek 23 showed that it is incorrect to take an analogy out of its context and employ it for purposes for which it was not intended. Thus, this allegory cannot be legitimately used as supposed proof of God's sanctioning of polygamy.

This chapter shows that when the crucial Old Testament passages on marital forms are contextually examined and analyzed, none of them can be seen to command or explicitly condone the practice of polygamy. On the contrary, the

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Pentateuch appears to record explicit laws forbidding the practice of polygamy. Both the prohibitions of polygamy as well as the other passages relating to marriage reveal an underlying harmony and basic accord with the monogamous marriage institution as originally established by God Himself in Eden.

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CHAPTER IV

CASE STUDIES OF POLYGAMISTS IN THE BIBLE

Any attempt to understand the phenomenon of polygamy in the Bible must of necessity take into account the numerous cases of the practice of plural marriage in the Old Testament. As noted throughout this chapter, many who have examined the lives of some of the persons who practiced polygamy have concluded that these case histories reveal that polygamy was permitted and even promoted by God.[1] This chapter sets out to reexamine these stories in order to observe whether or not an alternate understanding of these pericopes is perhaps better suited to the biblical data.

According to the biblical record, several men were involved in plural marriage. With some of these there is very little, if any, story line. Thus, it is not possible to draw from their stories any specific conclusions regarding the acceptability or rejection of the practice of polygamy. However, there is sufficient biblical material about the lives of a few polygamists to enable one to assess the manner in which polygamy was viewed by the Bible writers, or by God Himself.

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[1]See, for example, Kisaka, 45; Welch, 60; Hall, 32; Nkwoka, 147.

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As a preliminary study to the discussion of biblical materials, a short outline of polygamy in the ancient Near East is made. This provides the background from which to observe both similarities and differences between Hebrew polygamy and that of contemporary surrounding cultures.

A brief overview of the extent of the recorded practice of polygamy in the Bible is followed by a discussion of the overall purpose and reason for the inclusion of a variety of stories in Scripture. With this material as a background, the lives of polygamists of whom there is sufficient biblical information on which to draw conclusions is considered.

To conclude this chapter, a summary is made of the principles arising from this study. If valid, these principles should provide additional insights for a missiologically sound policy for determining the treatment of newly converted polygamists who request admission into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Survey of Polygamy in the Ancient Near East

This brief survey provides a general background to the biblical story. The description is limited to the practices of polygamy in near-eastern lands during Old Testament times.

The Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode (ca. 1850 B.C.) of the Sumerians includes at least four laws concerning inheritance which tacitly acknowledge the presence of a second wife or concubine.[1] According to David Hall's comparative study of

[1]See Pritchard, 160; Hall, 8.

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polygamy in the Bible and ancient near-eastern societies, "polygamy seemed to be the dominant social structure allowed under the law" in Sumeria.[1]

In Babylon, the Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1700 B.C.) similarly acknowledged and accepted polygamy under certain circumstances. If a wife did not produce any children, the husband could take a concubine.[2] If the wife became diseased, the husband was permitted to take a second wife.[3]

The Middle Assyrian Laws (ca. 1450 B.C.) took concubinage and polygamy for granted.[4] The husband could take as many concubines as he wished, regardless of his wife's fertility.[5] As one researcher concluded: "The Assyrian family was basically polygamous in character."[6] From a study of the above three societies, Hall has concluded that "polygamy in the Mesopotamian civilizations was common."[7]

The many texts recovered from ancient Egypt testify to the practice of polygamy throughout Egyptian society during the second millennium B.C. The

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[1]Hall, 11. See also Piotr Michalowski, "Royal Women of the Ur III Period; Part II: Geme-Ninlila," Journal of Cuneiform Studies 31 (1979): 171-176.

[2]Robert Francis Harper, The Code of Hammurabi, King of Babylon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904), 51; see law 143.

[3]Ibid., 53; see law 148.

[4]See Pritchard, 183, laws 40, 41.

[5]Hall, 10.

[6]I. Mendelsohn, "The Family in the Ancient Near East," The Biblical Archaeologist 11 (1948): 24.

[7]Hall, 10.

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Pharaoh was allowed to marry as many wives as he wished, including female relatives, concubines, and women acquired for political purposes.[1] While among the general populace most seem to have been monogamous due to economic reasons, it is clear that polygamy was a viable option for those who could afford it.[2]

Two other civilizations need to be mentioned, though briefly. It appears that the practice of polygamy among the Hittites resembled that of Mesopotamians.[3] Likewise, the Ugaritic literature indicates that polygamy was practiced freely in Ugarit society. For example, of twenty heads of households, five had more than one wife.[4]

In short, then, the evidence indicates that during the time that Bible characters practiced polygamy, this same marital form was permitted and practiced throughout the ancient Near East. While some civilizations placed restrictions on

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[1]See, for example, Alan R. Schulman, "Diplomatic Marriage in the Egyptian New Kingdom," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 38 (January-October 1979): 179-180. See also John A. Wilson, The Culture of Ancient Egypt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 129-130, 201.

[2]See Pierre Montet, Everyday Life in Egypt (London: Edward Arnold, 1958), 54-55; Hall, 12.

[3]See Matitiahu Tsevat, "The Husband Veils a Wife (Hittite Laws, 197-98)," Journal of Cuneiform Studies 27 (January 1975): 235-240; Hall, 12-13.

[4]A. van Selms, Marriage & Family Life in Ugaritic Literature, Pretoria Oriental Series 1 (London: Luzac & Company, 1954), 20.

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polygamy, others left it totally unrestricted.[1] As Marcus Cohn notes, polygamy was "the usual form of marriage in the Orient."[2]

Extent of Polygamy in the Bible

In his discussion of polygamy, one scholar refers to "the patriarchs, who were all polygamists."[3] Another states that "most Old Testament kings were polygamous."[4] A third notes: "It should be remembered that the span of time from Abraham to the divided monarchy was probably almost 1000 years; during which time the incidence of polygamy among the leaders of Israel recorded in Scripture was almost universal."[5] Statements such as these give the impression that polygamy was a normal and acceptable form of marriage, at least among the leaders in Israel.

Investigation of the complete scriptural record reveals a rather different picture. Of the twenty-five leaders of Israel during the above-mentioned "almost 1000 years," only the following six are clearly listed as having more than one wife: Abraham (Gen 16:1-3), Jacob (Gen 29:21-30), Gideon (Judg 8:30-31), Saul (1 Sam 14:50; 2 Sam 3:7), David (2 Sam 5:13), and Solomon (1 Kgs 11:3). Due to their numerous offspring, the following three are also assumed to have been

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[1]Hall, 15.

[2]Cohn, 370.

[3]Haring, Evangelization Today, 148.

[4]Nwankpa, 69.

[5]Oliver, 13.

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polygamous: Jair (Judg 10:3-4), Ibzan (Judg 12:8-9), and Abdon (Judg 12:13-14). Thus, nine out of twenty-five, or 36 percent, of the leaders of Israel are known or assumed to have been polygamous during the above quoted millennium--a percentage that does not appear to be "almost universal."[1]

In addition to these, there are only fifteen other possible indications of polygamy, from creation to the end of the united monarchy. These include Lamech (Gen 4:19), the antediluvians (Gen 6:1-7), Nahor (Gen 22:20-24), Esau (Gen 26:34), Eliphaz (Gen 36:12), Manasseh (1 Chr 7:14), Elkanah (1 Sam 1:2-8), Caleb (1 Chr 2:46-48), Jerahmeel (1 Chr 2:25-28), Ashhur (1 Chr 4:5), and Izrahiah, and his sons, Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah (1 Chr 7:3-4).

During the time of the divided monarchy seven of the forty kings are recorded as having been polygamous. Of the twenty kings in the Southern Kingdom of Judah six rulers are recorded as having more than one wife: Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:20-21),[2] Abijah (2 Chr 13:21), Jehoram (2 Chr 21:14-17), Joash (2 Chr 24:3), Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 24:15), and Zedekiah (Jer 38:23). Of the twenty monarchs in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, only Ahab is recorded as having had more than one wife (1 Kgs 20:3-7).

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[1]See ibid. The other sixteen leaders, not classified as polygamous, are: Isaac, Joseph, Aaron, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Samson, Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Abimelech, Tola, Jephthah, Elon, Eli, and Samuel.

[2]2 Chr 11:21 states that Rehoboam had twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters. Some English versions have interpretively rendered vs. 23 to say that Rehoboam took many wives for his sons, but the Hebrew merely says: "And/But he sought for many wives," without stating whether for himself or for his sons.

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Finally, from the Babylonian captivity onward, the only clear references to polygamy are Belshazzar, king of Babylon (Dan 5:2-3), and Ahasuerus the Persian monarch (Esth 2). During this period there is no clear instance of polygamy noted among God's people.[1] Likewise, the New Testament contains no unequivocal evidence of the practice of polygamy among Jews, Gentiles, or the developing Christian community.[2]

Thus, throughout the 4000 years of history covered by the Old and New Testaments only thirty-three reasonably clear cases of polygamy are recorded.[3] While the marital status of most of the rest of the approximately 3000 men of the Bible is not discussed, several marriages seem to be quite clearly monogamous. These include Old Testament characters like Adam, Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, Job, Isaac, Joseph, Amram, Aaron, Eli, Samuel, Ezekiel, and Hosea. Any study, therefore, of the practice of polygamy in the time of the Bible needs to be based on the record of the actual stories of biblical polygamists, rather than on generalizations, assumptions, or arguments from silence.

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[1]See Gleason L. Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 123. A survey of the Bible confirms Archer's statement.

[2]The phrase "husband of one wife," which has often been theorized as having permitted some form of polygamy in the early church, is examined in a study of New Testament passages in chapter 5.

[3]J. P. Newman gives a count of "twenty-five or thirty cases," Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 50. Kaiser has a similar count, 183.

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Ways of Viewing the Lives of Polygamists

The Bible makes no attempt to hide the practice of polygamy even among its most illustrious characters. This honest recording of the lives of people has been interpreted in different ways. Some have suggested that the examples of Scripture are to be emulated. Others have proposed a more cautious approach in interpreting these case histories. Both views are outlined here, together with the significance of each position.

The Protestant Reformer, Philip Melanchthon, stated: "Abraham, David, and other holy men had several wives; hence it is obvious that polygamy is not against divine law."[1] John Kisaka concurs, saying:

> Abraham, who took Hagar in order to have a child and avoid terrible shame, was a friend of God. Jacob, who gave dowry to Laban for his two wives, was named Israel. Both monogamists and polygamists (mentioned in the Old Testament) who loved God sincerely stood equally before God. Some of them such as Abraham, Jacob, and David were not only believers of God, but also held high responsibilities among God's people and were included among the progenitors of Jesus Christ.[2]

Another African Christian, John Mbiti, has argued in the same way that these polygamous men of Bible times had faith in God, were accepted by Him, and belonged to the company of the faithful.[3] Thus, as Gerhard Jasper emphasized:

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[1]Philip Melanchthon, Corpus Reformatorum, ed. C. G. Bretschneider (Halis Saxonum: C. A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1835; New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1963), vol. 2, col. 526.

[2]Kisaka, 45.

[3]John S. Mbiti, Love and Marriage in Africa (Essex, England: Longman, 1973), 190.

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"Polygyny is a possible way of family life sanctioned by the example of the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob and many of Israel's leaders".[1]

In other words, these authors believe that since God-fearing Bible characters practiced polygamy without any explicit verbal condemnation, this form of marriage cannot be outlawed completely. In fact, it may even be permissible within the Christian community under some circumstances.[2]

Reacting strongly to the reasoning expressed above, Samuel Wishard declares:

> It would be a monstrous assumption to conclude that all the deeds recorded in this book are right simply because found there. The sins of both good and bad men are put on record here for our warning and admonition. Their virtues are set forth for our encouragement.[3]

Echoing a similar perspective, Ellen White observed that the accounts of Scripture were written for the instruction of people, "that they may avoid the evils recorded and imitate only the righteousness of those who served the Lord."[4]

The question is, how does one determine which deeds are righteous or not, especially when there appears to be no direct propositional statements from God expressing His approval or displeasure with the practice of polygamy in the lives of almost all of these polygamists?

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[1]Jasper, 35.

[2]See Haring, Evangelization Today, 156; Hillman, 205-208.

[3]Wishard, 5. Dwight notes: "As the conduct of the best men falls far below the perfect standard of the Divine Law; it is obvious that it must be an unsafe criterion, from which to determine what the Law of God is," 24.

[4]White, Testimonies for the Church, 4:12.

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The suggestions of Walter Kaiser on this issue are worthy of observation. After an evaluation of several cases of so-called morally offensive characters and acts of people in the Old Testament, Kaiser put forward these two cautions: (1) "Commendation of a person or notable action need not imply commendation of every element of the men and women cited;"[1] (2) "Reporting or narrating an event in Scripture is not to be equated with approving, recommending, or making that action or characteristic normative for emulation by all subsequent readers."[2]

Rather than merely blindly following the examples of these people, Kaiser rightly insists that both explicit assertions as well as the immediate and broader contexts need to be taken into account. This should be done so as to distinguish between what the Scriptures actually teach and what they simply report so as to portray how far God's people drifted from Him and His holy law.[3] In other words, each narrative needs to be analyzed with regard to literary progression, dramatic structure, and stylistic features.

As each case is investigated in the rest of this chapter, several questions need to be raised. Is there any indication as to why the story was included by the biblical writer? What motivated the move into polygamy? What was the result of this marriage? What effect did it have on those involved? What comment, if any,

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[1]Kaiser, 283. For example, the silence of Scripture shows neither commendation nor condemnation of Moses for his murder of the Egyptian (Exod 2:11-15).

[2]Ibid. See, for example, the incest of Lot and his daughters, which is recorded without any word of judgment or commendation (Gen 19:30-38).

[3]Ibid.

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is made within Scripture, either as an editorial or divine assessment of that relationship? Besides directly stated comments, is there any evidence from the context as to how the polygamous marriage was viewed by either the Bible writer or by God Himself?

Taking into account these questions, the following sections attempt to outline and clarify the cases of polygamists in the Bible of whom there is sufficient information from which to draw some basic conclusions. A chronological sequence is used, starting with polygamy before the flood, and ending with the practice during the divided monarchy.

The Practice of Polygamy Before the Flood

Very little information about the lives of the antediluvians is recorded. All the data available is contained essentially in the first seven chapters of Genesis. Yet, even in this brief record, polygamy appears.

Lamech: The First Recorded Polygamist

The first record of polygamy is located in Gen 4:19-24 and reads:

> And Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah.
> And Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock.
> And his brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.
> As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.
> And Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, listen to my voice, you wives of Lamech, give heed to my speech, for I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me;
> If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

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Phillip Turley correctly observes that "Lamech is portrayed as a revengeful, murderous person, boasting of his strength."[1] Others have felt that it is significant that polygamy first appears in the reprobate line of Cain.[2] However, not all scholars agree; for example, commentator John Skinner says: "No judgment is passed on Lamech's bigamy, and probably none was intended."[3] Douglas Welch asks: "What is the point of the whole Lamech narrative to begin with?"[4] Welch continues:

> It is strange, is it not, that if the writer was protesting against the practice of polygamy that he did not explicitly pass judgment on Lamech for marrying two wives? Why set out to do so, and then write so vaguely that the readers could not be sure exactly what his intentions were?[5]

Welch's comment is interesting in light of the specific interpretational guidelines he himself suggests.[6] He correctly notes that an adequate approach to the Scripture must emphasize that any passage be understood in the light of its total context. This approach recognizes that God spoke to a specific people at a specific point in time, using "a language and other cultural symbols that carried maximum

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[1]Turley, 9.

[2]See de Vaux, 24; George Reid, "Polygamy in the Bible," Adventist Review, 24 March 1983, 11.

[3]John Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 118.

[4]Welch, 41.

[5]Ibid., 42.

[6]Ibid., 21-25.

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impact for communication."[1] Moreover, God had a specific theological purpose in mind related to the spiritual needs of the receptors of His communication. Thus, "He used linguistic forms with which the receptors felt at home."[2]

Once these basic concepts are acknowledged as biblically sound, the way becomes open for recognizing other methods of communication of approval or condemnation besides only explicit verbal statements. On this matter Clifton Maberly notes that to say the Bible is silent on polygamy "is to place too much emphasis on direct propositional statements, and far too little weight on the lesson book of sacred history."[3] With this in mind, the record of Lamech's polygamy is be considered.

First, Gen 1-4 gives the setting of the passage about Lamech. Chaps. 1 and 2 describe the creation of the world, indicating the perfect setting God provided. Almost one-fifth of these first chapters is devoted to the creation of man and woman and the establishment of a monogamous marriage. Chap. 3 relates the account of the fall of humanity into sin. Gen 4 begins the story of man living outside of the perfect setting which God had originally provided. This chapter outlines the outgrowth and consequences of Adam's sin by reporting its spread through his descendants. While in Gen 3 man's alienation from God is evident, Gen 4 portrays man's alienation from man. In this chapter the account of the first

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[1]Ibid., 21.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Maberly, "The Polygamous Marriage Variant: The Policy and Practice of a Church," (introduction), 3.

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polygamist is recorded. Thus, as Turley observes, the very negative "context casts a shadow over the propriety of polygamy as an institution."[1]

A second factor must be emphasized here. Lamech, who must not be confused with the father of Noah who had the same name, is clearly a descendant of Cain (Gen 4:17-19). As George Reid stated: "It is significant that a departure from the divine plan [of monogamous marriage] arose early in the line of rebellious Cain."[2] Polygamy arose, not among those God-fearing descendants of Seth, but rather among those who "were regardless of God, and in opposition to His purposes for man."[3]

The third and apparently most vital aspect can be observed in connection with two factors: (1) the symbolic use of the number seven in the literature of the Bible, and its significance in relation to the Lamech narrative; and (2) the special emphasis given to the accounts of Lamech on the one hand, and that of Enoch on the other hand.

In biblical literature numbers were often given symbolic use. The number seven is clearly the most significant figurative number in the entire Bible, appearing in some manner in almost six hundred passages.[4] Seven, a sacred

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[1]Turley, 10. See also Dwight, 5.

[2]Reid, 11. De Vaux notes that "polygamy first appears in the reprobate line of Cain," 24.

[3]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 81.

[4]Bruce C. Birch, "Number," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed. (1986), 3:556-561.

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number in virtually all ancient Semitic cultures,[1] played an exceptionally important role in antiquity, and in the Bible is connected with every aspect of religious life in every period. For example, "seven" is related to the pairs of clean beasts in the ark (Gen 7:2), the induction of the priests and the consecration of the altars (Exod 29:35-37), cleansing from leprosy (Lev 14), the festivals (Deut 16:9), the temple furnishings (1 Kgs 7:17), sacrifices (1 Chr 15:26), and the like.[2]

Gunther Plaut has observed that in Hebrew the word for "seven" (*šeḇaʿ*) bears a significant relation to the word for "fullness" (*śāḇaʿ*).[3] In addition to this possible linguistic link, it is evident that "the number 7 in its varied uses in the Bible expresses fullness or completeness."[4] Ellen White, who confirms that this number is symbolic, says: "The number 7 indicates completeness."[5] Thus,

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[1]Ibid., 559.

[2]Israel Abrahams, "Numbers, Typical and Important," Encyclopaedia Judaica (1971), 12:1254-1261.

[3]W. Gunther Plaut, "Numbers in Mysticism," The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia (1942), 8:249-251.

[4]Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (1979), s.v. "Seven." See also Gunner, who says that seven "is associated with completion, fulfilment, and perfection." R. A. H. Gunner, "Number," The New Bible Dictionary, (1962), 898. See also Richard Hess, "Lamech in the Genealogies of Genesis," Bulletin for Biblical Research 1 (1991), 22. For examples of this, see Gen 2:2: "And by the seventh day God completed His work," the seven day feasts (Exod 12:15, 19; Num 29:12); the seven churches of Revelation (Rev 2, 3); the complete possession of Mary by seven demons (Luke 8:2).

[5]Ellen G. White, The Acts of the Apostles (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 585. Evidently, Jesus Christ understood and used the number seven in a symbolic manner on at least two occasions. See Matt 18:21, 22; Luke 17:4.

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understanding the significance of this number, a reading the story of Lamech reveals several vital points.

By following the Jewish method of inclusive reckoning, Lamech is shown to be the seventh generation from Adam through the line of Cain.[1] Also, as Richard Hess points out, the numbers seven and seventy-seven in Lamech's poem "suggest Lamech's own status as seventh in the line from Adam."[2] Likewise, a listing of the family line shows that Enoch was also the seventh generation from Adam but through the line of Seth.[3] The distinction is clear: Lamech, in Cain's lineage, as contrasted with Enoch in Seth's lineage.[4]

Moreover, while only genealogical data are given concerning the other ancestors from the second generation onwards after Abel's death, "Lamek [sic], as the seventh from Adam, occupies a significant place in the genealogy, so more details of his life are noted."[5] Similarly, Enoch is seventh in the line of Seth, and

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[1]These are: Adam, Cain, Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methushael, and Lamech. Ryle rightly calls Lamech "the seventh of the Cainite line," 79.

[2]Hess, 22.

[3]These are: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, and Enoch (Gen 5:5-18). That the generations are counted inclusively, from Adam to Enoch, is verified by Jude 14, which calls Enoch the "seventh" from Adam.

[4]For an extensive compilation of data related to the significance of the seventh generation in genealogies, see Jack M. Sasson, "A Genealogical 'Convention' in Biblical Chronography?" Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 90 (1978): 171-185.

[5]Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 112.

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while no details about other men are given, "important material concerning Enoch was remembered."[1]

The contrasts between these two men of the seventh generation are evident: While Lamech was a descendant of Cain who "went out from the presence of the Lord" (Gen 4:16), Enoch "walked with God" (Gen 5:21); while Lamech was a violent man who took human life (Gen 4:23-24), Enoch was a man of faith to whom was given eternal life (Gen 5:24; cf. Heb 11:5); while Lamech was a polygamist (Gen 4:19), Enoch was known as a prophet (Jude 14).

Enoch, as a righteous man in the seventh generation, represents a completion and fulfillment of a life totally dedicated to God.[2] Lamech, as an unrighteous man in the seventh generation, demonstrates the complete corruption of one who lives separated from God. As Marcus Dods observed: "It is in Lamech the tendency culminates and in him the issue of all this brilliant but godless life is seen."[3] Lamech is listed as a murderer and a polygamist.[4] Both of these actions are clearly antithetical to Gen 1 and 2, where God is the One who

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[1]Sasson, 175.

[2]For more on the "godly character" of Enoch, see White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 88.

[3]Marcus Dods, The Book of Genesis, The Expositor's Bible (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1908), 50.

[4]See White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 81.

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not only gives life, but also the originator of the monogamous marital pattern.[1]

According to Ellen White, Lamech sinned in becoming polygamous:

> In the beginning God gave to Adam one wife, thus showing his order. He never designed that man should have a plurality of wives. Lamech was the first who departed in this respect from God's wise arrangement. . . . This was one of the great sins of the inhabitants of the old world.[2]

In addition, it is interesting to note that this seventh-generation expression of living in opposition to God brings to a full end the genealogical listing of the descendants of Cain. As Richard Hess observes: "The association of the number 7 with Lamech implies that the line of Cain comes to an end with this figure."[3] Even though they apparently continued to have offspring, no descendants are listed after the mention of Lamech's children.[4]

In brief then, an understanding of Lamech's polygamy must take the following into account: (1) its setting in a chapter that stresses man's alienation from man; (2) the fact that Lamech is listed as part of Cain's rebellious line; (3) the symbolic significance of Lamech being the seventh generation from Adam, thus representing the "climax of the self-sufficiency to which the line of Cain has

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[1]Menahem Kasher notes that the term "two wives" is especially mentioned, since this action was a departure from the ideal expounded in Gen 2:24. Menahem M. Kasher, Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Harry Freedman (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1953), 160. Dwight says Lamech "violated" the "Law of Marriage," 13.

[2]White, The Story of Redemption, 75-76.

[3]Hess, 22.

[4]Derek Kidner comments that, after the boastful statement of Lamech, "the family disappears from the story," Derek Kidner, Genesis, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 78.

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been tending;"[1] (4) the distinct contrast with the righteous Enoch, seventh from Adam through Seth's line;[2] (5) the mention of murder and polygamy in contrast to the creation of life, and the institution of monogamy in Gen 1 and 2; and (6) the ending of the genealogical listing with Lamech's children.

Polygamy and the Worldwide Flood

There has been considerable debate on whether or not the Bible indicates that, besides Lamech, others practiced polygamy prior to the great worldwide flood of Noah's time. Gen 6:1-3, 11-13 describes the corruption of the antediluvians:

> Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them,
> that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.
> Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."
> Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence.
> And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.
> Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth."

Some have felt that one of the contributing factors to the depravity of humanity was the practice of polygamy.[3] However, this conclusion has been

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[1]Dods, 50.

[2]Ibid., 51.

[3]See, for example, John Kitto, ed., A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, OH: Mark H. Newman, 1845), 2:306.

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challenged.[1] For example, Welch states that in the text it is neither stated nor implied that the marriages between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" were polygamous.[2] Thus, he maintains: "We must conclude that any attempt to establish a causal relationship between polygamy and the Flood is not warranted by the text itself."[3]

The phrase in contention is located at the end of Gen 6:2 and reads literally, "and they took for them wives of all whom they chose." Most versions render this clause similar to the NASB: "And they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose." But, as Robert Jamieson remarks, "the phrase 'took them wives of all which they chose' evidently implies something very different from the simple exercise of a free choice."[4] Jamieson concludes that this phrase indicates the practice of polygamy.[5] This understanding is clear in the Jerusalem Bible: "So they married as many as they chose."[6] This translation appears to be a legitimate rendering of the passage under consideration.

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[1]See, for example, Buthelezi, 59; Welch, 43-44.

[2]Welch, 43. While it is recognized that the intermarriage between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" was part of the problem, this issue is not discussed here since it is not germane to the problem of polygamy. On the question of mixed marriages, see White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 81-82.

[3]Ibid., 44.

[4]Jamieson, Genesis-Deuteronomy, 88 (emphasis added).

[5]Ibid.

[6]The NJB similarly states: "And married as many of them as they chose."

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Other biblical scholars also understand this phrase as a reference to polygamy. For instance, David Clines renders it, "taking for themselves wives of as many women as they chose."[1] David Atkinson concurs: "Here the 'sons of God' take as many as they choose."[2] Based on this phrase in Gen 6:2, Emil Kraeling concluded: "A polygamous situation is implied in these words."[3] Dwight goes a step further and says: "The fact, that Polygamy became general, or that men took them wives of all whom they chose, is here obviously assigned as the cause of that universal corruption and violence, which occasioned the Deluge."[4] Ellen White understood this passage similarly:

> When men began to multiply upon the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, they took them wives of all which they chose. This was one of the great sins of the inhabitants of the old world, which brought the wrath of God upon them. This custom was practiced after the flood, and became so common that even righteous men fell into the practice, and had a plurality of wives.[5]

Walter Kaiser, in basic agreement with the above perspective, directly expresses the link between polygamy and the flood: "It was precisely because of man's autocratic and polygamous ways that God destroyed the earth with a flood. That

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[1]David J. A. Clines, "The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6:1-4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History' (Genesis 1-11)," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 13 (July 1979): 36.

[2]David Atkinson, The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 131.

[3]Emil G. Kraeling, "The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1-4," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 6 (October 1947): 197.

[4]Dwight, 6.

[5]White, Spirit of Prophecy, 1:93.

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could hardly be construed as tacit divine approval of polygamy--it is the reverse!"[1]

The biblical record is plain that Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth were all monogamists at the time of the flood. On the contrary, polygamists were judged and destroyed by the flood. Ellen White highlights this, by discussing Noah's monogamous marriage and his preservation in the ark in contrast with polygamy. In fact, she notes that these antediluvians "would not leave off their sins, but continued in their polygamy,"[2] and were thus exterminated.

The scrutiny of the pre-flood records thus indicates two references to the practice of polygamy. In the case of Lamech, the record explicitly notes that he took two wives. The chronicle of Lamech indicates that polygamy was part of the corruption of Cain's line, constituting a sinful perversion of God's plan for marriage, and thus condemned as unacceptable.[3] The second reference, though not as explicit, nevertheless suggests plural marriage. If so, the direct judgment of God on the practice of polygamy is much more clearly expressed, by means of a worldwide flood.

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[1]Kaiser, 183.

[2]White, Spiritual Gifts, 3:67.

[3]See White, The Story of Redemption, 75-76.

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Abraham: The Friend of God[1]

Throughout the four centuries that followed the flood, the Bible records no evidence of polygamous marriages. The first mention of post-flood polygamy appears in the family of God-fearing Abraham.[2] Since Abraham was specially chosen by God to become the head of the nation through whom all of the world would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3), the plural marriage of this man needs to be carefully analyzed.[3] Also, since he is the first recorded righteous man to have become polygamous after the flood, the manner in which his polygamy was viewed and treated could provide vital insights for understanding and dealing with other cases of polygamy.

This section deals with several aspects of the marriages of Abraham. First, the amount of knowledge Abraham had about God's will for marriage is assessed. Second, the timing of the call of God is noted. Third, the reasons for Abraham's move into polygamy are discussed. Fourth, the dissolution of his marriage with Hagar is dealt with. Lastly, a short summary is made.

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[1]See Jas 2:23; cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Isa 41:8.

[2]Throughout this project, except where direct quotations require otherwise, the name Abraham is used for the patriarch, even though this was his name only after it was changed in Gen 17:5. His wife, is referred to as Sarah, except as necessitated in direct quotations.

[3]The importance of Abraham in the biblical record can be seen from the fact that his story covers numerous chapters in Genesis, from 11:26-25:11.

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Abraham's Awareness of the Will of God

At the time when Abraham came onto the scene of history, there was apparently no written code defining the requirements of God relating to marriage. The specific statutes outlawing polygamy were encoded centuries later, during the time of Moses.[1] Thus the question arises as to whether or not Abraham was aware of any divine regulations regarding marital relations when he took in Hagar as a second wife.

A check of the genealogical record indicates that Abraham was the tenth generation from the monogamous Noah, who, together with his family, was saved in the ark. Accepting these genealogical records as complete,[2] it becomes evident that Noah's son, Shem, was four hundred and fifty years old when Abraham was born.[3] Thus, it seems as though these two men were actually contemporaries for one hundred and fifty years until the death of Shem at the age of six hundred (Gen 11:10, 11). If so, then Abraham may have learned firsthand from one who had

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[1]See, for example, the study in chapter 3 of this project on Lev 18:18, and Deut 17:17.

[2]For further data on the reliability of these records as provided in the Masoretic Text, see H. David Clark, "The Genealogies of Genesis Five and Eleven" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1967); Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 and Their Alleged Babylonian Background," Andrews University Seminary Studies 16 (Autumn 1978): 361-374; idem, "Genesis 5 and 11: Chronogenealogies in the Biblical History of Beginnings," Origins 7 (1980): 23-27; idem, "The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11," Origins 7 (1980): 53-70.

[3]See Gen 11:10-12:4; Acts 7:4.

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survived God's judgment on sin, including polygamy, the will of God concerning marriage. As Ellen White notes:

> God has ever preserved a remnant to serve Him. Adam, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, in unbroken line, had preserved from age to age the precious revealings of His will. The son of Terah [i.e., Abraham] became the inheritor of this holy trust. . . . [God] communicated His will to Abraham, and gave him a distinct knowledge of the requirements of His law and of the salvation that would be accomplished through Christ.[1]

Thus, from the genealogical evidence that the lifespan of Shem and Abraham overlapped, and as corroborated by the observations of White, it would become clear that Abraham knew the requirements of God's law and this presumably included the divine will regarding marital forms. The following questions then naturally arise: If Abraham was aware of the divine mandate concerning monogamy, why did he take a second wife? How did God, who earlier had punished the antediluvian polygamists, now deal with Abraham's polygamy? A study of the sequence of events in the life of Abraham helps to shed light on these queries, as well as to observe both the results of polygamy, and the final resolution of the issue.

The Timing of the Call of God

At the age of seventy-five Abraham received a special call from God (Gen 12:4). He was asked to leave his relatives and his country and move to an unspecified destination where God would bless him and make of him a great nation (Gen 12:1-3). At the time, while Abraham was committed to a monogamous

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 125.

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marriage to Sarah, God summoned him. As Samuel Wishard notes: "[God] chose the man Abraham, the man with only one wife."[1]

Abraham obeyed and went forth, erecting altars and worshiping God as he began his journey.[2] Both before his journey began and throughout the next several years God repeated the special promise He made to Abraham, as recorded in Gen 12:2-3:

> "And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing.
> And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."[3]

However, Abraham faced two major hurdles: Until this time he had no children and his wife Sarah was infertile (Gen 11:30). Thus, the promise God had made to the monogamous Abraham seemed impossible of being fulfilled.

The Move into Polygamy

At this stage, after waiting for several years for the fulfillment of the promise of a son, Sarah suggested to Abraham that he take Hagar as a wife in order to bear children. Gen 16:1-4 records this incident:

> Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar.
> So Sarah said to Abram, "Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

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[1]Wishard, 14.

[2]See, for example, Gen 12:7, 8; 13:18.

[3]The same promise concerning his having many descendants is repeated in Gen 13:15-17; 15:4-5.

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> And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife.
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> And Abram went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.

That Hagar was taken as a "wife" in a polygamous situation, and not just for cohabitation for the purpose of having a son, is evident from the passage. Vs. 3 points out that Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham "as a wife." The Hebrew term used here, *lô lᵉ⊃iššāh*, is often used to describe a regular marriage.[1] As Ellen White put it: "It was at Sarah's earnest request that he had married Hagar."[2] Also, the fact that vs. 2 notes that Sarah wanted Hagar to have "children" for her may suggest that this was planned to be a long-term arrangement.

Gerhard Jasper shows that in this action, "Abram followed a common legally recognized way when he accepted Hagar as concubine from the hands of his wife Sarai."[3] R. K. Harrison asserts that, "in accepting this polygamous relationship Abraham was acceding to local custom rather than obeying the divine decree or trusting God's promise to him concerning descendants."[4] Ellen White concurs on both these points.

> Abraham had accepted without question the promise of a son, but he did not wait for God to fulfill His word in His own time and way. A delay was

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[1]See Gen 25:1, 20; 28:6; Deut 21:11; 24:3; 25:5; 1 Sam 25:39, 40; Jer 16:2; Hos 1:2.

[2]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 145 (emphasis added).

[3]Jasper, 43.

[4]Harrison, "Polygamy."

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permitted, to test his faith in the power of God; but he failed to endure the trial.[1]

In the same paragraph she states: "Polygamy had become so widespread that it had ceased to be regarded as a sin, but it was no less a violation of the law of God."[2] It was this lack of faith in God, as well as a reliance on surrounding customs at the expense of the divine law that resulted in the birth of Ishmael.[3] Even though God later told Abraham that He would also make a great nation out of Ishmael's descendants, He would not accept Ishmael as the one to fulfill the special promise made earlier to Abraham (Gen 17:18-20).

After turning down Abraham's appeal to make Ishmael the son of promise, "God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him'" (Gen 17:19). God, when speaking to Abraham, repeatedly referred to Sarah as "your wife,"[4] possibly in order to stress the fact that Sarah, Abraham's original wife, was to bear the son of promise.

This designation of Sarah as Abraham's wife is clearly contrasted with the manner in which Hagar is referred to. When the angel of the Lord spoke to

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 145.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Though Abraham drifted from God at this time in the matter of his polygamous union, God continued to communicate with him and to shower His transforming grace on him (see Gen 17, 18).

[4]See Gen 17:15, 19; 18:9, 10. White points out that this promise "was given, in words that could not be mistaken: 'Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed,'" White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 146.

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Hagar he used the phrase "Sarai's maid" (Gen 16:8); and later when God spoke to Abraham, He called Hagar "your maid" (Gen 21:12). Never once is God or the angel recorded as referring to Hagar as Abraham's "wife." Various writers have recognized this careful use of language.[1] As one of these noted: "While Sarah gave Hagar 'to be a wife,' God did not recognize her as a wife."[2] This distinction of terminology seems to imply that, even though the marriage was accepted by society, God did not recognize the polygamous alliance of Abraham and Hagar as a legitimate and valid marriage.[3]

The biblical account indicates that the peace of Abraham's home was largely destroyed because of this polygamous union (Gen 16:4-6).[4] When Hagar became pregnant she turned proud and boastful, and treated Sarah with contempt. Sarah dealt so harshly with her that she fled into the wilderness. While there, the angel of the Lord met her by a spring of water and said, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority" (Gen 16:9).

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[1]See, for example, William H. Crabbs, "Malachi 2:15-16: Divorce or Polygamy" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1979), 19; Wishard, 19-21; Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 50.

[2]Elbert Smith, 25.

[3]See ibid., 21.

[4]See also White, The Story of Redemption, 76. White states that the evil that resulted from this polygamy went far beyond Abraham's immediate household and affected later generations, as history indicates. Regarding Ishmael, White says: "The powerful nation descended from him were a turbulent, heathen people, who were ever an annoyance and affliction to the descendants of Isaac," White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 174.

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It has been conjectured that if God were against plural marriage, He would not have had the angel instruct Hagar to return to the household of Abraham, thus apparently restoring the polygamous family.[1] However, this assumption ignores two important statements made by the angel. First, the record indicates that the angel addressed her as "Hagar, Sarai's maid" (Gen 16:8), thus purposefully seeking "to remind her of her position and duty."[2] Second, by informing her to "return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority" (Gen 16:9), the angel indicated to her that she was to go back, not as Abraham's second wife, but rather in the role she had formerly held, that of a submissive servant. Thus, Hagar's return was not for the purpose of reestablishing or continuing polygamy. Rather, she was to return only as a servant.

Termination of the Polygamous Union

After the birth of Ishmael (Gen 16:16), the biblical record is silent about what happened to Hagar and Ishmael for the next thirteen years. Since no more children were born to Abraham and Hagar, it could be assumed that they discontinued their polygamous marriage. However, it is equally possible that a polygamous relationship was resumed some time after Hagar returned from her flight into the wilderness. That this second option is the more likely is hinted in the text.

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[1]See, for example, Senyonjo, 54.

[2]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 145.

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When Abraham was one hundred years old, Isaac, the son of promise was born to Sarah. On the day of his weaning, Sarah caught Ishmael openly making fun of Isaac (Gen 21:9).[1] Immediately she appealed to Abraham to "drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac" (Gen 21:10).

Whereas once before Abraham had listened to Sarah's advice and had taken Hagar as a wife, this time he was greatly distressed and did not immediately follow her suggestion, but rather relied on God for what to do next. The Scripture says: "But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named'" (Gen 21:12). Thus obeying God, Abraham sent away Hagar and Ishmael.[2]

This is the clearest instance in the entire Bible in which direct instruction is given concerning the breaking up of a polygamous family unit.[3] Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away after God had confirmed Sarah's suggestion (Gen 21:10). As Elbert Smith stated: "God did not command Abraham to go into polygamy; he

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[1]Ibid., 146.

[2]Ibid., 146, 147.

[3]However, it has been argued that the passage sets no real precedent for the sending away of a polygamously married spouse, since Hagar was sent away at Sarah's request. Thus, it is said, if the first wife does not mind having additional wives, then the polygamous unit can be maintained intact. See Kistler, 118. This argument, however, ignores the fact that it was only after God had confirmed Sarah's suggestion that Abraham ceased his polygamy.

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commanded him to come out of polygamy."[1] This step was taken "by the express direction of God."[2]

From this sending away of Hagar, Ellen White draws some important conclusions: This "instruction given to Abraham touching the sacredness of the marriage relation was to be a lesson for all ages."[3] Furthermore,

> If God had sanctioned polygamy, He would not have thus directed Abraham to send away Hagar and her son. He would teach all a lesson in this, that the rights of the marriage relation are to be ever respected and guarded, even at a great sacrifice. Sarah was the first and only true wife of Abraham. She was entitled to rights, as a wife and mother, which no other could have in the family.[4]

Even though Abraham's heart was "heavy with unspoken grief,"[5] "his love for Ishmael or Hagar ought not to stand in the way, for only thus [by sending these two away] could he restore harmony and happiness to his family."[6] Clearly then, as the Scripture points out, it was by God's instruction that Abraham "returned to a state of monogamy."[7]

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[1]Elbert Smith, 25 (emphasis original).

[2]Henry Callaway, Polygamy, a Bar to Admission into the Christian Church (Durban, South Africa: John O. Browne, 1862), 78.

[3]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 147 (emphasis added).

[4]White, The Story of Redemption, 80.

[5]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 147.

[6]Ibid., 146.

[7]Grout, 10.

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It might appear from this incident that God actually condoned and, in fact, called for a divorce--a practice clearly contrary to His will for marriage.[1] Closer examination of the entire pericope, however, indicates the consistency of God's actions in this matter. As indicated above, God only recognized Sarah as Abraham's "wife," while never considering Hagar as such. Thus, since "Sarah was the first and only true wife of Abraham,"[2] his alliance with Hagar was evidently not a valid marriage in God's sight. The command to send away Hagar was therefore not tantamount to divorce, but rather it was the dissolving of an unacceptable relationship.

It seems significant that God did not call Abraham to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah while he was still involved in practicing polygamy. It appears that Abraham was only in a position to pass the ultimate test of loyalty when he had ended his polygamous liaison with Hagar.[3]

The Final Years of Abraham's Life

Once Abraham had buried Sarah, he sent the chief servant of his household to find a wife for his son Isaac (Gen 24:4). In this command to find "a wife" and not "wives" was an implicit call to monogamy. In this matter Isaac appears to have lived in accordance with his father's admonition and with God's

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[1]See, for example, Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12.

[2]White, The Story of Redemption, 80.

[3]Compare Gen 21:14 with Gen 22.

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requirements. The monogamous household of Isaac was "regarded as a model in later Jewish tradition."[1]

After the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah is recorded, the writer of Genesis notes: "Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah" (Gen 25:1). Some have suggested that Keturah was actually a secondary wife whom Abraham married before Sarah's death.[2] However, the Bible records his marriage after the death of Sarah (Gen 25:1).[3] Abraham lived another thirty-eight years after the death of Sarah, which was sufficient time to get a new wife and have the six additional children born to him (Gen 25:2).[4] Wishard rightly posits that "there is not therefore the slightest evidence that this marriage was in contravention of the divine law--one wife for one husband."[5]

The first part of Gen 25:6 reads: "But to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living." This passage has been understood by some to mean that Abraham was polygamous throughout his lifetime. Nothing

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[1]The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia, 1966 ed., s.v. "Polygamy."

[2]See, for example, The New Unger's Bible Dictionary (1988), s.v. "Keturah;" Augustus Stiles Carrier and Ovid R. Sellers, "Keturah," A New Standard Bible Dictionary, 3d rev. ed. (1936), 492.

[3]See also W. Baur, "Keturah," The International Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed. (1986), 3:10; SDA Bible Commentary, 1:366.

[4]This age calculation comes from a comparison of Gen 17:17; 23:1; and 25:8.

[5]Wishard, 24.

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in the biblical story supports this view. On the contrary, "the concubines" spoken of in this text may have been Hagar and Keturah.

Even though Hagar is nowhere else specifically referred to as a concubine, the story of her marriage to Abraham indicates that she was treated as one. Keturah, on the other hand, even though called a wife in Gen 25:1, is referred to as a "concubine" in 1 Chr 1:32. As noted earlier in the examination of the concubine in Hebrew society, the terms "wife" and "concubine" were used interchangeably, except when referring to the original wife. Thus these concubines are "evidently Keturah and Hagar."[1]

The statement, "to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living" (Gen 25:6), provides a good model of how a father is to take responsibility for his children's welfare. Abraham did not simply abandon his offspring. As one commentary put it: "He was in a position to give each of these seven sons a number of servants and some of his flocks."[2]

Several facts can be learned from the study of the polygamy of Abraham. First, Abraham was monogamous when God selected him to become the head of a special people. Second, he was apparently aware of God's requirements

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[1]M. Newman, "Keturah," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962), 3:8. See also the following who hold a similar view: SDA Bible Commentary, 1:367; Rabin, 362; de Vaux, 24; Baur, 10; Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, 1975 ed., s.v. "Keturah." In addition there is a Jewish view that suggests that Hagar and Keturah are the same person, but with a different name. Kasher, 3:225-227, 244. This view though, does not have clear linguistic support in the Old Testament.

[2]SDA Bible Commentary, 1:367.

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concerning marriage, but due to a lack of trust in divine power he violated God's law by marrying a second wife. Third, the result of this union was discord and strife in the family. Fourth, God did not accept this as a marriage, but insisted that Sarah was Abraham's first and only true wife. Fifth, God's call for the dissolving of this polygamous alliance by sending away the second wife and her son was not equal to divorce, but rather the disintegration of an illicit union. This method of resolving a polygamous union was to be more than merely of local application. As White remarks, it was of worldwide scope, and was to provide timeless guidance for all ages and all peoples as to how to resolve the issue of polygamy.[1] Sixth, only after Abraham forsook polygamy and returned to monogamy did God call on him to sacrifice and worship at the site of the future temple. Seventh, for the rest of his life Abraham appears to have refrained from polygamy, even arranging for Isaac to marry only one wife. And eighth, as a loving father, Abraham made sure that all of his children were properly cared for.

Jacob: Patriarch of the Twelve Tribes

In his thesis on polygamy in the Old Testament, Phillip Turley asserts that "probably more insight on the relationships within a polygamous household is available from the life of Jacob than anyone else."[2] This, together with the fact

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[1]White, The Story of Redemption, 80; idem, Patriarchs and Prophets, 147.

[2]Turley, 22. The life story of Jacob can be found in Gen 25:21-50:13.

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that Jacob became the father of the men who were the progenitors of the tribes of Israel, provides sufficient reason to investigate the marital life of this man.

Clifton Maberly states that in the Bible "it is not recorded that God ever required Jacob to put away one of his wives."[1] Instead, Maberly maintains, "God renewed His covenant with a man in polygamy."[2] John Mbiti similarly posits that, as a polygamist, Jacob was fully accepted by God.[3] In order to ascertain the accuracy of statements such as these, Jacob's life is closely examined. First, the account of Jacob's polygamous unions is considered. Second, the encounter with the unknown assailant at the Jabbok river is discussed. Third, the biblical data relating to Jacob's marital status after his transformation is outlined. Fourth, God's call for Jacob to go to Bethel to worship there is addressed. Finally, a summary brings together the lessons seen from a study of the life of this patriarch.

Reasons for and Results of Polygamy

After Isaac had blessed Jacob, he instructed him to go to Paddan-aram in order to find a wife from the daughters of Laban (Gen 28:2). This appears to have been a strictly monogamous charge, given by a man who, even though his wife had been unable to bear children for twenty years, had chosen to wait on the Lord rather than to become polygamous in order to have offspring (Gen 25:20-26).

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[1]Maberly, "The Polygamous Marriage Variant: The Policy and Practice of a Church," 12.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Mbiti, 190.

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On his way to Laban's home, while still unmarried, God appeared to him in a dream. The promise that God had made to Abraham was now repeated to Jacob: "'The land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, . . . and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed'" (Gen 28:13, 14).

Turley properly points out that "polygamy was not Jacob's plan."[1] It was his sincere desire and intention to marry only Rachel, the beautiful woman he loved (Gen 29:18-25). After he had served seven years for Rachel, a wedding feast was held. However, in the evening of the first day of the wedding celebrations, Laban, apparently under cover of darkness and with the connivance of Leah, tricked Jacob into sleeping with her instead of Rachel.[2] Jacob thought that the woman he slept with that night was Rachel. As Gen 29:25 notes: "So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah!"

When Jacob remonstrated with Laban about this cruel deception, Laban told him that "it is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one" (Gen 29:26 NIV). At Laban's suggestion,[3] and in line with the accepted customs of the people, Jacob took both Rachel and Leah as his wives,

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[1]Turley, 23. See also Dwight, 7.

[2]White says: "The fact that Leah was herself a party to the cheat, caused Jacob to feel that he could not love her," Patriarchs and Prophets, 189.

[3]See Elbert Smith, who notes: "Thus came Jacob into polygamy by the duplicity of a Godless but crafty father-in-law. . . . God nowhere appears in the whole entourage," 25.

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even though this action was actually contrary to his father's counsel as well as in violation of the divinely established law of monogamy.[1]

Soon, due to the persuasion of these two sister-wives, Jacob began to cohabit with the two maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah, in order to produce offspring for Rachel and Leah (Gen 30:3-13). Over the course of several years, twelve sons and at least one daughter were born from this plural marriage.

In time certain less desirable results of polygamy became manifest in the household. The Genesis account lucidly documents the strife and tension between Rachel and Leah (Gen 30:1-16).[2] Also, it records the resultant disposition of the children who grew up in this environment (Gen 34:13-31; 37:2-34). Commenting on the consequences of plural marriage in this home, Ellen White states:

> The envy and jealousy which were cherished by the several mothers making the family relation very unhappy, were instilled by word and example into the minds and hearts of the children, who grew up revengeful, jealous, and uncontrollable. They would not endure provocation, for they had too long cherished hatred and revenge. These evils will ever be found to be the result of polygamy.[3]

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[1]Dwight notes that Jacob violated the "Original Law of Marriage," 13. Even though Jacob apparently drifted away from God at this point, God did not forsake him (see Gen 31:3-13, 24, 42).

[2]See Wishard, who enumerates the struggles between the two wives, 30-31.

[3]White, "The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels: Jacob and Joseph," The Signs of the Times, 18 December 1879, 377. See also Turley, who notes the evil results of polygamy in Jacob's home, 24-26.

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In addition to the effects on the mothers and children, the polygamy of Jacob made his own life bitter and darkened it with grief and anxiety.[1] The record simply says that Jacob "loved Rachel more than Leah" (Gen 29:30); in fact, "Leah was unloved" (Gen 29:31).

The Divine Encounter at the Jabbok

After Jacob had spent twenty years living in Paddan-aram (Gen 31:41), God called him to return to the land of his fathers and to his relatives (Gen 31:3). Jacob obeyed this summons and set out with his large household. On this journey back to his homeland Jacob underwent an important experience.

As a young man Jacob had cunningly been able to purchase the birthright from his starving brother Esau (Gen 25:29-34; 27:36). Later on, by means of deliberate deception, he managed to get his father to pronounce the birthright blessing on him (Gen 27:18-36). After fleeing for his life, he became involved in the practice of polygamy (Gen 29:21-30:12). Next, he slyly worked to ensure that the strongest of Laban's flocks would be his (Gen 30:25-43). Until the time of his encounter with the angel, Jacob's two greatest problems seem to have been deceit and polygamy.

While alone on one side of the Jabbok river, Jacob was attacked at night by an unknown assailant. He wrestled until daybreak, when the stranger "touched the socket of his thigh" (Gen 32:25), injuring him severely. At this point Jacob

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[1]See Gen 47:9. Cf. White, Spiritual Gifts, 3:170; idem, Patriarchs and Prophets, 208-209.

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realized that he had been struggling with a divine being (Gen 32:30), an angel according to a later Old Testament writer (Hos 12:4).[1] He clung to the supernatural personage seeking a special blessing. He received the blessing, and his name was changed from Jacob to Israel (Gen 32:26-29).[2]

The significance of the name change must not be overlooked. Many examples in Scripture indicate that people's names were often closely related to their most outstanding characteristics,[3] or to important incidents in their lives.[4] The changing of a name was often associated with a radical transition in life.[5] In the case under consideration, no longer was his name to be Jacob, "the deceiver" (Gen 27:35, 36). Instead, he was to be called Israel, "for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed" (Gen 32:28).[6] In other words, the change in name represented a transformation in character for Jacob.

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[1]One Jewish tradition holds that God "sent the angel Michael to strive with him," Kasher, 4:151; see also, 152, 252, 253. Ellen White further identifies this being: "It was Christ; the Angel of the covenant, who had revealed Himself to Jacob," White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 197.

[2]See also White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 197-198.

[3]See, for example, Nabal, the "fool" (1 Sam 25:25), and Solomon, the man of "peace" (1 Chr 22:9).

[4]See, for example, the names and meanings of Jacob's sons in Gen 29:32-30:24.

[5]See, for example, the child of promise who was born only after Abram became Abraham, and Sarai became Sarah (Gen 17:5-16; 21:1-8). A similar radical change takes place when Saul becomes Paul (Acts 13).

[6]See also Hos 12:4: "Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed."

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Evidently, Jacob did become an overcomer, living in an honest way, in contrast with his previous lifestyle. For example, he now dealt openly and non-deceptively with the Shechemites, even though he had been wronged (Gen 34). The encounter with the angel indicated a significant moment of transition in his life.

Too much may be read into what actually happened when the angel "touched the socket of his thigh" (Gen 32:25). However, perhaps the greater peril is in not giving enough attention to this expression. Bible scholars recognize that the "thigh" (*yārēk*) is sometimes used in the Old Testament as a euphemism for male sexual or procreative organs.[1] In a linguistic study of the Hebrew words translated as "socket of the thigh," and "sinew of the hip" (Gen 32:25-32), Stanley Gevirtz has shown that the literal "hand of the thigh" indicated the penis, while the "sinew" of the hip referred to the male genitalia.[2]

This is the place that the angel was said to have "touched." Adam Clarke notes that the Hebrew term used here, *nāgaᶜ*, "often signifies to smite with

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[1]See, for example, Gen 46:26; Exod 1:5; Num 5:21-29. See also commentators such as Gordon J. Wenham, Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 84; Walter Brueggemann, Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 270; Walter Riggans, Numbers, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 50; Jacob Milgrom, Numbers, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 41.

[2]Stanley Gevirtz, "Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford," Hebrew Union College Annual 46 (1975): 52, 53.

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violence."[1] Commenting on this "touch" of the angel, Nahum Sarna says that he delivered "a sudden, powerful blow."[2] Walter Brueggemann points out that this was "no minor injury."[3] Furthermore, he notes: "It is not impossible that the damage to the 'thigh' means Jacob was assaulted in his vital organs."[4] This injury was evidently so severe that approximately a decade passed before Jacob had another child.[5]

This action of the divine being had special significance for Jacob. Christopher Wordsworth suggests that, "the thigh was touched, because there was his weakness, and there also was his strength."[6] This blow to his reproductive organs could be interpreted as indicative of divine disapproval of his polygamy--a powerful non-verbal form of communication.

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[1]Adam Clarke, The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testament: (Authorized Translation) Including the Marginal Readings and Parallel Texts, with a Commentary and Critical Notes, 6 vols., rev. ed., edited by Thornley Smith (Salisbury Square, England: Ward, Lock & Co., 1881), 1:comment on Gen 32:25 (emphasis original). See, for example, Gen 12:17; Josh 8:15; 2 Kgs 15:5; Job 1:19; Isa 53:4.

[2]Sarna, Genesis, 227.

[3]Brueggemann, Genesis, 270.

[4]Ibid.

[5]A study of Gen 34 and the surrounding passages indicates that "Jacob may easily have spent from eight to eleven years in Succoth," Keil and Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 1:311.

[6]Wordsworth, vol. 1, part 1, 138 (emphasis original).

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Marital Status after the Encounter

Several lines of biblical evidence suggest that from this time onwards Jacob forsook his polygamous lifestyle. First, whereas prior to this encounter, the Scripture repeatedly mentions that Jacob had sexual intercourse with all four of these women,[1] after this change in his life there is no mention of conjugal relations with any one but Rachel (Gen 35:16-19).

Second, during the next decade or so after Jacob's radical change, the only woman in the household who gave birth was Rachel (Gen 35:18). The fact that none of the other three women had any more children, may imply that Jacob was no longer cohabiting with them.

Third, whereas before the Jabbok experience, Jacob had referred to both Rachel and Leah as "my wives" (Gen 30:26; cf. 31:50), afterwards he called only Rachel "my wife" (Gen 44:27). Furthermore, his use of terms when instructing his sons about his burial may be significant. Referring to the cave of Machpelah, Jacob stated: "There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah" (Gen 49:31).[2] When

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[1]See Gen 29:23, 30, 32-35; 30:4, 7, 9, 10, 15-17, 19, 21-24.

[2]It has been assumed that Jacob's request to be buried in the same tomb with Leah proves that he retained her as a wife until she died. This conclusion, however, cannot be drawn when the customs of the ancient Hebrews are considered. Due to climactic conditions burials took place within 24 hours. Thus, when Rachel died approximately 20 miles away from the cave of Machpelah, she was buried on the way (Gen 35:19), since the cave was too far away. Several passages show that the Israelites believed it desirable to be buried with their ancestors in the family burial ground (Gen 47:30; Judg 16:31; 2 Sam 19:37). It was this wish that apparently motivated Jacob's request. See Seventh-day

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speaking of both Abraham and Isaac, Jacob used the term "wife" to show the relation of Sarah and Rebekah to their husbands. However, he failed to use this qualifying term when talking about Leah. Thus, by omitting to classify Leah as "my wife" it appears that Jacob indicated that after his transformation he no longer lived with her as a wife, even though he apparently cared for her until her death.

Fourth, the genealogical listings in Genesis provide additional evidence that Jacob became monogamous subsequent to the night he struggled with the divine being. The manner in which the four mothers of Jacob's children are referred to could be instructive. In connection with Leah, (Gen 46:15), Zilpah (Gen 46:18), and Bilhah (Gen 46:25), the record merely cites each as someone who "bore to Jacob" certain children. However, concerning Rachel, the Bible specifically categorizes her as "Jacob's wife Rachel" (Gen 46:19). This distinct classification of only Rachel as Jacob's wife has been noted by some commentators.[1] The significance of this terminological specification becomes even more pronounced since immediately prior to Jacob's change of life, the author of Genesis referred to Rachel and Leah as Jacob's "two wives" (Gen 32:22).[2]

Adventist Bible Dictionary, (1979), s.v. "Burial."

[1]See E. A. Speiser, Genesis, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 345; Sarna, Genesis, 315; Kasher, 6:56.

[2]On the surface two passages seem to conflict with the view that Jacob ended his polygamy at the Jabbok. Genesis 35:22a refers to Bilhah as Jacob's "concubine," as though his alliance with her continued after the divine encounter. However, in the immediately following passage (vss. 22b-26), Benjamin is spoken of as one of the twelve sons "born to him in Paddan-aram." Since it is undisputed

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These various lines of scriptural data seem to suggest that from the time of his encounter with the angel, when his name and character were transformed, Jacob demonstrated the genuineness of his repentance by forsaking his polygamous marriage. In the words of Mavumilusa Makanzu: "Jacob, after the struggle with God which can be said to have been his conversion, abandoned his two concubines and remained faithful to his first wife."[1] J. P. Newman likewise maintains that after this divine encounter Jacob "abandoned polygamy."[2]

Ellen White's comments, which infer that Jacob terminated his polygamous lifestyle, synchronize well with the biblical data outlined above. She notes that "through humiliation, repentance, and self-surrender, this sinful, erring

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that Benjamin was not born in Paddan-aram (see Gen 35:16-18), it appears that, in the telling of this story, the writer took the liberty to conflate the information and ignore the sequence of time. Gen 37:2, which calls Bilhah and Zilpah "wives" of Jacob, shows a similar ignoring of time. Here the writer has Jacob talking about Rachel's possible future actions (Gen 37:10), even though she had already died (Gen 35:19). In other words, the content and context of these problem texts show that these specific pericopes cannot be used to determine any time lines or chronological sequences. Thus, these passages cannot rightly be viewed as necessarily contradicting the evidence that Jacob became monogamous after his confrontation with the angel.

[1]Makanzu, 61. Admittedly, Makanzu posits that Leah was the "first wife," and that "Rachel was already dead at that time," 61. This is not correct, since the record indicates that several years later Rachel gave birth to Benjamin (Gen 35:18). In addition to the evidence shown above, that after his transformation Jacob cohabited only with Rachel, Gen 29:18-28 shows that Jacob ignorantly had sexual intercourse with Leah, against his will. This deceptive and manipulative sexual relation cannot be considered marriage. Therefore, Leah was not really the first wife. Rachel was the original wife according to Gen 29:19-25. Apparently, Jacob could have chosen to not take Leah as a wife, even after he had slept with her, since the sexual intercourse between the two of them had been without his consent (cf. Gen 34).

[2]Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 51.

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mortal prevailed with the Majesty of Heaven."[1] White, who repeatedly asserts that polygamy is a sin,[2] indicates that at this point in his life Jacob forsook every sin, and God graciously forgave him for his wayward past.[3] White's possible inference that Jacob terminated his polygamous lifestyle when his character was transformed synchronizes well with the biblical data outlined above.

The Summons to Worship at Bethel

Significantly, only after Jacob had evidently refrained from practicing polygamy, did God direct him to "go up to Bethel, and live there; and make an altar there to God" (Gen 35:1). The Hebrew name "Bethel" means literally "house of God." Thus, just as God summoned Abraham to worship Him at Mount Moriah after he had returned to a state of monogamy, so God invited Jacob to worship at the "house of God" after he had terminated all polygamous activities. Not only was Jacob to build an altar at Bethel, but he was also instructed to live and spend some time at this sacred site.

At Bethel, at this "house of God," God appeared to Jacob to renew His covenant with him (Gen 35:11, 12). God informed him that he would be blessed with many descendants and the land He had given to Abraham and Isaac. Just as God had originally made the covenant with Jacob before he had become

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 197.

[2]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:100; idem, The Story of Redemption, 76; idem, Patriarchs and Prophets, 338.

[3]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 198-203.

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polygamous, likewise, now that he appears to have refrained from the practice of polygamy God renewed the covenant with him. Centuries later Hos 12:4 confirmed that Jacob "found Him at Bethel."

According to Gen 35, after Jacob and his household left Bethel, Rachel died as she was giving birth to Benjamin, the last child fathered by Jacob. As indicated above, the weight of evidence suggests that, after his life-changing experience, Jacob never practiced polygamy again. Yet, it seems that throughout his entire life Jacob kept his whole family together, guiding them and providing for them.[1]

By way of summary, several things could be said about the marital life of Jacob. First, when he was a single man, and years before he became a polygamist, God called him to fulfill a special role. While it was Jacob's intention to marry only Rachel, he acquiesced to the pressure of custom and became polygamous. The consequences of this plural marriage were strife between the wives, grief for Jacob, and discord and hatred among the children. After God's summons to return to his ancestral home, he underwent a life-changing encounter with a divine being. As a result of this transformation, Jacob apparently ended his polygamous relationships and lived monogamously with his original wife, Rachel. Only when he had become monogamous did God invite him to worship at the "house of God." When Jacob ended his polygamy, then only did God renew the

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[1]This can be observed from the story as a whole, but especially from passages such as, Gen 33:12-14; 35:16-21; 37:2; 42:1-5, 13; 46:8-27; 47:1; 49:31.

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covenant with him. Apparently, Jacob never again practiced polygamy. Nevertheless, until the day of his death he did care for and look after the mothers and all of his children.

Esau: Father of the Edomites

Esau, the older twin brother of Jacob, is infrequently discussed in the literature dealing with polygamy in the Bible. Moreover, there is little information recorded concerning his marital life. However, since it is clear that Esau was involved in polygamy, and since some seem to feel that "polygamy does not have a negative connotation in this context,"[1] the marital situation of Esau is addressed here.

The first record of Esau's marriages is located in Gen 26. This chapter details the struggles of his father, Isaac, with the residents of the land. First, there was the conflict with Abimelech, king of the Philistines, over Isaac's wife, Rebekah (Gen 26:1-11). Then there was the dispute over the wells of water (Gen 26:15-22). Despite these problems, God cared for and protected Isaac and his family. Abimelech warned his people to respect Isaac and Rebekah, and God prospered them while they lived among the Philistines (Gen 26:11-14). The dispute over water ended when Isaac dug a well at Rehoboth (Gen 26:22). Recognizing God's blessings on Isaac, Abimelech requested a peace treaty between the two of them (Gen 26:26-31).

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[1]Turley, 22. Here Turley is referring to the record of Gen 36.

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At the end of these successfully overcome difficulties the account of Esau's polygamy is related: "And when Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah" (Gen 26:34, 35). The bitterness caused by these wives of Esau and the deception which follows in Gen 27 are placed in contrast with Isaac's triumphs over the Philistines.

The reason for the grief of Isaac and Rebekah is not given. Turley sees two reasons: the women were Hittite and the marriage was polygamous.[1] When Rebekah expressed her dissatisfaction with the fact that Esau's wives were Hittites (Gen 27:46), he then married another woman, Mahalath, the daughter of his uncle, Ishmael (Gen 28:8, 9). Even though no specific negative comment is recorded in these two chapters concerning Esau's polygamy, this entire incident does occur in a rather negative light.[2]

In addition to the previous information concerning Esau's wives, Gen 36:2, 3 states: "Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite; also Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, the sister of Nebaioth." At first glance it might appear as though Esau married six wives. However, a careful analysis may suggest otherwise. Judith the daughter of Beeri was probably wife number one (Gen 26:34), whose name is not mentioned in Gen

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[1]Turley, 20.

[2]Ibid., 21.

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36, apparently since she bore Esau no children. The second wife was called Basemath (Gen 26:34) or Adah (Gen 36:2). Wife number three was Oholibamah, daughter of Anah (Gen 36:2). The fourth wife was called Mahalath (Gen 28:9) or Basemath (Gen 36:2). In all, it appears that Esau married four wives.[1]

Three of these four wives are mentioned in the genealogical records of Gen 36. The actual wording of this list is significant: "Eliphaz the son of Esau's wife Adah, Reuel the son of Esau's wife Basemath" (Gen 36:10, emphasis added); "And these were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah" (Gen 36:14, emphasis added). Each of the three is specifically classified as "Esau's wife," apparently indicating that Esau remained polygamous throughout his life. This record clearly contrasts with the genealogical account of Jacob, in which only Rachel was categorized as his wife. Thus, while Jacob ended his polygamy, as shown above, Esau evidently continued this practice throughout his life.

The short story of Esau in Genesis, together with the comments of later Bible writers, provides sufficient information from which to make a fair assessment of his character. Esau is known for selling his birthright for a meal of "bread and lentil stew" (Gen 25:27-34).[2]

While Gen 25:34 simply states that the selling of the inheritance rights shows that "Esau despised his birthright," for this act the New Testament calls him

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[1]See SDA Bible Commentary, 1:423-424; Archer, 99-101.

[2]The birthright was considered very important, since, after the death of the father, it involved leadership (Gen 27:29), a double portion of inheritance (Deut 21:17), and domestic priesthood (Num 3:12, 13).

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"godless" (Heb 12:16). Other Bible versions interpret the passage to say that Esau was "profane" (NKJV), "irreligious" (RSV), "worldly-minded" (REB), "unspiritual" (TEV), and a "man without respect for God" (BBE). R. Waddy Moss noted that the Greek word used in Heb 12:16, *bebēlos*, "suggests the quality of a man to whom nothing is sacred, whose heart and thought range over only what is material and sensibly present."[1] Merrill Unger observed that Esau was a man "destitute of faith. This was manifest in his despising the birthright because it was a spiritual thing."[2]

Even though he had sold the birthright to Jacob, when the time arrived for the bestowal of this privilege, Esau determined to secure its blessings regardless of the solemn oath he had made with his brother.[3] When he found that Jacob had deceptively obtained the blessing, he was filled with rage. Jacob had to flee for his life. However, twenty years later, and apparently as a result of Jacob's appeal to God for protection (Gen 32:11), Esau did not dare to harm his brother.[4]

By way of summary, it can be said that this study of Esau's marital life provides some insights concerning the practice of polygamy. A comparison of the biblical accounts reveals that Esau married four women. While no direct negative statement is made in Gen 26 concerning Esau's polygamy, this account of his life

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[1]R. Waddy Moss, "Esau," Dictionary of the Bible (1963), 265.

[2]The New Unger's Bible Dictionary (1988), s.v. "Esau."

[3]See Gen 27:1-40, cf. 25:33; White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 180.

[4]See White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 198; idem, The Story of Redemption, 96.

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does not appear in a positive light. Since three of his four wives appear in the genealogical record as still married to Esau, it may be concluded that Esau remained a polygamist all his life. Both the Old and New Testaments point out that Esau was a godless person who despised spiritual things. Thus, Esau's polygamous marriage appears to be part of his rebellious lifestyle.

Moses: Great Deliverer of the Israelites

Not much is recorded about Moses' marital situation, but the Bible does indicate that after he fled from Egypt, Moses married Zipporah, daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian (Exod 2:16-3:1). Later, mention is made of "the Cushite woman whom he had married" (Num 12:1). Thus, some have concluded, as William Summers put it, "that Moses was a polygamist. That one of his wives was a Midianitess, the daughter of a priest, and that the other was an Ethiopian [or Cushite] woman."[1] This position thus assumes Moses had two wives: Zipporah and the Cushite.

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[1]William D. Summers, Marriage: Or, The Bible and Polygamy (N.p.: N.p., 1886), 24. This view is also held by others, such as, Oliver, 12; Mbiti, 190; Gunnar Helander, Must We Introduce Monogamy? A Study of Polygamy as a Mission Problem in South Africa (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Shuter & Shooter, 1958), 24; Harry Boer, "Polygamy," Frontier 11 (Spring 1968): 25; Moyenda Nosakhere, The Path Toward Liberation: Understanding the Need for Polygamy in the African-American Christian Community (Nashville, TN: Imani Publications, 1991), 25-26.

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In contrast to this view, some commentators suggest that Moses married the Cushite woman after the assumed death of Zipporah.[1] However, this view is conjectural, and has no biblical or other data to support it.

Several other scholars hold that Zipporah the Midianite and the Cushite woman were the same person. Some feel geographical evidence would support this view. In the words of John Rea:

> It is possible that Zipporah, a Midianite, was also designated a Cushite, for Midian included part of NW Arabia where some Cushite tribes lived. Furthermore, she may have been called a Cushite because her complexion may have been darker than that of most Israelites.[2]

There appears to be some biblical indication of a close link between these two geographical terms. James Hoffmeier notes that in Hab 3:7 the place names "Cushan" and "Midian" occur in synonymous parallelism, suggesting that the terms referred to the same place. He concludes: "Therefore the 'Cushite' woman of Nu. 2:1f. could well have been the Midianite Zipporah."[3] Basing his argument

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[1]See, for example, Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 2:797-798; A. Noordtzij, Numbers, trans. Ed van der Maas, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 106; John Sturdy, Numbers, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 90.

[2]John Rea, "Zipporah," Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, (1975), 2:1848-1849. See also Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, (1979), s.v. "Zipporah."

[3]James K. Hoffmeier, "Zipporah," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed. (1988), 4:1201. See also Riggans, 102; John Joseph Owen, "Numbers," The Broadman Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1970), 2:118; N. H. Snaith, Leviticus and Numbers, The New Century Bible (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967), 234. Although this parallel usage of Cush and Midian appears in Habakkuk, several centuries after Moses, it is possible that these terms were already synonymous in Moses' day.

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also on Hab 3:7, Gerhard Jasper says that this view "is geographically the more probable interpretation."[1]

Ellen White maintains that only one woman is in view here:

> Though called a "Cushite woman" (Numbers 12:1, R.V.), the wife of Moses was a Midianite, and thus a descendant of Abraham. In personal appearance she differed from the Hebrews in being of a somewhat darker complexion. Though not an Israelite, Zipporah was a worshiper of the true God.[2]

By way of summary, Moses has been accused of being polygamous because in Exodus and Numbers his spouse is connected to two different countries. No biblical support has been found for the suggestion that Moses married a second wife after the assumed death of Zipporah. However, there is sufficient scriptural and geographical evidence on which to conclude that Zipporah the Midianite and the Cushite woman were one and the same person.

Gideon: "Mighty Man of Valor"[3]

In the book of Judges, Gideon stands out as a prominent man whom God used to deliver His people from foreign oppression. Since the Bible clearly states that Gideon was a polygamist, his marital status has at times been discussed in the literature dealing with issues surrounding polygamy.[4]

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[1]Jasper, 36.

[2]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 383; see also idem, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:19-20.

[3]Judg 6:12 (RSV).

[4]See, for example, Turley, 40-42; Hall, 29-30; Kistler, 118-119.

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Of the ninety verses of Scripture that deal with the story of Gideon (Judg 6:11-8:35), only two make reference to his polygamy:

> Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives.
> And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech (Judg 8:30, 31).

In connection with the first text, Tryggve Kronholm correctly notes that "this sober report reflects no interest at all in the polygamy of Gideon as such, but is only meant to explain an impressive sequence of seventy sons."[1] Similarly, as to the second verse, "it is not this concubine who is focused upon by the narrator, but her son with Gideon: Abimelech."[2]

Nevertheless, the issue arises as to how one is to understand the polygamy of Gideon, in light of the absence of any explicit condemnation or approval of this practice. An examination of the immediately preceding passages of Scripture may assist in answering this question.

After having collected plundered gold ornaments from the people, "Gideon made an idol from the gold and put it in his home town, Ophrah. All the Israelites abandoned God and went there to worship the idol. It was a trap for Gideon and his family" (Judg 8:27 TEV). Significantly, three verses after this statement, the only references to his polygamy are made.

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[1]Kronholm, 57.

[2]Ibid.

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The specific sequence in which these two events are recorded must be carefully noted. First, the text reveals the manner in which Gideon turned away from faithful allegiance to God. Ellen White observes that "his course proved a snare to himself and his family, as well as to Israel."[1] Then, only after his apostasy is mentioned, the record notes that Gideon had many wives, as White puts it, "according to the evil custom of those days."[2] Thus, the data concerning the two activities clearly contrary to the will of God, are placed in close proximity in the passages which close his story. Noting these two practices, J. P. Newman stated:

> But if the practice of polygamy by Gideon is a law for us, then the practice of idolatry by Gideon is also a law. If there is silence in the Bible touching the polygamy of Gideon, there is also silence touching his idolatry; if one is sanctioned so is the other.[3]

Commenting on the life of this illustrious leader, David Smith rightly cautions: "Because a man is favored of God once, there is no reason to suppose that all his subsequent acts are God-like, or examples for our imitation."[4]

Thus, the biblical record does not place the polygamy of Gideon in a positive light. It is juxtaposed with the only other passage that notes his violation of God's law.

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 556.

[2]White, "God's Justice Vindicated," The Signs of the Times, 4 August 1881, 337.

[3]Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 52.

[4]David Smith, 8.

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Elkanah: "A Man of Wealth and Influence"[1]

The story of Elkanah's polygamy has received special attention since this seems to be the only recorded clear case of polygamy among apparently common Israelites. Based on the view that Elkanah was one of the general populace, it has been conjectured that, of the ordinary households in Israel, "quite a few may have been bigamous or even polygamous."[2] Because of conclusions such as these, the marital life of this man is investigated here.

The narrative suggests that Elkanah was not simply one of the common people.[3] When Samuel had been weaned, he was taken to be dedicated to serve in the house of the Lord. Part of the sacrifice consisted of a three-year-old bull (1 Sam 1:24), or "three bulls," as the Masoretic Text states. This "very expensive offering"[4] indicates that Elkanah had resources not generally available to a common Israelite.[5] In the words of Ellen White, Elkanah "was a man of wealth and influence."[6]

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 569.

[2]Staples, "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa," 24.

[3]According to 1 Chr 6:33-38 Elkanah was a Levite, and not of the Aaronic priestly line.

[4]Kenneth L. Chafin, 1, 2 Samuel, The Communicator's Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 32.

[5]Hall, 30.

[6]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 569. Elkanah is included as one of the "wealthy individuals" who were polygamists, according to Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary (1986), s.v. "Polygamy."

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While the story of Elkanah and his marital concerns takes up most of the first two chapters of 1 Samuel, the crucial passage related to his polygamy is in 1 Sam 1:1-6:

> Now there was a certain man from Ramathaim-zophim from the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite.
>
> And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.
>
> Now this man would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were the priests to the Lord there.
>
> And when the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters;
>
> but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but the Lord had closed her womb.
>
> Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb.

Several commentators recognize the existence of similarities between the books of Samuel and Judges. "A reading of the Books of Samuel shows that they are the same type of literature as that found in the Book of Judges. The same motifs are to be found."[1] Another commentator has rightly recognized that "the conditions reflected in the opening chapters of Samuel are those of the period of the Judges."[2] Bearing in mind the similarities between these books, the final

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[1]Eric C. Rust, The Book of Judges; The Book of Ruth; The First and Second Books of Samuel, The Layman's Bible Commentary (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 77. See also, SDA Bible Commentary, 2:448; Gray and Adams, 1:693; David F. Payne, I & II Samuel, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 1; Henry Preserved Smith, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), xii.

[2]S. Goldman, Samuel, Soncino Books of the Bible Series (London: Soncino Press, 1951), x.

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statement of the book of Judges becomes significant: "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 21:25).[1] Such was the environment in which Elkanah lived.

There might be some significance in the fact that, in the text immediately following the mention of Elkanah's polygamy, the two sexually immoral priests, Hophni and Phinehas, are introduced (1 Sam 2:22). Recognizing that even the spiritual leaders of the Israelites were promiscuous, it comes as no surprise to learn that Elkanah chose to become polygamous in those days when "everyone did just as he pleased" (Judg 21:25 TEV).

According to the NASB, the text that introduces the polygamy of Elkanah begins: "And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah" (1 Sam 1:2). The order in which the two wives are mentioned seems to indicate that Hannah was the first wife, while Peninnah was the second. Analysis of the Hebrew text provides additional support for this concept. When talking about Hannah, the text uses the word ʾ*aḥaṯ*, meaning "one." Though this cardinal number is normally translated as "one," it may be rendered as the ordinal number, "first," if the context so permits.[2] Since the text

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[1]See Dwight, 25; SDA Bible Commentary, 2:449.

[2]See, for example, Gen 1:5; 2:11; Exod 39:10; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 274; E. Kautzsch, ed., Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1910), 292.

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notes that Peninnah was the name of *haššĕnîṯ*, literally "the second,"[1] it would be acceptable to render ʾ*aḥaṯ* here as "first." Thus, both the order in which they are listed as well as the language of the passage indicates that Hannah was the original wife, while Peninnah was the second one.

In agreement with this view, David Mace suggests that "the strong possibility is that she [Hannah] was his original wife; and that, because of her sterility, he took Peninnah in order to secure offspring."[2] Ellen White corroborates this view:

> The desire to perpetuate his name led the husband . . . to contract a second marriage. But this step, prompted by a lack of faith in God, did not bring happiness. Sons and daughters were added to the household; but the joy and beauty of God's sacred institution had been marred and the peace of the family was broken. Peninnah, the new wife, was jealous and narrow-minded.[3]

The stress and resultant distress of this polygamous marriage is well documented. 1 Sam 1:6 states: "Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her." The following verse notes that this happened year after year; "she would provoke her, so she wept and would not eat." In addition, the record relates that Hannah's heart was sad (vs. 8), and that she felt "greatly distressed" (vs. 10), and afflicted (vs. 11). Thus out of her "great concern and provocation" (vs. 16), she poured out her soul (vs. 15), praying to the Lord and weeping bitterly

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[1]This is the rendering of the Septuagint; also YLT. See also Kautzsch, 292; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 1041; Choon Leong Seow, A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 204.

[2]Mace, 126.

[3]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 569.

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(vs. 10). Turley notes that this "plural marriage produced nothing but trouble in the household of Elkanah."[1] Ellen White observed:

> [This polygamous union] was attended with evil results. The peace of the hitherto united and harmonious family was broken. Upon Hannah the blow fell with crushing weight. All happiness seemed forever swept away from her life. She bore her trials uncomplainingly, yet her grief was none the less keen and bitter.[2]

In 1 Sam 1:6 a specific Hebrew term is used to describe Peninnah: *ṣārāh*, a "rival."[3] This is the feminine noun which derives from the verb *ṣārar*,[4] which in turn is the precise term used in Lev 18:18, which prohibited the taking of a second wife, for she would be a "rival" to the first wife.[5] The use of the same basic term in this passage may indicate that the polygamous marriage of Elkanah was a violation of Lev 18:18. Elkanah's act of taking a second wife, according to

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[1]Turley, 55.

[2]White, "The Birth of Samuel," The Signs of the Times, 27 October, 1881, 469. See also idem, Patriarchs and Prophets, 569.

[3]Patai notes: "The very name by which a co-wife is called today in Arabic, *darrah*, is the same by which she was called in Hebrew in Biblical times (*ṣarah*; e.g., 1 Sam. 1:6; Lev. 18:18), and by which she was called in the Laws of Hammurabi (*ṣerritu*), a term originally meaning 'enemy' (in the female form of the noun)," 40.

[4]See Brown, Driver and Briggs, 865. Turley recognizes this use of the Hebrew term, 54.

[5]See chapter 3 of this project.

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Ellen White, was "prompted by a lack of faith in God,"[1] and was "a course which God did not sanction."[2]

The biblical chronicle thus reveals several important facts regarding the marital status of Elkanah. Both Judges and 1 Samuel describe similar literature, motifs, and conditions in Israel. This was a time when all the people did as they pleased. Even the spiritual leaders were sexually promiscuous. Elkanah, a wealthy and influential man, likewise went his own way by marrying polygamously in order to have offspring. Many problems resulted from this union. An apparent linguistic link with Lev 18:18 seems to suggest that Elkanah's polygamy was contrary to this regulation. Thus, Elkanah's violation of God's marital standards provides no positive guidance for the work of the church.

David: "A Man After God's Own Heart"[3]

Over the years various individuals have pointed to the experience of David, and have concluded that God must have condoned polygamy to some degree since it was practiced by one who was called "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam 13:14). Noting that David was one of the holy men of God who had several wives, Philip Melanchthon concluded: "Hence it is obvious that polygamy

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 569.

[2]White, "The Birth of Samuel," 469.

[3]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:87. Speaking of David, 1 Sam 13:14 says: "The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart." Acts 13:22 quotes God as calling David, "A man after My heart."

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is not against divine law."[1] Several writers are in basic agreement with this position. As A. O. Nkwoka put it: "David, the ideal king of Israel is known as 'a man after God's own heart' and he was polygynous."[2]

Based on Nathan's statement to David after he had married Bathsheba, some have concluded that God Himself provided David with many wives. As David Hall states: "Not only is Scripture silently uncritical of David's polygamy, but 2 Samuel 12:7-8 seems to place the imprimatur of Yahweh on the multiple marriages of David."[3] Douglas Welch posits that this passage "not only indicates that David had several wives, but that God himself actually 'gave' them to David."[4] Tryggve Kronholm concurs by saying that this text speaks of "polygamy as sanctioned by God."[5] The biblical account, however, reveals some pertinent data that puts David's polygamy and his high standing before God into proper historical perspective.

In addition to the above view that God approved of David's polygamy, several have suggested that his polygamy is never condemned in Scripture.[6] An

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[1]Melanchthon, vol. 2, col. 526.

[2]Nkwoka, 147. See also Welch, 60.

[3]Hall, 32.

[4]Welch, 60.

[5]Kronholm, 60. See also Mmagu, 41.

[6]See, for example, Hall, 33; Welch, 61; Kistler, 118-119. Furthermore, Walter Kaiser (183) notes that, "some will wonder: why was no punishment inflicted on these polygamists by the government?" It is well recognized that when God organized the theocratic nation of Israel at Sinai, He instituted stringent civil

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appropriate response to this view can be found only when one understands the manner in which God operated in times past to show His approval[1] or disapproval[2] of people's actions. These manifestations of divine actions must be taken into account when considering David's plural marriages.

First, an extended survey of the entire story of David is made in order to observe the basic pattern of his life. Second, the marital status of David at the time of his anointing as the future king of Israel is considered. Third, an overview of the early marriages of David, before he took Bathsheba as his wife, is made. Fourth, the chronicle of David's relationship with Bathsheba, and Nathan's pronouncement of judgment from God is analyzed. Fifth, the question as to which women David set aside, and the reasons for this decision, are investigated. Sixth, the final years of David's life are considered, noticing his relationship with Abishag. Finally, this study ends with a summary.

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penalties on transgressors of His law. However, with the institution of the monarchy, a new problem arose. As one commentary puts it: "Since the power of the king was absolute, there was no authority in the land to bring the crimes of the king to justice." SDA Bible Commentary, 2:904. This was clearly the case with David, and virtually all the other polygamists mentioned in the Bible during the time of the theocracy. Therefore, in instances such as these, whenever God chose to, He stepped in and became the executor of the civil penalty.

[1]See, for example, Exod 23:20-28; Lev 26:1-13; Deut 11:13-15; 28:1-14.

[2]See, for example, Gen 12:17; 20:3; Exod 3:20; 12:29-33; Lev 26:14-39; Deut 11:16, 17; 28:15-68; Judg 2:11-23; 4:1-3; 6:1; 9:56-57; 13:1; 1 Chr 6:22-27; 24:24; 28:5-25; 29:4-10; Neh 9:24-28; Pss 78:54-64; 107:10-11; Isa 26:9.

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Cyclical Pattern of David's Life

It has been correctly observed that "the history of the 'judges' is a cyclical story of deliverance, apostasy, and then deliverance."[1] More precisely, the book of Judges has been described as a series of cycles consisting of "the repetition of five sequential steps: sin, servitude, supplication, salvation, and silence."[2] The life of David, as recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, evidences a similar pattern of events, which might be instructive in better understanding David's polygamy.

The story begins when David is secretly anointed as the next monarch of the united kingdom of Israel, and is invited to play soothing music for king Saul (1 Sam 13:14-16:23). After this introduction, David suddenly comes face to face with the enemy, the Philistines (1 Sam 17). Facing this threat of servitude and the taunts of Goliath, David implicitly makes supplication to God: "This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands" (1 Sam 17:46). Thus, salvation comes to him and the Israelites (1 Sam 17:50-54). At this point, while David prospers, Saul threatens his life (1 Sam 18:17-19:11). Now comes a period of silence in his relationship with God, when without consulting God, he flees for his life (1 Sam 19:12-20:42). At this point David loses faith and commits sin by using deception

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[1]Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Ezra-Nehemiah," The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 4:735. See, for example, Judg 3:7-12; 4:1-3; 6:1-14; 8:33-34.

[2]See Turley, 40.

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to save himself (1 Sam 20:1-21:15). This sequence of events completes the first cycle of the story.

This pattern is repeated: servitude or when calamity threatens (1 Sam 22:21-23:1); supplication or when David recognizes his need of God (1 Sam 23:2-4); salvation, when God rescues or protects him (1 Sam 23:14); silence, when David prospers and apparently forgets God (1 Sam 25:21-22); and, sin, when he violates God's law (1 Sam 25:39-43). Then follows servitude (1 Sam 30:1-5), supplication (1 Sam 30:6-8), salvation (1 Sam 30:16-25), silence (2 Sam 2:8-3:1), and sin (2 Sam 3:2-16).

David's polygamous practices are consistently recorded after a period of silence. Thus, David's practice of polygamy is repeatedly located in the final round of the cycle,[1] the period of sin, when he violated God's commands in various ways.[2] Moreover, subsequent to every mention of his polygamy is a statement reflecting some sort of calamity, threat, or judgment.[3] This seems to indicate that the context and structure of the narrative draws attention to the negative assessment made of the polygamy of David.

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[1]See 1 Sam 25:39-43; 2 Sam 3:2-16; 5:13-16; 11:1-27.

[2]For example, it is during these periods of "sin" that he also lies (1 Sam 21:2; 27:8-12), murders, or plans to kill (1 Sam 25:13-22; 2 Sam 11:14-27), and commits adultery (2 Sam 11:4).

[3]See 1 Sam 30:1-5; 2 Sam 3:22-37; 5:17; 12:1-14.

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Marital Status When Called by God

According to 1 Sam 13:8-14, it was immediately after Saul had presumptuously officiated as priest in offering up a burnt sacrifice at Gilgal that Samuel informed him that he would lose his kingdom. In this context Samuel stated: "The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart" (1 Sam 13:14).

This young shepherd David, selected by God to replace Saul, was handsome, healthy, and living in harmony with the will of God (1 Sam 16:7, 12). In addition, he was such an outstanding musician that he was taken to the palace to play in the service of king Saul (1 Sam 16:14-23). Evidently, at this time David was a single man. The narrative indicates that it was while David was still an unmarried man, and before he became embroiled in polygamy, that God called him "a man after His own heart." Ellen White comments at length:

> Skeptics have assailed [C]hristianity, and ridiculed the Bible, because David gave them occasion. They bring up to Christians the case of David, his sin in the case of Uriah and Bathsheba, his polygamy, and then assert that David is called a man after God's own heart, and if the Bible record is correct, God justified David in his crimes.
>
> I was shown that it was when David was pure, and walking in the counsel of God, that God called him a man after his own heart. When David departed from God, and stained his virtuous character by his crimes, he was no longer a man after God's own heart.[1]

God had personally selected Saul to lead His people (1 Sam 10:24). However, even though Saul had for a while been a devout follower of God, he

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[1]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:87. See also Grout, 11.

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eventually rejected God.[1] Similarly David was chosen by God as the next king when he was living within God's will. At this time God considered him "a man after His own heart."[2]

David's Early Marriages

David was an astute man. First, he won the hand of Michal, Saul's daughter, and thus became personally related to the royal family (1 Sam 18:20-28). Some time later Saul took Michal and gave her in marriage to Palti the son of Laish (1 Sam 25:44). After he had become king of Israel, David took Michal back as his wife, even though by this time he had apparently married several other women (2 Sam 3:1-16).

Apparently after Michal had been taken away from him by Saul, David met and married Ahinoam of Jezreel. While David was still married to Ahinoam,

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[1]See the change in Saul's life, from one who had the Spirit of God on him (1 Sam 10:10), to one who finally turned to a spirit medium for guidance (1 Sam 28).

[2]A similar caution needs to be sounded about the use of other passages of Scripture. Some may point out that 1 Kgs 15:5 says that, "except in the case of Uriah," David "did what was right in the sight of the Lord." This seems to imply that his polygamy was accepted by God. However, this verse also overlooks David's terrible sin of numbering Israel, which cost the lives of 70,000 men (1 Chr 21:1-27). As Dwight noted concerning this text and 2 Chr 24:2: "The phrase, therefore, means only, that their conduct was generally acceptable to God; but furnishes no evidence of the lawfulness of any one specific act," 28. Interestingly, 1 Kgs 14:8 says that David did "only that which was right," completely ignoring any of his sins. The context of these passages reveals that these statements were made in order to contrast David with Jeroboam, who led the Israelites into idolatry (see 1 Kgs 12:26-33). Moreover, generalized eulogistic statements must not be taken as fully explaining the whole life of a Bible character. See Wishard, 36-39.

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and before he became king, he married Abigail, the intelligent, beautiful, and wealthy widow of Nabal (1 Sam 25:2-43). Ellen White notes that when David married Abigail "he was already the husband of one wife, but the custom of the nations of his time had perverted his judgment and influenced his actions."[1] She also comments that this polygamous union of David "was not according to the original plan of God; [for] it was in direct opposition to his design, that a man should have more than one wife."[2]

Even though God had so clearly revealed His will regarding marriage, David nevertheless chose to follow the customs of others rather than God's laws. This was clearly a "departure from right,"[3] and, "the bitter result of this practice of marrying many wives was permitted to be sorely felt throughout all the life of David."[4]

By the time he had reigned as king for seven years in Hebron, David had taken at least four other women in marriage: Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah (2 Sam 3:2-5). Maacah was the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, which was apparently a small kingdom between Bashan and Hermon.

The chronicle of David shows that over time he increased in greatness (2 Sam 3:1; 5:10-12). For example, one passage reads: "And David perceived that

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 668.

[2]Ellen G. White, "The Work of a Peace-Maker," The Signs of the Times, 26 October 1888, 642.

[3]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:86.

[4]White, "The Work of a Peace-Maker," 642.

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the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel" (2 Sam 5:12 RSV). The following verse then records David's actions when he became more powerful: "And David took more concubines and wives" (2 Sam 5:13 RSV). Instead of drawing closer to the God who had given him success, David's prosperity led him away from God.[1] As Ellen White remarked:

> He finally fell into the common practice of other kings around him, of having a plurality of wives, and his life was embittered by the evil results of polygamy. His first wrong was in taking more than one wife, thus departing from God's wise arrangement. This departure from right, prepared the way for greater errors.[2]

The David and Bathsheba Chronicle

The relationship of David with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, is perhaps the most notorious of his misdeeds. This account is vividly recorded in 2 Sam 11 and 12.

Giving in to lustful passion, David had sexual relations with Bathsheba while her husband was on the battlefield (2 Sam 11:1-4). When David found out that she was pregnant, he tried to deceitfully cover up his adulterous affair (2 Sam 11:5-13). Unable to successfully accomplish this, he arranged for the death of Uriah (2 Sam 11:14-27). After Uriah's death, David married Bathsheba, thus

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[1]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:86.

[2]Ibid.

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adding to the number of wives he already had. The Scripture states: "But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Sam 11:27).

God then sent the prophet Nathan with a message of reproof for David. Regarding the prophet's speech, G. N. Vollebregt says: "In his parable of the rich man with the flocks and herds and the poor man with one ewe lamb Nathan clearly indicated his approval of monogamous marriage and at the same time implicitly criticized David's harem."[1]

By means of this parable, Nathan appealed to David's sense of justice. Not realizing that the story paralleled his own actions, David pronounced severe judgment on the man in the story: "As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. And he must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion" (2 Sam 12:5, 6).[2] Nathan then said to David: "You are the man!" (2 Sam 12:7). Nathan then gave David an important message from God, as well as a direct judgment for his sins.

Nathan's message to David

Similar to the manner in which most other English versions have rendered 2 Sam 12:7, 8, the NASB translates the first part of Nathan's address as follows:

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[1]G. N. Vollebregt, The Bible on Marriage, trans. R. A. Downie (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 23.

[2]This law of fourfold restitution for a stolen sheep was established in Exod 22:1.

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> Thus says the Lord God of Israel, "It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul.
>
> "I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these."

As indicated at the beginning of this study of David's life, some have concluded that this passage proves that God sanctioned and supported the practice of polygamy. As Hall puts it: "The prophet Nathan had declared that the Lord had given David the wives of Saul. God took responsibility for the wives of Saul in David's household."[1] This kind of conclusion has been seriously questioned from basically two different perspectives.

First, the Bible mentions only one wife of Saul, Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz (1 Sam 14:50), and one concubine, Rizpah the daughter of Aiah (2 Sam 3:7; 21:8). Rizpah was taken by Abner after Saul's death (2 Sam 3:6-11), and apparently never became one of David's spouses (2 Sam 21:1-14). That leaves only Ahinoam, the mother of Michal.

If one holds to the literal meaning of "gave," then, as Kaiser has pointed out, "David was authorized, on this supposition, to marry his wife's mother--a form of incest already condemned in the Levitical law, carrying the sanction of being burnt alive (Lev. 18:17)."[2] Thus, Kaiser suggests that the phrase, "I gave you . . . your master's wives," indicates that God gave all of Saul's female

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[1]Hall, 32.

[2]Kaiser, 188.

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domestics and courtesans into David's possession.[1] This, Kaiser says, is an acceptable translation of the word *nāšîm*, "women."[2]

Operating on the premise that Saul might well have had other "wives," even though they are nowhere else specifically mentioned in Scripture, a second position holds that the term *nāšîm*, as used in this passage, should be consistently interpreted. If the word *nāšîm* is to be rendered "wives" in vs. 11, and understood as those women married to David, then in vs. 8 it should also mean the "wives" of Saul, and not merely female domestics, as Kaiser suggests.[3]

Similarly, the term *nāṯan* (give) should be consistently rendered. This word appears three times in the complete speech of Nathan: twice in vs. 8, as seen in the text outlined above, and once in vs. 11: "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your companion, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight." Since, it is clear that the prophecy of vs. 11 was fulfilled when Absalom slept with his father's "concubines" (2 Sam 16:21, 22),[4] it is obvious that the word *nāṯan* (give) does not here indicate that God prompted

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid. See also Anderson, 162-163.

[3]The view that these were spouses and not merely female domestics, is strengthened by the phrase, *bᵉḥêqeḵā*, which indicates that these women were put "into your bosom" (2 Sam 12:8 NRSV). See Hall, 33.

[4]See White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 739.

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these acts of wickedness.[1] Rather, since Absalom's was plainly an incestuous act according to Lev 18:8, the word "give" must be understood as the permissive will of God, in which what He allows is spoken of as though He actually does it.[2] Otherwise, as Samuel Wishard notes, if "give" means that God actively gave David's spouses to Absalom, then God would be the author of sin, and one who approves of incest.[3]

Thus, since the weight of evidence indicates that *nāṯan* in vs. 11 refers, in a general way, to the freedom of choice which Absalom used in taking over his father's spouses, a similar meaning could be deduced for *nāṯan* in vs. 8. Furthermore, since God had previously established monogamy and had forbidden the king to "multiply wives" to himself (Deut 17:17), He would not have violated these laws by actually "giving" David these wives.[4] As J. P. Newman, talking about the word "give" in these two verses, put it: "If one is the approval of polygamy the other is the approval of rebellion and incest."[5]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid. See, for example, Exod 10:20, 27, where Pharaoh's stubbornness is spoken of as though God Himself actually "hardened Pharaoh's heart."

[3]Wishard, 35. See also Elbert Smith, 26-27.

[4]See Elbert Smith, 26.

[5]Great Discussion! Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy!, 52. See also Dwight, 23.

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It appears therefore, both the contextual usage of *nāṯan* and the biblical regulations show that God did not actively "give" David any "wives."[1] Rather, David had the freedom to choose whether to take many wives, according to the practice of the kings of other nations, or to loyally follow the commandments of God.[2] He chose to disobey God. As a result, Ellen White notes that "he was made to see the wretched evil of such a course by the unhappy discord, rivalry and jealousy among his numerous wives and children."[3]

In brief then, this investigation has shown that 2 Sam 12:7, 8 cannot legitimately be interpreted to say that God actually "gave" David the "wives" of Saul. David simply chose to take as many wives as he wanted, since he had the freedom of choice.

The judgment pronounced on David

Since the king had absolute power, and was the one to pronounce judgment,[4] when he acted wickedly there was no human being who dared call him

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[1]The final phrase of vs. 8 reads literally: "And if too little, I would have added to you this and that." Understood in the context of God's permissive will, this phrase simply indicates that God would have allowed David many more legitimate things, if he had needed any.

[2]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:86.

[3]Ibid. See, for example, 2 Sam 13:1-39; 1 Kgs 1:5-2:25.

[4]See, for example, 2 Sam 12:5-6; 21:1-14.

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to account.[1] However, when it came to the killing of another man in order to add another wife to his harem, God stepped in. This did not happen immediately, but only after David had married Bathsheba. Thus, judgment came to David "a whole year" after he had committed adultery, by which time the baby had been born.[2]

The question has often been raised as to what specific sin or sins David was being judged for. For example, Douglas Welch posits that the charge against David was threefold: adultery, murder, and misuse of power. But, he adds, "polygamy is not implicated at any point."[3] Holding a different view, William Blum suggests that "David is criticized, not only for his adultery and murder, but also for taking Bathsheba as his wife,"[4] thus implying polygamy.

The narrative records that "the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Sam 11:27). The "thing" that is referred to could include the following acts of David: a misuse of power, adultery, attempts to deceptively conceal his actions (2 Sam 11:6-13), murder, and polygamy. However, no particular sin is mentioned.

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[1]In the Bible the judgment of God on sin sometimes appears swiftly; at other times it is delayed; and, at still other times, there appears no explicit condemnation mentioned. See, for example, the incest of Lot's daughters (Gen 19:30-38), the incest of Tamar (Gen 38:12-30), Moses' murder of the Egyptian (Exod 2:11-25); the Sabbath-breaking of the Israelites (Exod 16:22-30); the idolatry of Gideon (Judg 8:27); the sexual promiscuity of Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam 2:22); and the blasphemy of Job's wife (Job 2:9).

[2]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 723. See 2 Sam 11:27; 12:15.

[3]Welch, 62.

[4]Blum, 190.

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The divine accusation and judgment on David are vividly outlined in Nathan's speech in 2 Sam 12:9-12:

> "'Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.
> "'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'
> "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your companion, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight.
> "'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'"

In the sentence Nathan pronounced on David the punishment corresponds to the sin and intensifies it. God accuses David of "doing evil in His sight" (2 Sam 12:9), and in turn promises "I will raise up evil against you from your own household" (vs. 11). In vs. 9, David is twice accused of having killed Uriah "with the sword," therefore, God states, "the sword shall never depart from your house" (vs. 10). In both vss. 9 and 10 David is charged with having taken Uriah's wife "to be your wife," thus, God says, "I will even take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your companion" (vs. 11). Finally, David is indicted for lying with Uriah's wife "secretly" (vs. 12), but, God says that David's companion will lie with his wives "in broad daylight" (vs. 11), "before all Israel" (vs. 12).[1]

This reproof contains a specific delineation of David's evil actions. Besides the reference to evil in general, it is plain that Nathan made three direct

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[1]Emphasis added.

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charges in these verses. First, he accused David of murdering Uriah; second, he charged David with having "taken his wife to be your wife."

While it has often been assumed that this statement is an accusation of adultery, neither the English versions nor the Hebrew original text indicates this. Rather, the indictment reads: "You took for you as wife" (*lāqaḥtā lᵉkā lᵉ⁾iššāh*). This phraseology is repeatedly used in the Old Testament to indicate a marriage.[1] As Dwight rightly notes: "To take, in Hebrew *lāqaḥ* when connected with *⁾iššāh*, a woman, is the appropriate Hebrew phrase for to marry a wife."[2] Moreover, this charge referred to an action that clearly took place only after David had gotten rid of Uriah.[3] Recognizing these facts, it can be seen that this second indictment is then evidently an accusation of polygamy.

The third charge is located in vss. 11 and 12. The crucial Hebrew term used here in vs. 11 is *šāḵaḇ*, "to lay." This word, when used of one man sleeping with the wife of another man, clearly refers to adultery.[4] Furthermore, this very term, *šāḵaḇ*, is used in 2 Sam 11:4 to describe David's sleeping with Bathsheba

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[1]See Gen 28:2; Deut 21:11; Jer 16:2. See also Gen 25:1, 20; 28:20; Deut 24:3; 25:5; 1 Sam 25:39, 40. Cf. Gen 26:34; 27:46; Lev 18:18; Deut 22:13; 1 Chr 7:15; Ezra 2:61.

[2]Dwight, 61 (emphasis original). The word *lāqaḥ* ("to take") is not used for stealing, which in Hebrew is (*gānaḇ*).

[3]See 2 Sam 11:1-27.

[4]See, for example, the legal stipulations in Num 5:13, 19; Deut 22:22; cf. Gen 39:7-12. See also Brown, Driver and Briggs, 1012.

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while Uriah was away from home. Here, David is accused of adultery, of having sexual relations with Bathsheba while her husband Uriah was alive.

David is accused of three specific sins: adultery, murder, and polygamy. These are precisely the three sins mentioned by Ellen White. She states that David went on to "add murder to adultery,"[1] thus indicating, in line with the biblical account, that the adultery occurred first, prior to the murder of Uriah. In addition to these two sins, White implicates polygamy as well. She does this when commenting on the judgment that God promised to bring against David, "from your own household" (2 Sam 12:11):

> God did not in the least degree justify him in his sins, but sent Nathan his prophet, with dreadful denunciations to David because he had transgressed the commandment of the Lord. God shows his displeasure at David's having a plurality of wives by visiting him with judgments, and permitting evils to rise up against him from his own house.[2]

Fourfold restitution for the murder

As soon as Nathan had finished his reproof, David acknowledged his guilt by responding: "'I have sinned against the Lord'" (2 Sam 12:13). To which Nathan replied: "'The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die'" (2 Sam 12:13). Then he added, "'However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die'" (2 Sam 12:14).

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 719.

[2]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:87.

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As seen in 2 Sam 12:5, 6, David had pronounced two kinds of judgment on the wicked man in Nathan's parable: death, as well as fourfold restitution. Nathan informed David that God had removed the death penalty from him. However, the fourfold judgment, that David had unknowingly placed upon himself, was never removed. Just as he had taken the life of another man, so he was to lose four of his sons. Commentators recognize the fulfillment of this judgment in the deaths of Bathsheba's firstborn, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah.[1] In the words of Ellen White:

> "He shall restore fourfold," had been David's unwitting sentence upon himself, on listening to the prophet Nathan's parable; and according to his own sentence he was to be judged. Four of his sons must fall, and the loss of each would be a result of the father's sin.[2]

Some time after the death of the unnamed firstborn, Amnon was killed by his half-brother, Absalom, because he had raped his sister, Tamar (2 Sam 13:1-33). After noting this second death in the family, White commented: "Twofold judgment had been meted out to David." A few years later, Absalom conspired to usurp the throne. As soon as David heard the news, he fled Jerusalem with those loyal to him. He recognized in this conspiracy of his son

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[1]See Robert Jamieson, Joshua-Esther, A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945), 243; Ganse Little, "Exposition of II Samuel," The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1981), 2:1104; Adam Clarke, 2:338.

[2]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 727.

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"the just judgment of God."[1] Eventually, Joab killed Absalom in battle (2 Sam 18:14), thus completing the third judgment.[2]

From the available biblical data it appears David's reign, after the death of Absalom, lasted approximately ten years,[3] until he died at the age of seventy (2 Sam 5:4, 5). It was only after he had died that the fourth judgment, which had apparently been held back for a while, was fulfilled.[4] White observes: "The execution of the sentence upon [Adonijah] the son of David completed the fourfold judgment that testified to God's abhorrence of the father's sin."[5]

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[1]Ibid., 732.

[2]Ibid., 748.

[3]See 2 Sam 12:14-15:7. See also Merrill F. Unger, "David," The New Unger's Bible Dictionary (1988), 283-284; Heinrich Ewald, The History of Israel, vol. 3, The Rise and Splendour of the Hebrew Monarchy, ed., J. Estlin Carpenter (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1871), 170 (footnote #1); Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (1979), s.v. "David;" J. Barton Payne, "David," The New International Dictionary of the Bible (1987), 258; P. Kyle McCarter, II Samuel, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 355.

[4]Even while God judged and punished David it is clear that both during this time of his adultery, murder, and polygamy, as well as when he committed other sins, God never abandoned him. Although David had been disloyal to God by violating His express will, the narrative of his life indicates that God mercifully continued to extend His transforming grace to him.

[5]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 750. See also Jasper, who notes that here was "a punishment which unfolded itself over the whole span of the years of his reign in always new happenings," 48.

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Putting Away the "Wives-Concubines"

Since the events surrounding the rebellion of Absalom are vital to a fuller understanding of David's marital life, they are examined in further detail here. When Absalom plotted against his father's throne he was able to get Ahithophel, David's advisor, to join him; "and the conspiracy was strong" (2 Sam 15:12). As soon as David heard about this rebellion he said to all his servants: "'Arise and let us flee'" (2 Sam 15:14). Absalom then victoriously entered Jerusalem as king.

Referring to David's counselor who had joined Absalom's revolt, Ellen White notes: "The defection of Ahithophel, the ablest and most wily of political leaders, was prompted by revenge for the family disgrace involved in the wrong to Bathsheba, who was his granddaughter."[1] It was Ahithophel who suggested to Absalom that he take over David's spouses, in order to solidify his position as the new king (2 Sam 16:21). Absalom carried out this vile suggestion of incest,[2] thus fulfilling the prophecy made by Nathan to David some years earlier.[3]

After the death of Absalom and the suppression of his rebellion, David returned to power. His handling of the ten women taken over by Absalom is related in 2 Sam 20:3: "Then David came to his house at Jerusalem, and the king took the ten women, the concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 735. See also William J. Deane, David: His Life and Times, Men of the Bible: Their Lives and Times Series, ed. J. S. Exell (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 162. See 2 Sam 11:3; 23:34; cf. 15:12.

[2]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 738.

[3]Ibid., 739; see 2 Sam 12:11, 12.

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placed them under guard and provided them with sustenance, but did not go in to them."

In 2 Sam 20:3, as in the passage that mentions the ten women left behind at the palace (2 Sam 15:16), the writer uses the term *nāšîm pilag^{e}šîm*, "wives-concubines."[1] The use of this term seems to imply that the group of ten women consisted of wives as well as concubines. As Ganse Little noted: "David's wives and concubines were violated by Absalom."[2]

While it cannot be determined with absolute certainty who these ten spouses of David were, there are some indications in the text as to their identity. Michal, first wife of David, would not be included, for David appears to have set her aside (2 Sam 6:20-23).[3] The record indicates that David had been married to the following six identified women: Ahinoam, Abigail, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah (2 Sam 3:2-5). In addition to the six spouses listed above, David had taken in at least two more "wives" and two more "concubines" in Jerusalem

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[1]See chapter 3 of this project where the interchangeability of the terms "wife" and "concubine" is discussed.

[2]Little, 1104.

[3]Commenting on 2 Sam 6:23, which refers to Michal's barrenness, Joyce Baldwin notes: "In the context, Michal's childlessness implies that from this point on marital relations between her and David came to an end." Joyce G. Baldwin, 1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 211. Several other commentators likewise understand that, from this point of Michal's despising of David, they were estranged for the rest of their lives. See Peter R. Ackroyd, The First Book of Samuel, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 71; Chafin, 79; David Payne, I & II Samuel, 185; Rust, 131; McCarter, 187-188; Goldman, 225.

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(2 Sam 5:13), making a total of ten women. Later, after he had Uriah killed, he married Bathsheba, bringing the total to eleven. While it is possible that he might have had more than eleven wives and concubines, the biblical record does not specifically indicate this. It can therefore be concluded that the ten *nāšîm pilag^{e}šîm* (wives-concubines) that David left behind when he fled for his life were all of the above, except for Bathsheba.

God's judgment expressly stated that, just as David had taken Uriah's wife, He would "give" David's "wives" to someone else (2 Sam 12:11). These were the ten women that Absalom appropriated to himself.[1] Thus, in not taking back these spouses, David's polygamy was terminated, and he remained monogamously married to only Bathsheba, who had apparently not been claimed by Absalom. As Makanzu states: "After David's repentance and return to God (Psalm 51) he no longer went to his concubines but kept only Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon."[2]

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[1]In the Bible the number ten is often used as a round number, or symbolically to indicate completeness (Gen 31:7; Num 14:22; Neh 4:12; Job 19:3; 1 Sam 1:8; Dan 1:20). See The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary (1987), s.v. "Numbers;" Andrew C. Zenos, "Numbers, Significant and Symbolic," A New Standard Bible Dictionary (1936), 629; Abrahams, 1258. Therefore, it is possible that, if the assumption is correct that David had more than ten wives and concubines, the number ten could here be indicating that, besides Bathsheba, he left the complete harem behind when he fled; and completely set aside his polygamy upon his return to the kingdom.

[2]Makanzu, 61-62. See also David Smith, 10.

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Many Bible scholars have posited that David put these women aside because they had been defiled by Absalom.[1] For example, Kenneth Chafin suggests that "because they were considered defiled, they were isolated."[2] However, various other reasons have been suggested for this action of David.

Hans Hertzberg sees the isolating of the concubines as bringing to a close "the brief era of Absalom."[3] Ben Philbeck seems to suggest the opposite. He indicates that "to have resumed a conjugal relationship with them could have been interpreted politically."[4] Thus, Philbeck continues, "since David denied all legitimacy to the interlude of Absalom's reign, he discharged his responsibilities toward his concubines."[5] John Willis, however, suggests that, "initially David may have put his ten concubines under guard to protect them from Sheba,"[6] who,

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[1]See, for example, Wordsworth, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Books of Samuel, vol. 2, The Holy Bible, in the Authorized Version; with Notes and Introductions (London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place, 1871), 117 (2d part of book); A. F. Kirkpatrick, The First and Second Books of Samuel, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 401; Ackroyd, 189.

[2]Chafin, 368-369.

[3]Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, I & II Samuel: A Commentary, trans. J. S. Bowen, The Old Testament Library Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 371.

[4]Ben F. Philbeck, "1-2 Samuel," The Broadman Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1970), 3:134.

[5]Ibid.

[6]John T. Willis, First and Second Samuel, The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1982), 392.

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at this time, was leading a revolt against David (2 Sam 20:1-22). However, none of these views can be clearly established from the text or the context.

Since the actual reasons for David's putting away of these women are not directly stated in the passage, a study of the background and context is essential. In order to accomplish this, both David's reactions to the rebellion of Absalom, as well as the specific judgment of God as given by Nathan, are considered.

Describing the manner in which David left as he fled Jerusalem, the text notes: "David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went, and his head was covered and he walked barefoot" (2 Sam 15:30). One commentator appropriately notes that "the procession of David and his company up the western slope of the Mount of Olives had all the marks of mourning."[1] Walter Brueggemann referred to this departure from the city as a "time of ritual grief."[2] As David left in humility and sorrow,[3] he recognized in this conspiracy of his son "the just judgment of God."[4] In this humble attitude, David's heart was further opened to God's guidance, and his life was ready to be fully transformed.

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[1]John Mauchline, ed., 1 and 2 Samuel, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1971), 274. See, for example, Esth 6:12; cf. Jer 14:3, 4.

[2]Walter Brueggemann, First and Second Samuel, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 304.

[3]See White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 731.

[4]Ibid., 732.

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Earlier, Nathan had pronounced God's sentence on David. Of these judgments, two were specifically related to his marital life. As noted above, one directly stated that someone close to David would lie with his wives "in broad daylight" (2 Sam 12:11), "before all Israel" (vs. 12). Thus, when "in the sight of all Israel" (2 Sam 16:22), Absalom had sexual relations with the royal spouses who had been left behind, David must have recognized in this action the direct fulfillment of God's prediction.

The other judgment declared: "I will even take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your companion" (2 Sam 12:11). This pronouncement indicated that God Himself would be ultimately responsible for removing David's wives from him, thereby terminating his plural marriages. Thus, when Absalom appropriated his spouses, David accepted the fulfillment of this prophecy, set aside his spouses, and no longer practiced polygamy.

In addition, based on the context, yet another reason can be suggested for David's return to monogamy. Walter Brueggemann remarks that, by this drastic action of confining these women to a safe place, "David moves visibly away from the royal ideology [of polygamy] in the direction of the old requirements of covenant,"[1] as located in Deut 17:14-20.[2] Brueggemann's comments are appropriate, since it is clear that, when David left Jerusalem, he fled "in humility

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[1]Brueggemann, First and Second Samuel, 330.

[2]Ibid., 89.

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and sorrow,"[1] recognizing God's judgment in the rebellion of Absalom.[2] Therefore, following his return to the throne, David lived a transformed life in accordance with the laws given for rulers in Deut 17:14-20.

As indicated earlier, when David set these women aside, he protected them by placing them "under guard" (2 Sam 20:3). Furthermore, he "provided for their needs" (2 Sam 20:3 TEV). However, the record is clear that "he did not have sexual relations with them" (2 Sam 20:3 NCV). This emphasis on the monogamous status of David during the last years of his life is reiterated in the story of the final part of his reign.

Last Years of the Reign of David

One final narrative related to the marital status of David can be found in 1 Kgs 1:1-4:

> Now King David was old, advanced in age; and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm.
> So his servants said to him, "Let them seek a young virgin for my lord the king, and let her attend the king and become his nurse; and let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may keep warm."
> So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king.
> And the girl was very beautiful; and she became the king's nurse and served him, but the king did not cohabit with her.

The text states that the purpose of finding this nurse for the ailing king was so that she could attend to him, and lie in his bosom to keep him warm

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[1]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 731. See 2 Sam 16:30.

[2]White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 732.

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(vs. 4). One commentary rightly notes that "this is usually interpreted as a medical prescription, for contact with a young, warm and fresh body could revive the king."[1] This practice of diatherapy, in which the body heat of a healthy person is used to help warm an afflicted one, was a medical procedure of both ancient Jews and Greeks.[2]

Even though this young woman was "extremely beautiful,"[3] the writer reports that "David did not have sexual relations with her" (1 Kgs 1:4 NCV). Various commentators suggest that, due to his physical debilities, David was unable to have sexual relations with Abishag.[4] However, the Hebrew, *lō᾽ yᵉḏāʿāh*, literally "he did not know her," does not speak of inability. C. F. Keil noted that this remark was not introduced "to indicate the impotence of David."[5]

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[1]Gwilym H. Jones, 1 and 2 Kings, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 89.

[2]Richard D. Patterson and Herman J. Anstel, "1, 2 Kings," The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 4:26.

[3]Waltke and O'Connor, 268.

[4]See Jones, 89; J. Robinson, The First Book of Kings, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 24; Simon J. DeVries, 1 Kings, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 13.

[5]C. F. Keil, The Books of the Kings, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), 17.

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Or as another scholar suggested: "David made a moral choice not to be sexually involved with Abishag."[1]

From this brief account it becomes plain that Abishag was merely a nurse and never became a concubine or a wife to David.[2] The king appears to have chosen to remain in a faithful monogamous relationship with Bathsheba until the day of his death.[3] David's return to monogamy is suggested by Ellen White's comment that "he mourned over his sins and departure from God's just precepts."[4] She observes that "the closing years of David's life were marked with faithful devotion to God."[5]

One more matter needs brief attention here, and that concerns the apparent timing of David's connection with the house of the Lord. A chronological reading of the story of David reveals that while he was still a

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[1]Russell H. Dilday, 1, 2 Kings, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 30.

[2]See James Montgomery, who, from both vs. 4 as well as the context shows that Abishag "was simply a nurse." James A. Montgomery, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 72. See also Chr. W. F. Bahr, The Books of the Kings, book 1, trans. and ed. Edwin Harwood, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 22.

[3]That Bathsheba was still the king's wife can be seen from the ready access she had to the king's bedchamber, as well as the context of the pericopes in 1 Kgs 1, 2. See also SDA Bible Commentary, 2:726; Montgomery, 75.

[4]See White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:94, cf. 86, 87, 90.

[5]Ibid., 4a:94.

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polygamist he desired to build a temple for God (2 Sam 5:13-7:3). But, God denied him this privilege for various reasons (2 Sam 7:4-17; 1 Chron 22:7-10). It seem more than mere coincidence, that apparently only after David had undergone a spiritual transformation and had returned to power as a monogamous man that God permitted him to make all the preparations for the temple (1 Chr 22:1-5).

Summary of David's Marital Life

God called David a man after His own heart. This phrase was applied to him when he was a single young man living in accordance with the will of God. At this point in his life, clearly prior to his polygamy, he was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel as the future king of Israel. When David departed from God's commands and began to practice polygamy, "he was no longer a man after God's own heart."[1]

By the time David became king in Jerusalem, he had six wives. As he became more and more successful he drifted further from God and married more women. When David committed adultery and then killed Bathsheba's husband in order to cover up his crime, he remained unpunished for some time.

However, when David married Bathsheba, God sent Nathan with a message of reproof and judgment. The message of God in 2 Sam 12:7, 8 gives no evidence of divine approval for David's polygamy. This pronouncement of divine displeasure reveals several elements essential to a proper understanding of God's

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[1]Ibid., 4a:87.

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perspective on polygamy. The judgment of God was in accordance with the three sins David had committed: adultery, murder, and polygamy. For the crime of murder, David was to lose four of his sons; because of his adultery, another would sleep with his wives; and because of his marrying Bathsheba, he would lose all his other wives.

When Absalom appropriated David's spouses during his attempted takeover of the kingdom, David recognized the direct and complete fulfillment of the prophetic judgment. Thus, when he returned to power after the suppression of the rebellion, David set aside his ten spouses, leaving only Bathsheba. He provided for the care and protection of these women throughout the rest of their lives.

According to the biblical record, David remained monogamously married to Bathsheba for the rest of his life. Even when a beautiful virgin was brought in to keep him warm, he chose not to become involved in polygamy again. Thus, the man who started out as a "man after God's own heart," spent the last decade or so of his life living more closely in accordance with God's commands, including His marital regulations.

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Solomon: "Loved by the Lord"[1]

Phillip Turley observes that "Solomon is more notorious for his prolific harem than any of the other Hebrew monarchs."[2] According to 1 Kgs 11:3, Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, making a total of 1000 spouses.[3] Turley, like other writers, has concluded that Solomon is condemned only for his marriage of foreign wives, not for polygamy.[4] The appropriateness of such a conclusion can only be determined by an analysis of the complete story of Solomon's life.

In order to understand the marital life of this king who "was wiser than all men" (1 Kgs 4:31), the narrative of his life is analyzed in chronological sequence. The first part of the reign of Solomon is examined to observe his marital status in relation to the rest of his lifestyle. Then, the record of his polygamy is investigated. Following this, the final years of Solomon's life are

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[1]2 Sam 12:25 (NIV) reads: "And because the Lord loved him [i.e., Solomon], he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah," (which means "loved by the Lord").

[2]Turley, 50.

[3]Concerning the sixty queens and eighty concubines of Cant 6:8, G. Lloyd Carr appears correct in suggesting that they are not Solomon's spouses. He notes: "More probably, no particular harem is being considered. Note the text does not say 'Solomon has' or 'I have', but it is a simple declaration: There are . . . , and my beloved 'is unique' (v. 9, NIV)," G. Lloyd Carr, The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 148 (emphasis original).

[4]Turley, 51. See also Hall, 34-35; Welch, 62.

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discussed, together with his own counsel concerning some of the lessons he had learned. Finally, a summary of the findings is made.

Faithful Early Years of His Reign

Just before he died, David gave important admonition to Solomon, the new king. Part of his counsel stated: "And keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the law of Moses" (1 Kgs 2:3). This advice Solomon heeded as he started his reign.

After approximately three years as king (1 Kgs 2:39-3:1), "Solomon formed a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her to the city of David, until he had finished building his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem" (1 Kgs 3:1).[1] Around this time, while he appears to have been married only to Pharaoh's daughter, God appeared to him in a dream at Gibeon, and offered him

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[1]If the Song of Songs, which climaxes in the wedding ceremony, describes the first marriage of Solomon, then the bride mentioned here in Cant 6:13 appears to be Pharaoh's daughter, who had apparently been living in the Egyptian enclave in northern Palestine. This is possible, since the term "Shulammite," which appears only here in the Bible, seems to be the feminine form of Solomon's name, i.e., "the Solomoness," or "the one devoted to Solomon." For more on the "Shulammite" see H. H. Rowley, "The Meaning of 'The Shulammite'," The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures 56 (January 1939): 84-91. See also William H. Shea, "The Chiastic Structure of the Song of Songs," Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 92 (1980): 392-393. Vollebregt appears to be correct in suggesting that "we should regard this [book] as a passionate plea for monogamous marriage," 49. A similar theme of the exclusiveness of the marriage relationship comes out in Prov 5-6.

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whatever he would like (1 Kgs 3:5). Solomon humbly responded: "Give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Thine?" (1 Kgs 3:9). This answer pleased God, and He fulfilled Solomon's request. In addition, God promised him riches and honor. Long life would also be his, if he would obey God's laws (1 Kgs 3:10-14).

For several years Solomon prospered. He judged wisely (1 Kgs 3:16-28), became more powerful and wealthy (1 Kgs 4:21-28), and became known as the wisest of all people (1 Kgs 4:31-34). During this time, beginning in the fourth year of his reign, Solomon "began to build the house of the Lord" (1 Kgs 6:1). Within seven years the temple was complete (1 Kgs 6:38). Then an impressive dedication ceremony was conducted (1 Kgs 8). After that, Solomon took thirteen years to build a palace for himself (1 Kgs 7:1-8).

When these building projects were over, some twenty-five years after Solomon had begun his reign,[1] and while he was apparently still monogamous,[2] God appeared to him a second time in a dream, and informed him that if he would walk before Him "in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, then I will

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[1]This figure of approximately twenty-five years is derived from adding the time Solomon started building (in the fourth year of his reign, 1 Kgs 6:1), to the twenty years it took to build the temple and the palace (1 Kgs 6:38-7:8), to the fact that it was only after the temple had been dedicated that God appeared to him a second time in a dream (1 Kgs 9:1-9).

[2]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:99-100.

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establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever" (1 Kgs 9:4, 5). Together with this promise, God issued a warning that if he or his sons were to violate God's laws, disaster would overtake them (1 Kgs 9:6-9). The biblical account shows that, as Ellen White put it, "Solomon walked for many years uprightly before God."[1]

Over time, "Solomon was extolled for his wisdom to the uttermost parts of the earth."[2] As a result, the Queen of Sheba "came to test him with difficult questions" (1 Kgs 10:1). When Solomon answered all of her questions, she praised God, saying: "Blessed be the Lord God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel" (1 Kgs 10:9). Such was the reign of this God-fearing man for approximately the first twenty-five years of his forty-year rulership (1 Kgs 11:42), a time when he appears to have been monogamous.

Gold, Horses, and Many Spouses

After the account of the visit of the Queen of Sheba, the story of Solomon takes a dramatic turn. Beginning in 1 Kgs 10:14 and continuing through several verses until 1 Kgs 11:3 is a listing of all of the things that Solomon accumulated. In this section, the first passage states: "Now the weight of gold which came in to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold" (1 Kgs 10:14). While other items are noted, it is clearly the gold, mentioned eleven times in

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[1]Ibid., 4a:100.

[2]Ellen White, "The Apostasy of Solomon: His Idolatry and Dissipation," The Health Reformer, May 1878, 141.

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twelve texts, that is emphasized (1 Kgs 11:14-25).[1] Richard Nelson points out: "Suddenly, all the glittering gold of Solomon's reign takes on a grimmer aspect, tarnished by the remembered words of Deuteronomy 17:17: 'nor shall he (the king) greatly multiply for himself silver and gold.'"[2]

Immediately following the last mention of gold, is the notation that Solomon had "horses and mules" (1 Kgs 10:25). The next verse indicates that he

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[1]As noted in the study on Lamech's life, the number seven symbolized completion and perfection to the Semitic mind. In contrast, since six falls just short of seven, as Adela Yarbro Collins notes, it "has connotations of incompleteness, imperfection, and even of evil," Adela Yarbro Collins, The Apocalypse, New Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Message (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 97. See also Earl F. Palmer, 1, 2, 3 John, Revelation, The Communicator's Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 208; M. Eugene Boring, Revelation, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 162. The number 666 is thus seen as "the number which persistently falls short of the perfect number seven," G. B. Caird, The Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 176. See also the following, who hold basically the same position: E. W. Hengstenberg, The Revelation of St. John, vol. 2, trans. Patrick Fairbairn, Clark's Foreign Theological Library (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1852), 53; Charles Augustus Briggs, The Messiah of the Apostles (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 324; W. Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker's Book Store, 1940), 182; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 412; G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1974), 220. Admittedly, while all of the above commentators are discussing the use of the number six in the New Testament, it would apparently not be inappropriate to extrapolate that in the Old Testament also, the number six was seen similarly. The significance of the 666 talents of gold should therefore not be overlooked. This figure, which symbolically represented incompleteness, failure, and evil, appears right at the start of the enumeration of Solomon's acquisitions.

[2]Richard D. Nelson, First and Second Kings, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987), 67. See also, Wordsworth, 3:45.

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had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses. Then vs. 28 adds: "Also Solomon's import of horses was from Egypt and Kue." Nelson astutely comments: "No one with a Deuteronomistic theological background could ever have missed the broad hint of the last verses about horses from Egypt (10:28-29), which point directly to Deuteronomy 17:16."[1] Another commentary on precious metals and horses puts it thus: "The excessive accumulation of silver and gold and the multiplication of horses were in violation of the warnings given by Moses (Deut. 17:16, 17)."[2]

Following the passage about Solomon's trade with Egypt is the account of his many wives. 1 Kgs 11:1-3 states:

> Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women,
> from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love.
> And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away.

Besides the mention of Solomon's first wife, vs. 1 indicates that he chose wives from five near neighbors to Israel.[3] Simon DeVries concludes: "Marrying the wives was part of Solomon's political strategy."[4] The purpose of these marriages was to form alliances with these neighboring states,[5] apparently in an

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[1]Nelson, 67. See also Wordsworth, 3:45.

[2]SDA Bible Commentary, 2:784.

[3]See Jones, 233.

[4]DeVries, 143.

[5]Ibid.

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effort to secure peace. However, the attempt to obtain peace in a way contrary to God's laws resulted in the opposite (1 Kgs 11:14-40).

Solomon violated two divine regulations. Vss. 1 and 2 bring to mind the prohibition of intermarriage with those who were not believers in the Creator God. Explicit instructions had been given that there was to be no marriage with these non-believers (Exod 34:11-16; Deut 7:1-4). The specific danger God had mentioned was that marriage with these people would turn the Israelites "away from following Me to serve other gods" (Deut 7:4). This is precisely what happened to Solomon. He began to worship Sidonian, Ammonite, and Moabite gods (1 Kgs 11:5-7).[1]

In distinction to the above emphasis, vs. 3 focuses in on the multiplicity of spouses that Solomon had: "And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away." This statement alludes distinctly to the royal law of Deut 17:17, "neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away."[2] According to J. Ridderbos, in 1 Kgs 11, "Solomon's having many wives is condemned."[3] In taking more than one wife,

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[1]Neh 13:26 confirms this point.

[2]Dwight notes that Solomon's polygamy was an "outrageous violation" of the "express law against the multiplication of wives," 26.

[3]Ridderbos, 200.

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Solomon's action was "directly opposed to the law of Jehovah,"[1] as well as the "ideal God set forth in Genesis."[2]

Ellen White has written extensively on the life of Solomon, who for many years did walk uprightly before God. She notes:

> The Lord particularly cautioned the one who might be anointed king not to "multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold." Verse 17.
>
> With these warnings Solomon was familiar, and for a time he heeded them.[3]

> But even this exalted, learned, and once good man, fell through yielding to temptations connected with his prosperity and honored position. He forgot God, and the conditions of his success. He fell into the sinful practice of other kings, of having many wives, which was contrary to God's arrangement.[4]

The record of 1 Kgs 10:14-11:8 traces the step-by-step movement of Solomon away from God and into apostasy. Solomon violated the regulations set up primarily for kings in Deut 17:16, 17, which included the law against polygamy.

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[1]Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, 10 vols. (Silver Spring, MD: E. G. White Estate, 1981-1990), 7:74. Other commentators similarly recognize that Solomon here violated the divine prohibition, which they specifically see as Deut 17:17. See, for example, SDA Bible Commentary, 2:784; Keil, 168; Wordsworth, 3:4; Nelson, 67.

[2]Dilday, 132. See also Howard A. Hanke, Numbers and Deuteronomy, The Wesleyan Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 517.

[3]Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 52.

[4]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:100.

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Divine Response to Solomon's Apostasy

At the conclusion of the passage delineating the downfall of Solomon, the record reads:

> Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,
> and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded.
> So the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you, and will give it to your servant.
> "Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son.
> "However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen." (1 Kgs 11:9-13)

Whereas before, when Solomon had been faithful to God, he had been greatly blessed, his subsequent apostasy resulted in divine judgment, just as God had previously warned (1 Kgs 9:6-9).[1] As 1 Kgs 11:14 notes: "Then the Lord raised up an adversary to Solomon, Hadad the Edomite." A little later, vs. 23 states: "God also raised up another adversary to him, Rezon the son of Eliada." Vs. 26, indicates that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, "also rebelled against the king."[2]

Although the punishment with which Solomon was threatened was not to be inflicted until his death, God removed His protecting care and thus permitted

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[1]See Jones, 234.

[2]This judgment of God was in direct fulfillment of the statement made about Solomon in 2 Sam 7:14: "When he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men."

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adversaries to harass and weaken the kingdom.[1] As Howard Hanke notes: "The violation of this legal norm [Deut 17:17] brought ruin and destruction, not only upon himself but also upon his nation."[2] Thus, "by messages of reproof and by severe judgments, God sought to arouse the king to a realization of the sinfulness of his course."[3]

Closing Years of Solomon's Life

There is some indication in the later writings of Solomon of the results of the reproofs and judgments which God brought on Solomon. Although disputed by some modern scholars,[4] there is considerable evidence that "the book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon in his old age."[5] For example, Eccl 1:1 introduces the book saying: "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in

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[1]See Keil, 172; White, Prophets and Kings, 77.

[2]Hanke, 517.

[3]White, Prophets and Kings, 77.

[4]See, for example, George Aaron Barton, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), 58-65; J. Coert Rylaarsdam, The Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, The Layman's Bible Commentary (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1964), 94-96; Wesley J. Fuerst, The Books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Lamentations, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 96-98.

[5]Ellen G. White, "The Apostasy of Solomon: The Lessons of His Life," The Health Reformer, June, 1878, 172. For further support for this view see, for example, White, Prophets and Kings, 80; SDA Bible Commentary, 3:1057-1060; Delitzsch, 179-190; Michael A. Eaton, Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 21-23.

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Jerusalem." Moreover, as Michael Eaton has noted: "The account in [Eccl] 2:1-11 is strongly reminiscent of Solomon; almost every phrase has its parallel in the narratives concerning Solomon."[1]

Eccl 2:1-11 chronicle some of the attempts of Solomon to find meaning in life. Solomon says that he collected for himself "silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces" (vs. 8). He also provided for himself "male and female singers and the pleasures of men--many concubines" (vs. 8). The word rendered "concubines" is an interpretation of a phrase that appears only once in the Old Testament: *šiddāh w^ešiddôṯ*.[2] Though the meaning is somewhat uncertain, based on the immediate context, etymological studies, and a comparison with other scriptural references, scholars have suggested that the word "concubines" best translates this unique phrase.[3] The comment at the end of this part of the discourse may provide a clue as to Solomon's attitude toward this search for pleasure: "And behold all was vanity and striving after wind" (Eccl 2:11).

Ellen White explains that the judgment pronounced against Solomon in 1 Kgs 11:11, 12 awakened him to his folly.[4] As a result, "in penitence he began

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[1]Eaton, 23.

[2]See A. Lukyn Williams, Ecclesiastes, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 33; Fuerst, 107; James L. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes: A Commentary, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 80.

[3]See A. Lukyn Williams, 33-34; Crenshaw, 81; Eaton, 67; A. Cohen, ed., The Five Megilloth: Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary (Surrey, England: Soncino Press, 1946), 117.

[4]White, Prophets and Kings, 77.

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to retrace his steps toward the exalted plane of purity and holiness from whence he had fallen so far."[1] His "repentance was sincere,"[2] and he confessed his sin.[3] Since, as White correctly points out, "repentance includes sorrow for sin, and a turning away from it,"[4] it would be legitimate to suggest then that Solomon forsook this "sinful practice"[5] of polygamy at this point in his life. Then it was that, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, he recorded for after generations the history of his wasted years together with their lessons of warning.[6] The final two verses of Ecclesiastes capture the essence of Solomon's message: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl 12:13, 14 NIV).

The life of Solomon can be summarized as follows. During the first approximately twenty-five years of his forty-year reign, it appears as though Solomon was a God-fearing person who lived in accordance with the monogamous marital standard set up in Eden. During this time God twice appeared to him in a

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[1]Ibid., 78.

[2]Ibid., 84. See also idem, "Communication from Mrs. E. G. White," The General Conference Bulletin, 25 February 1895, 340.

[3]Ibid., 85.

[4]Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 17.

[5]White, Spiritual Gifts, 4a:100.

[6]White, Prophets and Kings, 79.

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dream, promising blessings if Solomon would follow His requirements. Also during this period Solomon built and dedicated the temple. The record shows, however, that he drifted away from God, and violated the specific deuteronomic prohibitions concerning the excessive accumulation of wealth, the obtaining of horses from Egypt, intermarriage with non-believers, and polygamy. When this happened, God reproved him and brought judgments upon him. Solomon responded by sincere repentance and confession, including apparently the stopping of his polygamy. His last writings make a call for obedience to God and His requirements, "for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl 12:13 NIV).

Joash: Repairer of the House of the Lord

The account of the plural marriage of Joash is found in 2 Chr 24:2, 3:

> And Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.
> And Jehoiada took two wives for him, and he became the father of sons and daughters.

More than two centuries ago James Hamilton, commenting on this passage, stated: "Here we have God's own testimony, that a man may be a polygamist, and yet no sinner."[1] More recently, other writers have expressed similar sentiments concerning the so-called "divine sanction" of Joash's polygamy.[2] For example, Phillip Turley posits: "The possession of two wives for king Joash seems from this passage, to have been an arrangement that was proper

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[1]Hamilton, 8.

[2]See, for example, Kronholm, 79; Mann, 16; Jasper, 36.

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in the sight of God."[1] Since the case of Joash is often cited in relation to the issue of polygamy, the marital life of Joash is addressed in this project.

Young Joash's life was spared when his assassinated father's sister, Jehosheba, rescued him from certain death (2 Kgs 11:1-3). She and her husband, Jehoiada the priest, raised Joash as their own son (2 Kgs 12:2).[2] This young man, called "Joash" (2 Kgs 12:19, 20; 13:1, 10) as well as "Jehoash" (2 Kgs 12:1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 18), became the king of Judah at the age of seven, after the wicked queen Athaliah was put to death (2 Kgs 11:1-20).

The record in the book of Chronicles reveals that Joash's reign was divided into basically three phases. First, there was the period during which he worked "to restore the house of the Lord" (2 Chr 24:4), which had become dilapidated and was in need of restoration.[3]

Second, was the time of Joash's apostasy. Soon after the death of the priest Jehoiada, as Keil notes,

> Joash yielded to the petitions of the princes of Judah that he would assent to their worshipping idols, and at length went so far as to stone the son of his

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[1]Turley, 53.

[2]That Jehoiada stood in for Joash's father is seen by various commentators. See, Dilday, 370; W. A. L. Elmslie, The Book of Chronicles, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 273-274; Edward Lewis Curtis and Albert Alonzo Madsen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Book of Chronicles, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 433.

[3]See Dilday, 371. Cf. 2 Chr 24:7.

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> benefactor, the prophet Zechariah, on account of his candid reproof of his apostasy (2 Chron. xxiv. 17-22).[1]

As Zechariah lay dying in the courtyard of the temple, he said: "May the Lord see this and call you to account" (2 Chr 24:22 NIV). By these words he announced the fate of Joash.[2] The following verses then describe how the Arameans came and "killed all the leaders of the people" (2 Chr 24:23 NIV). This happened "because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Joash" (vs. 24). Finally, outraged by the murder of Zechariah, Joash's own servants assassinated him (vs. 25). Thus, this king who had started out well forsook God's way, and was punished as a result.

In the books of Kings and Chronicles there appears to be a pattern for the stories of many of the kings. The narrative begins with a brief summary of the reign of the king, then the writer elaborates on details of his life.[3] This type of narrative pattern is evident in the story of Joash as well. For a better understanding of the polygamy of Joash, the two parallel introductory accounts of his reign are outlined here:[4]

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[1]Keil, 365. See also Robert C. Dentan, The First and Second Books of the Kings; The First and Second Books of the Chronicles, The Layman's Bible Commentary (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1964), 149; J. G. McConville, I & II Chronicles, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 210-211.

[2]See McConville, 211.

[3]See, for example, 2 Kgs 13, 14, 15, 16, 17; 2 Chr 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, etc.

[4]Dwight notes a similar significance in these parallel passages, 28.

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2 Kgs 11:21-12:3	2 Chr 24:1-3
Jehoash was seven years old when he became king.	Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Zibiah from Beersheba.
In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba.	
And Jehoash did right in the sight of the Lord all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him.	And Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.
Only the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.	And Jehoiada took two wives for him, and he became the father of sons and daughters.

On several matters the account of the chronicler is similar to that of the author of the book of Kings. However, a distinct contrast appears in the final verse of both accounts. Whereas in 2 Kgs 12:3 a note is made about the "high places," or centers of idolatrous worship,[1] that were not removed, 2 Chr 24:3 says that Jehoiada "took two wives for him."

It is apparent that 2 Kgs 12:3 is in contrast with vs. 2. The Hebrew word *raq*, rendered "only," introduces the statement about the practice of idolatry. Thus, both the language and the content stress the evil of Joash's reign as contrasted with the "right" that he did (vs. 2).

A remarkably analogous structure prefaces the account of Joash's reign in 2 Chr 24 as well. The Hebrew term used to introduce vs. 3 in this passage is the conjunction *waw*. When used to express contrasting ideas, the *waw* is rendered

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[1]See, for example, Lev 26:30; Num 22:40, 41; 33:52; 1 Kgs 13:33; 2 Kgs 17:29; 2 Chr 14:3; 34:3, 4. See also Dilday, 371; SDA Bible Commentary, 2:923.

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by the word "but."[1] Recognizing that polygamy is contrary to the divinely established marital laws,[2] the *waw* should here be rendered as "but," since this action is contrasted with the "right" noted in vs. 2. Thus, it would be more contextually and linguistically accurate to render 2 Chr 24:3 as: "But Jehoiada took two wives for him."[3]

This rendering of the *waw* as "but" in 2 Chr 24:3 synchronizes better the two prefaces outlined above. In both cases the material begins by noting that the seven-year-old Joash, the son of Zibiah, became king in Jerusalem and reigned for forty years. The second correspondence between these two accounts is the mentioning of Joash's faithfulness during Jehoiada's lifetime. The third comment in both emphasizes one specific manner in which Joash fell short of, or violated God's regulations.

The favorable assessment of Joash is qualified to some extent. Joash is not portrayed as a flawless king, but rather as one who obeyed God, except for his idolatry and his polygamy. In fact, just as the comment about the "high places" in 2 Kgs 12:3 implies a negative evaluation of Joash's conduct in connection with his

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[1]Brown, Driver and Briggs, 252; Waltke and O'Connor, 651.

[2]Some commentators note that Joash here compromised Deut 17:17. See, for example, Jacob M. Myers, II Chronicles, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 137.

[3]Parrinder, 16-17, understood this verse as indicating that Jehoiada took two wives for himself. While this could be a legitimate rendering of the word *lô*, as Kaiser shows (183, footnote #4), the context implies that Jehoiada, acting as a father to the orphaned king, took these wives for Joash. It has also been noted that these could have been two wives in succession. See Kaiser, 183 (footnote #4); Jamieson, Joshua-Esther, 549.

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worship practices, so the notation of "two wives" in 2 Chr 24:3 indicates an adverse judgment on his behavior in relation to his marital action.

In brief then, this short study on the life of Joash finds no evidence that the polygamy of Joash was divinely sanctioned. While at one stage in his life he was true to God, he apostatized later on. The two parallel introductory records of Joash's life suggest that the plural marriage that he practiced was contrary to that which was "right in the sight of the Lord."

Summary of the Assessment of Polygamists in Scripture

This chapter has investigated the lives of the best-known polygamists in the Bible. As noted, these characters were selected because the biblical account contained sufficient information from which to draw conclusions regarding the manner in which the practice of polygamy was viewed either by the Bible writers or by God Himself.

In the cases of Lamech, the antediluvians, Esau, and Elkanah there is no explicit verbal assessment of their practice of polygamy. However, the practice of this marital form is placed in a rather negative light. For example, in Lamech's story the context, language, cultural symbols, and structural elements identify polygamy as an expression of corruption and rebelliousness against God. Lamech, the antediluvians, and Esau are classified as wicked people. Elkanah practiced polygamy in a time when people did as they pleased.

In each case punishment or judgment is either directly stated or implied. For Lamech it was the termination of his family tree. The clearest expression of

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disapproval of polygamy can be seen in the destruction of polygamists during the worldwide flood. Elkanah's polygamy appears to be implicitly critiqued by a possible reference to his violation of Lev 18:18, and the evidence of the resultant strife in his home. Esau was a godless man, whose descendants became the enemies of God's people.

The accounts of Gideon and Joash indicate that both of these leaders at one stage in their lives were zealous for God. However, they eventually both led their people into idolatry. The record of their polygamy is not placed in a positive light as it appears contrasted with their idolatry, in both cases.

Since, according to the biblical record, Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon are all identified as having been set aside by God for a specific purpose, their cases are considered together. These men were all called by God before they became polygamous. Abraham and Solomon were monogamous when God spoke to them, while Jacob and David were divinely set aside when they were still single men. It was only after they were selected by God that each one drifted away from God's will and became polygamous.

None of these accounts of polygamy is placed in an attractive light. In Abraham's case, he took a second wife because he did not trust God to fulfill His promises. Jacob became polygamous due to the deceit and persuasion of others, and not at God's command. In the cyclical pattern of the life of David, polygamy appears only during the period when he was involved in sin. The structure of the

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story of Solomon indicates that his polygamy appears during the time when he violated other commands of God and slipped into apostasy.

The results of the polygamy of these four characters are extensively documented in Scripture. Both in Abraham's and Jacob's cases there was jealousy and disharmony between the wives. Furthermore, strife and tension arose among the children of Jacob and David. Solomon's wives turned his heart away from God and into idolatry.

At some point in the polygamy of each one of these men, God interposed either directly or indirectly with some form of judgment, punishment, or direction to break up the polygamous unions. In Abraham's case, God recognized only Sarah as his wife, and sanctioned the sending away of Hagar as the way to resolve their family problems. Jacob's encounter with the divine being at the Jabbok apparently resulted in his forsaking plural marriage and returning to a monogamous relationship with his original wife, Rachel. David seems to have accepted the predicted loss of his spouses and set them aside when he returned to power as a transformed man. Solomon, upon recognizing God's judgments, repented and apparently ceased his practice of polygamy as well.

Significantly, it appears that only while these men were not polygamous that they were directly connected with the "house of the Lord." God summoned first Abraham and later Jacob to worship Him at a special meeting place only after each had ended his polygamy. Both David and Solomon appear to have been involved in temple work only while they were monogamous.

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In almost every one of these cases it appears that after the dissolution of the polygamous relationships, the mothers and children were properly looked after. Abraham provided for his children who were sent away. Jacob apparently kept the members of his family together and cared for them all of his life. While nothing is said about Solomon, the record states that David protected and provided for his former spouses for the rest of their lives.

This extensive analysis of the lives of the major polygamists of the Old Testament reveals that in no case is there even implicit sanction of the practice of polygamy. On the contrary, God seems to have indicated His support of monogamy by never summoning a polygamous man to a special task. When those who were called became polygamous, God interposed and brought about the cessation of this marital form. By the language of the story, as well as by various kinds of judgments, God conveyed His disapproval of polygamy. That His blessing and sanction rests only on monogamy as a marital form is the fundamental message conveyed in the chronicles of those who practiced polygamy in Bible times.

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CHAPTER V

NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES CONCERNING MARITAL FORMS RELATED TO POLYGAMY

Throughout the New Testament there is complete silence regarding polygamy or polygamists, even though there is extra-biblical historical evidence that some Jews of this period practiced this form of marriage.[1] Two contradictory conclusions have been drawn from this silence. William Blum notes that on the one hand, "it might be concluded that Christ and the evangelists were quite aware of those marriages and accepted them as legitimate."[2] On the other hand, "the silence of the biblical writers does not necessarily imply that they approved polygynous marriages."[3]

Karl Barth recognized the fact that "when we turn to the New Testament, polygamy seems suddenly to have disappeared from view."[4] Thus, since

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[1]See Joachim Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, trans. F. H. Cave and C. H. Cave (London: SCM Press, 1969), 90-94, 368-372; Josephus Antiquities of the Jews 17.1.14.

[2]Blum, 224. See also Katuramu, 20.

[3]Blum, 224.

[4]Karl Barth, On Marriage, Social Ethics Series, no. 17 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 22.

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"monogamy seems to be so much a matter of course," Barth remarked that it would have been superfluous to have had an edict forbidding the Christian community from practicing polygamy.[1] Similarly, Edward Schillebeeckx observed that at this time, polygamy "presented no problem: monogamous marriage was accepted as a point of departure."[2]

In view of the absence of any direct reference to polygamy in the New Testament, the task of this chapter is to consider the materials dealing with marital relationships that have implications for polygamy. First, some statements of Jesus directly pertaining to marriage are addressed. Second, the meaning and significance of *porneia* in Acts 15 is examined. Third, the comments of Paul on marriage are investigated. Lastly, the findings are summarized.

Jesus' Statements on Marriage

Much discussion has taken place in connection with the biblical passages related to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In this section only the statements of Jesus that have implications for polygamy are addressed. To begin with, the phrase "one flesh" is considered. Next, the discussion of the levirate custom is investigated. A short summary follows.

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Schillebeeckx, 202.

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Use of the Term "One Flesh"

The discussion of Jesus with the Pharisees concerning the possibility of and grounds for divorce is found in Matt 19:3-9 and Mark 10:2-12.[1] The first part of the dialogue, according to Matt 19:3-6, reads:[2]

> And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?"
>
> And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

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[1]A recent article on Deut 24:1-4 shows the basic harmony of Jesus' statements in the Gospels with this Old Testament case law. See J. Carl Laney, "Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and the Issue of Divorce," Bibliotheca Sacra 149 (January-March 1992): 3-15.

[2]The second part of this discussion (Matt 19:7-9), which contains the "exceptive clause" permitting divorce for *porneia*, is not addressed here. However, it should be noted that, in addition to other interpretations, several scholars have recently put forth evidence which suggests that *porneia* here refers to illicit marital unions of the kind forbidden in Lev 18:1-18. See, for example, Ben Witherington, "Matthew 5.32 and 19.9--Exception or Exceptional Situation?" New Testament Studies 31 (1985): 571-576; W. J. O'Shea, "Marriage and Divorce: The Biblical Evidence," The Australian Catholic Record 47 (April 1970): 89-109; W. K. Lowther Clarke, "The Excepting Clause in St Matthew," Theology 87 (September 1927): 161-162; H. J. Richards, "Christ on Divorce," Scripture 11 (January 1959): 22-32; Augustine Stock, "Matthean Divorce Texts," Biblical Theology Bulletin 8 (February 1978): 24-33; Bruce Vawter, "The Divorce Clauses in Mt 5,32 and 19,9," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 16 (1954): 155-167; F. F. Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 185; J. Carl Laney, The Divorce Myth (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1981), 62-78; Fitzmyer, 91-103. If these scholars are correct on the legitimacy of dissolving illicit marriages, and since this study has concluded that polygamy is one of these unlawful unions (see chapter 3 of this project), this statement of Jesus would permit divorce for polygamists. This would then resolve the so-called polygamy-divorce dilemma as posited by Bouit, 102; Gitari, 7; Yego, 69; Bryson, 3-4; Kistler, 118; Walter A. Trobisch, "Congregational Responsibility and the Christian Individual," Practical Anthropology 13 (September-October 1966): 239; Staples, "Must Polygamists Divorce?" 50; and William G. Johnsson, "Between the Ideal and the Actual," Adventist Review, 29 May 1986, 4-5.

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and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh'?

"Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."[1]

Instead of disputing with the Pharisees, Jesus directed them to the true nature of marriage as instituted at the beginning of this world.[2] He appealed specifically to the passage in Gen 2:24 as God's word concerning marriage.[3] However, in referring to this passage, Jesus did not quote from the Hebrew text. Rather, He appears to have used the Septuagint version.

A comparison of ancient texts indicates that Jesus sometimes apparently quoted from the Septuagint,[4] while at other times He favored the Masoretic text.[5] Thus, His choice of the Septuagint in this case could be indicative of an additional emphasis He wished to make concerning marriage. In the words of

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[1]In arguing for the indissolubility of marriage it has been felt that the marriage vow that a polygamist makes with his additional wives should not be broken, just as the Israelites were not permitted to break their vow to the Gibeonites (Josh 9-10) even though they had been deceived into making it (see, for example, Bryson, 2-3). However, this view ignores the fact that vows should only be kept if they do not force one to perform a morally wrong act (see White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 506. Cf. idem, "Nehemiah Separates Israel from Idolaters," The Signs of the Times, 24 January 1884, 407-408).

[2]R. K. Bower and G. L. Knapp, "Marriage," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed. (1986), 3:261-266.

[3]See John Murray, 29; Keil and Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 1:90; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 729.

[4]See, for example, Mark 10:4 (cf. Deut 24:3).

[5]See, for example, Matt 26:31 (cf. Zech 13:7); Matt 27:46 (cf. Ps 22:1); John 13:18 (cf. Ps 41:9). See Gleason L. Archer and Gregory Chirichigno, Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).

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R. C. H. Lenski: "Jesus quotes Gen 2:24, using the LXX [Septuagint] which reproduces the Hebrew exactly save that *hoi duo*, 'the two,' is added in order to bring out the sense of the original."[1] Jesus' statement, "the two shall become one flesh," needs further consideration.[2]

While the issue considered here is divorce and not polygamy, it would be hermeneutically correct to observe other implications that can legitimately be derived from this statement of Jesus. Several scholars have done this. For example, Eduard Schweizer suggested that the "one flesh" concept "presupposes monogamy."[3] Similarly, John Murray noted that both "the indissolubility of the bond of marriage and the principle of monogamy are inherent in the verse."[4] As Otto Piper observed: "It is obvious that what Jesus says about marriage implies monogamy."[5] Statements such as these appear to be validated both by the

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[1]Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, 729.

[2]The Pauline usage of this phrase is not addressed here; however, it could be argued that in Eph 5:31, "Paul is not using monogamous marriage as an analogy at all. He is using the analogy of a relationship--the relationship which exists between Christ and the church," Welch 96. Also, the phrase "one flesh" in 1 Cor 6:16 is likewise used in connection with the Christian's relationship to Christ.

[3]Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Mark, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1970), 203. See also, Makanzu, 62; Kronholm, 88; Godfrey E. Phillips, The Old Testament in the World Church, Lutterworth Library, vol. 13, Missionary Research Series, 2 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1942), 124.

[4]John Murray, 30.

[5]Otto Piper, The Biblical View of Sex and Marriage (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 149.

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Genesis account of the marriage institution and the overall New Testament view of marital relationships.[1]

Focusing on Jesus' use of the phrase "the two shall become one flesh," some have pointed out the specific significance of the word "two." For instance, in his A.D. 393 treatise on marriage, Jerome elaborated on Jesus' statement regarding the two who become one: "Not three, or four; otherwise, how can they be any longer two, if they are several."[2] Likewise, Robert Hitchens comments that the word "two" makes it plain that "'one flesh' can in no way include polygamous marriages. It is not 'three, four, five, or six' that become 'one flesh' but 'two.'"[3] Several scholars have therefore appropriately concluded that this phrase not only approves monogamy, but it "also excludes polygamy."[4]

The Practice of the Levirate Custom

The issue of the levirate in the New Testament has often been discussed in relation to marital forms. The only clear reference to this custom is recorded in

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[1]See the study on Gen 1 and 2 in chapter 2 of this project. See also the other New Testament passages addressed in the rest of this chapter.

[2]Jerome Against Jovinianus 1.14.

[3]Hitchens, 15.

[4]E. Earle Ellis, "Adultery," Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics (1973), 10. See also Blum, xviii; Nkwoka, 149; Gray and Adams, 4:99; Kronholm, 86; Frederick C. Grant, "Introduction and Exegesis of the Gospel According to Mark," The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979), 7:796.

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connection with a dialogue of Jesus with the Sadducees. The first part of this debate is found in Matt 22:23-28:[1]

> On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Him and questioned Him,
> saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies, having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up an offspring to his brother.'
> "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother;
> so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh.
> "And last of all, the woman died.
> "In the resurrection therefore whose wife of the seven shall she be? For all seven had her."

Commenting on this account, David Gitari notes that when Jesus responded to the question of the Sadducees, He "made no reference to polygamous implications of the Levirate law."[2] Due to this silence of Jesus, Eugene Hillman posits that "it may be of some significance that the Gospel story of this encounter contains no reservations at all about the polygamous implications of the levirate law."[3] Recognizing that arguments from silence are inherently suspect, another writer has nevertheless commented that Jesus "did not make use of this occasion to protect the marriage institution from a custom that was a major cause of

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[1]For the parallel accounts, see Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-33.

[2]Gitari, 6.

[3]Hillman, 164. See also Wise, 84.

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polygamy."[1] And, "if Jesus did hold an absolutist position on monogamy the silence of the Gospels at this point is difficult to understand."[2]

Statements such as these are based on the understanding that the levirate was a binding obligation which inevitably resulted in polygamy.[3] This might indeed be the case in some societies; however, there appears to be no evidence that the biblical levirate, as legislated for and practiced by Israel, ever caused polygamy.[4] Yet the question remains as to how to deal with the levirate issue as raised by the Sadducees.

G. K. Falusi recognizes that "we are not told whether or not the seven brothers were previously married and therefore became polygamous at the time each inherited the woman."[5] A possible solution to this problem may be derived from an analysis of the final question posed by the Sadducees: "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife" (Luke 20:33). If the six brothers who inherited the woman had already been married, the Sadducees' question would have been moot, since it would have been obvious that the wife would have belonged to the first brother only. Thus, crucial to the

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[1]Staples, "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa," 28.

[2]Ibid.

[3]See Hillman, 163-164; Staples, "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa," 25.

[4]See the study done in chapter 3 above.

[5]Falusi, 302-303.

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argument is the assumption that this case involved "seven men with only one wife."[1]

The later interpretation by the Babylonian Talmud, which indicates that the levirate was not to be practiced polygamously, provides additional support for a monogamous levirate system.[2] As Geoffrey Parrinder noted, the teaching of the Rabbis was against a married man's taking a widow as a second wife.[3] Thus, as in the Old Testament, the weight of evidence in the New suggests that the levirate was practiced monogamously.

By way of summary, the following can be said about Jesus' statements on marriage. When asked about divorce by the Pharisees, Jesus pointed them back to the Genesis model of marriage. In doing so, He quoted from the Septuagint version, which more clearly brings out the original monogamous intent of the institution of marriage. A study of the levirate as discussed by Jesus and the Sadducees shows that, as in the Old Testament, this custom was apparently not practiced in a way that promoted or caused polygamy. Thus, the monogamous marital norm was supported by Jesus' teachings.

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[1]Stanley M. Horton, "Matthew," New Testament Study Bible, The Complete Biblical Library (Springfield, MO: The Complete Biblical Library, 1986), 479.

[2]See, for example, Babylonian Talmud Yebamoth 44a, 50a-b.

[3]Parrinder, 26.

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The Meaning of *Porneia* in Acts 15

Admittedly, *porneia* and its related forms can have various meanings.[1] In some cases, such as Matt 21:31, 32 and Luke 15:30 this word seems to specifically indicate prostitution.[2] In other passages, such as Mark 7:21 and Gal 5:19, *porneia* appears to refer to immoral behavior in general.[3] On occasion, as in Rev 14:8, it can figuratively refer to idolatry.[4]

The use of the usual Greek term for adultery (*moicheia*) together with *porneia* in passages such as Matt 15:19 and Mark 7:21 indicates that these terms are not identical.[5] While *moicheia* (adultery) plainly refers to sexual unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant, "*porneia*, on the other hand, is a much broader term which may include adultery, but refers to the other unlawful sexual behavior as well."[6] Harold England has appropriately remarked that "in the New Testament, *porneia* has both a broad and a limited usage."[7] Therefore, as J. Carl

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[1]See the delineation of the uses of this word in the article by Joseph Jensen, "Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina," Novum Testamentum 20 (July 1978): 161-184.

[2]See also 1 Cor 6:13, 15, 16, 18; 10:8; Heb 11:31.

[3]See also 1 Cor 5:9, 10, 11; 6:9; 7:2; Rev 2:14, 20, 21; 9:21; 22:15.

[4]See also Rev 17:1, 2, 4, 5, 15, 16; 17:3, 9; 19:2.

[5]See also 1 Cor 6:9; Heb 13:4.

[6]Laney, The Divorce Myth, 68. See also Harold England, 118.

[7]Harold England, 122.

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Laney observes, "context must always determine the specific meaning of a word."[1] Since some evidence suggests that *porneia* in Acts 15 had a meaning different from, yet related to, the two non-figurative definitions given above,[2] the meaning of *porneia* in this passage needs attention.

In a letter sent to the churches by the Jerusalem Council, which met around A.D. 49,[3] the apostles and elders provided instruction for the new Gentile believers. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28) these early church leaders informed the new believers that, while they did not have to be circumcised, they needed to "abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication [*porneia*]" (Acts 15:29). If these four prohibitions are compared with those recorded in Leviticus, it becomes evident, as Laney states, that "when the Council formulated its decision, the restrictions were recorded in their correct order according to Leviticus 17-18."[4] The fact that there is some correlation between Acts 15 and Lev 18 is recognized by several authors,

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[1]Laney, The Divorce Myth, 73. See also Harold England, 122.

[2]For a list and brief critique of ten possible meanings for *porneia*, see H. G. Coiner, "Those 'Divorce and Remarriage' Passages (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor 7:10-16); With Brief Reference to the Mark and Luke Passages," Concordia Theological Monthly 39 (May 1968): 367-384. See also Laney, The Divorce Myth, 62-81.

[3]See SDA Bible Commentary, 6:304; Lenski notes that "Zahn dates the council in the spring of 52; others place it earlier." R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 592.

[4]Laney, The Divorce Myth, 73.

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including New Testament scholars F. F. Bruce and Joseph Fitzmyer.[1] When placed in parallel columns the reference to these levitical laws becomes even more evident:

Idol sacrifices	Lev 17:7-9
Blood	Lev 17:10-13
Things strangled	Lev 17:14-16
Porneia	Lev 18:1-30

Recognizing the correspondence between Acts 15 and the levitical laws, Hans Conzelmann concludes: "These are the prohibitions of Leviticus 17-18 (in vs 29 they are even in the same order)."[2]

Conzelmann and other scholars have noted that these forbidden sexual relationships include more than just the incestuous alliances recorded in the first part of Lev 18.[3] They correctly point out that the prohibited *porneia* in Acts 15 includes the various sexual relationships listed in the second part of Lev 18 as well. Colin Brown notes that *porneia* apparently covers "all sexual offenses listed

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[1]See Fitzmyer, 88; Bruce, 185; Stock, 26; Harold England, 121-122; Witherington, 572; Jensen, 180; W. Clarke, 162. Though many scholars who see this link between Acts 15 and Lev 18 suggest that *porneia* refers only to incestuous relationships, nothing in Lev 18 calls for such a restricted view.

[2]Hans Conzelmann, Acts of the Apostles, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 118.

[3]See Conzelmann, 119; Dwight, 153; Jerome Crowe, The Acts, New Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 117. The SDA Bible Commentary, recognizing the connection between *porneia* in Acts 15 and the entire chapter of Lev 18, notes: "In regard to fornication, the Levitical law against every form of unchastity was rightly strict (Lev. 18; 20:10-21)," 6:312.

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in Lev. 18."[1] These include adultery (vs. 20), bestiality (vs. 23), homosexuality (vs. 22), incest (vss. 7-17), and polygamy (vs. 18).[2]

The restrictions of the laws of Lev 17-18 were not only for the Israelites. The concept of inclusiveness, "whether he is a native or an alien" (Lev 17:15), is repeated several times in this levitical legislation,[3] indicating that these "are universal abominations,"[4] which apply to both Israelite and non-Israelite.[5] As Jerome Crowe properly observed concerning the early church decision: "The practises proscribed are among those which Israelite law forbade for resident aliens (Lev 17-18)."[6] It appears, therefore, as though the four points made by the Jerusalem Council were "the same four concessions [that] had for centuries been demanded of any stranger who wished to make his home in Israel (Lev 17:8-18:26)."[7] As F. Gavin noted: "*Porneia* in this meaning would surely be

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[1]Colin Brown, 538.

[2]That Lev 18:18 is a law against polygamy was shown in chapter 3 of this project.

[3]See Lev 17:8, 10, 13, 15; 18:24, 25.

[4]Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' Model," 121.

[5]Hasel, "Clean and Unclean Meats in Leviticus 11: Still Relevant?" 103-104.

[6]Crowe, 117. See also Conzelmann, 118.

[7]Richards, 30. See also William Willimon, who comments on Acts 15:20: "James seems to regard these gentiles as analogous to 'strangers' in the Hebrew Scriptures," William H. Willimon, Acts, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Know Press, 1988), 130.

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forbidden to everyone."[1] Thus, just as these specific laws in Leviticus were universally applicable moral requirements,[2] so the apostles and elders, under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28),[3] instructed the new Gentile believers that, among other things, all Christians were required to abstain from *porneia* in all its forms, including the practice of polygamy.

The Greek word for "abstain," *apechomai*, needs special attention. This word occurs only six times in the New Testament. Of these, two occurrences are in Acts 15.[4] Both in vss. 20 and 29 "those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles" (vs. 19) are instructed to "abstain" from four things. Various dictionaries define *apechomai* as "to keep away or abstain from,"[5] "to hold

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[1]F. Gavin, "A Further Note on *Porneia*," Theology 16 (February 1928): 104.

[2]Just as *porneia* is obviously a moral issue, so Dwight has shown from Scripture that the other three requirements of the Jerusalem Council are not merely ceremonial, but "sinful under all circumstances," 137.

[3]See Bruce, 298; SDA Bible Commentary, 6:314.

[4]The other four occurrences are located in: 1 Thess 4:3; 5:22; 1 Tim 4:3; and 1 Pet 2:11.

[5]Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964-1976), 2:828.

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oneself off from any thing,"[1] or "to give up something."[2] R. C. H. Lenski renders it as to "hold yourselves away from."[3]

Based on this passage, William Willimon aptly observes that Acts 15 shows that while Gentiles were gladly received, they were required to "adhere to certain basic Levitical standards."[4] In other words, "converts into the church are welcomed, but not without limits."[5] Thus, based on the understanding that in Acts 15 *porneia* includes polygamy, it can be concluded that, in line with the universal laws of Leviticus 17 and 18, the early Christian church instructed new converts to abstain from polygamous alliances.[6]

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[1]Edward Robinson, A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament, new ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858), 71.

[2]Denis W. Vinyard, ed., The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary: Alpha-Gamma, The Complete Biblical Library (Springfield, MO: The Complete Biblical Library, 1986), 342.

[3]R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 614.

[4]Willimon, 131.

[5]Ibid., 130.

[6]Some scholars believe that material from Qumran, which was produced around the time of the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council, further illustrates the connection between *porneia* and polygamy. In the Damascus Document (CD 4:12b-5:14a) the Hebrew term *zᵉnût*, which is sometimes translated in the Septuagint as *porneia* (e.g., Jer 3:2, 9; Ezek 23:27), is used to describe polygamy. See Fitzmyer, 91-97; Bruce, 185 (footnote #29); Stock, 26-28; Harold England, 122-123.

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Paul's Instruction Concerning Marriage

The apostle Paul recorded vital information regarding marital relations. In this section only the materials that appear to have specific implications for the subject of polygamy are considered. To begin, the first few verses of 1 Cor 7 are analyzed. Next, the so-called "Pauline privilege" in connection with new believers and their marital status is examined. Then, the meaning of the phrase "the husband of one wife" is addressed. A brief summary follows.

Marital Form in 1 Cor 7:1-4

While other passages in the New Testament discuss marriage,[1] 1 Cor 7 appears to be the only chapter which deals virtually exclusively with the marriage problem. The issue related to marital structure is located in 1 Cor 7:1-4:[2]

> Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.
> But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.
> Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.
> The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

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[1]See, for example, Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-21; 1 Tim 5:1-16.

[2]Some hold that 1 Cor 7 contains information on the levirate. For example, J. Massingberd Ford states: "I suggest that this is a widowed sister-in-law and that the question posed by the Corinthians is one which concerned levirate marriage: they asked whether they were bound by this Jewish custom. . . . The mention of the husband dying in v. 39 supports the hypothesis of levirate marriage. In this verse St Paul lifts the obligation of levirate marriage from the woman also: she may marry whom she wishes," J. Massingberd Ford, "Levirate Marriage in St Paul (I Cor. VII)," New Testament Studies 10 (April 1964): 364-365.

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The first verse indicates that Paul was responding to queries sent to him by the Corinthians. While vs. 1 suggests that it is morally excellent to remain unmarried, vs. 2 is a general call for people to get married, as a foil against prevailing immorality.[1] Admittedly, the focus of this passage is not on the structure of marriage, whether monogamous or polygamous. Nevertheless, the specific manner in which Paul discusses marriage could provide insights into this issue.

After giving the reason for his instruction, Paul says: "Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (vs. 2, emphasis added). The distributive concepts, "each man" (*hekastos*) and "each woman" (*hekastē*), point strongly to the fact that there is a single individual on each side of the marital relationship.[2] Paul Hamar comments that the term "each man" suggests "a monogamous marriage."[3] He adds: "This [term] was applied first to the man, then to the woman. There is to be one mate."[4] While J. B. Lightfoot suggests that the use of "each man" and "each woman" denotes "an incidental

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[1]See R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 273-274.

[2]See Curtis G. Morrill, "The Arguments for Christian Monogamy in First Corinthians 7:2-5" (B.Div. monograph, Grace Theological Seminary, 1942), 34.

[3]Paul A. Hamar, "1 Corinthians," New Testament Study Bible, The Complete Biblical Library (Springfield, MO: The Complete Biblical Library, 1986), 329.

[4]Ibid.

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prohibition of polygamy,"[1] Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer state more directly that "this forbids polygamy."[2]

Commenting at length on the rest of vs. 2, Curtis Morrill states:

> It is significant to observe here also that the object in each case is singular, "wife" not "wives", and, "husband" not "husbands." This would seem quite conclusive in itself. But Paul does not leave the matter thus. He interjects between *hekastos* (each man) and *gunaika* (wife), the word *heautou* [of himself]. This is a reflexive pronoun. . . . Between *hekastē* [each woman] and *andra* [husband] Paul uses not *heautou* but another and much stronger word, *idion* [(uniquely her) own]. If Paul guards against polyandry by saying, "Let each man have a wife which is his own distinct possession," he is a great deal more specific in guarding against polygamy.[3]

Various biblical scholars recognize that "the use of the possessive reflexive pronoun *heautou* [of himself] and the adjective *idion* [own] imply monogamy."[4] As Lenski observed: "The two accusatives 'his own wife' and 'her own husband' clearly point to monogamy and accord with the original divine

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[1]J. B. Lightfoot, Notes on Epistles of St Paul from Unpublished Commentaries (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), 221.

[2]Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians, 2d ed., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 133.

[3]Morrill, 34-35 (emphasis original).

[4]William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, 1 Corinthians, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1976), 206. See also, F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 155; Norman L. Geisler, Christian Ethics: Options and Issues (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 280; Hall, 52; SDA Bible Commentary, 6:706.

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institution of marriage."[1] Moreover, as F. W. Grosheide noted, the words "let have implies that monogamous marriage is a commandment."[2] Jean Hering concludes from the evidence in vs. 2 that "only marriage which is strictly monogamous can be contemplated for a Christian."[3] Adam Clarke commented: "Here, plurality of wives and husbands is most strictly forbidden."[4]

The third verse of this passage "deals with the equal rights within the marriage relation."[5] Neither the husband nor the wife has the right to withhold from the other the participation in sexual relations. Commenting on vs. 3, Morrill aptly states: "The Greek word, *homoiōs* (likewise), between the obligation of the man to the woman and of the woman to the man, stands as an equal sign. Such could never be true in a polygamous family."[6] Commentator Charles Carter

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[1]Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 274.

[2]Grosheide, 155. See also Hamar, 329.

[3]Jean Hering, The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (London: Epworth Press, 1962), 49.

[4]Adam Clarke, 6, comment on 1 Cor 7:2. See the following, who also maintain that this passage excludes polygamy: John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, vol. 1, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 225; Albert Barnes, I Corinthians, Notes on the New Testament, Explanatory and Practical (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 112; G. G. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 2:822; John Albert Bengel, Bengel's New Testament Commentary, 2 vols., trans. Charlton T. Lewis and Marvin R. Vincent (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1981), 2:199.

[5]Morrill, 37.

[6]Ibid., 40.

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concurs with this view by noting that vs. 2 "forbids polygyny," and "prohibits polyandry."[1]

Vs. 4 states that just as the husband has authority over the wife's body, so the wife has authority over the husband's body. Christian Kling notes that "this is a reciprocity whereby alone marriage receives and maintains its monogamous character."[2] On this, Morrill observes: "This gave the woman the same rights and privileges as her husband had in the sexual relation. Such a thought would be utterly impossible in a polygamous marriage."[3] Centuries ago John Calvin commented that, according to vss. 3 and 4, polygamy "is again condemned; for if this is an invariable condition of marriage, that the husband surrenders the power of his own body, and gives it up to his wife, how could he afterwards connect himself with another, as if he were free?"[4] Thus, based on 1 Cor 7:4, George

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[1]Charles W. Carter, "I Corinthians and Ephesians," The Wesleyan Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 5:165.

[2]Christian Friedrich Kling, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, trans. Daniel W. Poor, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), 141.

[3]Morrill, 41.

[4]Calvin, Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, 1:226 (emphasis original).

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Joyce concludes: "The principle here laid down is directly exclusive of polygamy."[1]

Vs. 2 can be seen as a monogamous command which excludes all polygamy. The equal rights to sexual relations between husband and wife, mentioned in vs. 3, likewise appears to forbid polygamy. Furthermore, true reciprocity of authority over each other's body (vs. 4) is apparently only possible in a monogamous marital relationship. Thus, it can be said that 1 Cor 7:1-4 "contains an accumulative and overwhelming argument in favor of monogamous marriage."[2]

The "Pauline Privilege"[3] and Polygamy

In the discussion of the treatment of newly converted polygamists, some have referred to Paul's counsel in 1 Cor 7:12, 15, 17, 20, 24:

> But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

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[1]George Hayward Joyce, Christian Marriage: An Historical and Doctrinal Study, 2d ed., Heythrop Series, no. 1 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948), 572. See also Henry, 6:537.

[2]Morrill, 45.

[3]Generally, the term "Pauline privilege" has been understood as referring to Paul's statement that divorce is permissible when an unbelieving spouse chooses to dissolve a marriage. See, for example, the following writers who point this out: O'Shea, 105-106; Bruce Vawter, "Divorce and the New Testament," The Catholic Biblical Commentary 39 (October 1977): 536-537. However, since the term "Pauline privilege" has also been used in connection with polygamy, it is considered below in this framework. See Bouit, 106; Staples, "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa," 34.

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> Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in all the churches.
> Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called.
> Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called.

It has been suggested that this passage is "the strongest Biblical argument in favor of a responsible and considered policy of admitting families, who are converted while in the state of polygamy, to the church."[1] This view is based primarily on an understanding of vss. 17, 20, and 24, that permits one to "remain in that condition in which he was called" (vs. 20). Supportive of this position, David Gitari suggests that if polygamists came to Paul, "he might have said, 'everyone should remain in the state in which he was called'. (1 Cor. 7:20)."[2] Thus, Jean-Jacques Bouit concludes that the "Pauline privilege" indicates that the new believer is not to precipitate the breaking up of his polygamous marriage.[3]

While the context indicates that it is correct to consider this biblical passage in connection with the treatment of new believers, three factors seem to have been overlooked in this extension of the so-called "Pauline privilege." The first is the crucial introductory statement, which sets the whole tone for the rest of his instruction. As pointed out in the above study, the first four verses of this

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[1]Staples, "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa," 33. See also, Oliver, 15-16.

[2]Gitari, 7.

[3]Bouit, 106. Similarly, Staples maintains that "the Pauline privilege may mean, by extension, that if a man is converted in a polygamous state of marriage, . . . he may be permitted to bring wives with whom he has a positive and enduring relationship into the church with him," "The Church and Polygamy in Sub-Saharan Africa," 34.

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chapter set forth monogamous marriage as the standard for marriages for Christians. It is most probable that Paul's counsel in the latter part of the chapter would not conflict with these earlier statements.

A second factor that needs to be taken into account relates to vs. 19: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God." Just as in Acts 15, circumcision is here waived while obedience to God's laws is called for. From this verse, as well as other biblical passages,[1] it is clear that "God does not evaluate a man's religion by his compliance with ritual observances, but by his relationship to the principles of the divine law."[2] Grosheide comments that "the context indicates that with commandments here is meant the moral law, which is valid for everybody."[3] Thus, when it is recognized that polygamy is prohibited and monogamy enjoined in God's "law,"[4] the summons of vs. 19 for the convert to keep God's commandments becomes the basis for dissolving all polygamous unions.

The third point vital to this discussion of the "Pauline privilege" relates to the thrice-repeated concept, that each one should "remain in that condition in

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[1]See, for example, Eccl 12:13; Mark 7:1-13; John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 2:4-6.

[2]SDA Bible Commentary, 6:710.

[3]Grosheide, 169.

[4]White, Spiritual Gifts 3:63. It should be noted that certain things such as rape, fornication, bestiality, and incest are not directly mentioned in the Ten Commandments. Yet they are understood as being part of the moral law. It is this broader sense of "moral law" that is referred to here.

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which he was called" (vss. 17, 20, 24). As noted above, some have understood this passage as permitting polygamists to remain in polygamy upon becoming a Christian. But Robertson and Plummer rightly point out: "What is laid down is that, unless one's external condition of life is a sinful one, no violent change in it should be made, simply because one has become a Christian."[1] As Calvin observed, this "condition" in which one is called "means a lawful mode of life,"[2] which would appear to exclude polygamy.

In brief then, the three factors outlined here appear to call into question the validity of the extended application of the so-called "Pauline privilege" that allows practicing polygamists into the church. On the contrary, when all the salient aspects of 1 Cor 7 are taken into account, Paul teaches faithful monogamy for all believers.

Meaning of "Husband of One Wife"

In the pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, the apostle Paul gave specific counsel regarding the kind of people to be chosen as leaders in the church. Part of this instruction is recorded in 1 Tim 3:2, 3, 12, and Titus 1:5, 6:

> An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

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[1]Robertson and Plummer, 145. Other Bible scholars agree; see Barnes, I Corinthians, 122; Kling, 152; Hering, 54.

[2]Calvin, Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, 1:248. Paul discusses what kinds of activities are lawful and which are not lawful for the Christian. See, for example, 1 Cor 6:9-11; 13; Gal 5:19-26; Eph 5; 6.

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not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money.

Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

Since the phrase "husband of one wife" has possible implications for the matter of polygamy, it is addressed here. It is well recognized that this phrase, which "has been debated from ancient times,"[1] has "caused much controversy."[2] A variety of interpretations and explanations have been suggested by various scholars and Bible commentators.[3]

Taking this phrase as referring exclusively to leaders, some writers have posited that this text suggests that some early Christians had more than one wife.[4]

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[1]Fred D. Gealy, "Introduction and Exegesis of the First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus," The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980), 11:410.

[2]E. K. Simpson, The Pastoral Epistles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 50. See also, Charles R. Erdman, The Pastoral Epistles of Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943), 39.

[3]See, for example, the views listed by the following: SDA Bible Commentary, 7:297-298; Holst, 210-212; Gealy, 410-412; C. H. Dodd, "New Testament Translation Problems II," The Bible Translator 28 (January 1977): 112-116; Robert Pearson, "A Historical and Grammatical Analysis of the Phrase 'Husband of One Wife'" (Th.M. thesis, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1972), 38-87; Walter Lock, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924), 36-38.

[4]Currently there is no known historical evidence which suggests that practicing polygamists were accepted into the early Christian church.

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A. O. Nkwoka, for instance, says that by inference this phrase seems "to presuppose that there were other men in the Church who had more than one wife and would therefore not qualify for leadership."[1] He adds: "It is very likely that when Christianity penetrated the world of the Roman Empire, polygynists who genuinely responded to the Gospel were allowed to keep their believing wives and children."[2] David Gitari, expressing a similar view, says: "The Early Church may have tolerated polygamy among the Jewish converts to Christianity, but excluded such persons from holding offices as bishops and deacons."[3]

Judah Kiwovele, who maintains that this phrase "shows that polygyny was present in the Early Church,"[4] concludes that, while church leaders "should not be polygynists or wives of polygynists,"[5] other practicing polygamists "should be accepted into full church membership."[6] Likewise, Vincent Nwankpa

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[1]Nkwoka, 149. Nwankpa concurs, noting that "the phrase 'husband of one wife' implies that there were polygamists in the church," 48.

[2]Nkwoka, 149.

[3]Gitari, 7.

[4]Judah B. M. Kiwovele, "Polygyny as a Problem to the Church in Africa," Africa Theological Journal 2 (February 1969): 14.

[5]Ibid., 25.

[6]Ibid., 24. Kiwovele notes that even "post-baptism polygynists also should not be excommunicated from church membership because of their wives they married besides the first wife," 24-25.

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concluded: "Overseers or elders are the only ones required to be strictly monogamous."[1]

A second view suggests that this phrase means that certain church leaders are "married" to the church. As Robert Pearson noted in his master's thesis: "The phrase supposedly symbolizes that bishops are married to the Church, a justification for a celibate priesthood."[2] If the bishop were married to the church, then, as Pearson observes, "it would be safe to assume that 'children' (I Tim. 3:4) is referring to the congregation."[3] However, the phrase "manages his own household well" (vs. 4) would then conflict with the following phrase, "how will he then take care of the church of God?" (vs. 5), since these two phrases are clearly used as distinct concepts.[4]

A third opinion is that this phrase mandates that only married men are eligible to serve as leaders in the church.[5] However, as Jerome Quinn challenges, "if such an idea were being put forward, the children mentioned next

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[1]Nwankpa, 41. See also Gitari, 7-10.

[2]Pearson, 38.

[3]Ibid., 40.

[4]Pearson notes that Roman Catholics "deny that this verse supports this ecclesiastical fiat," 38.

[5]The following authors discuss this view: Pearson, 41-44; Ed Glasscock, "'The Husband of One Wife' Requirement in 1 Timothy 3:2," Bibliotheca Sacra 140 (July-September 1983): 245-246; Jerome D. Quinn, The Letter to Titus, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 85.

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would also be required."[1] Furthermore, as Ed Glasscock recognized, the one who accepts this concept "must face an inconsistency in Paul's view, for it surely would not be consistent to require marriage to serve the Lord as an elder or deacon (1 Tim. 3:2, 12), yet encourage one to stay single so as not to be distracted from serving the Lord (1 Cor. 7:32)."[2]

A fourth position maintains that one who has divorced his previous wife and married another is not eligible to be a church leader.[3] Robert Saucy questions this viewpoint:

> If divorce on the basis of adultery is [biblically] legal and dissolves the marriage so that the one divorced can marry another, is the one remarried considered to be now "the husband of one wife"? It seems evident that legally such a remarried person is the husband of only one wife. He is not considered to have two wives. If this is true, then technically, he meets the requirements of the language of 1 Timothy 3:2.[4]

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[1]Quinn, 85.

[2]Glasscock, 246 (emphasis original).

[3]See, for example, Arland J. Hultgren, "I-II Timothy, Titus," Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 73; J. N. D. Kelly, A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 75; A. T. Hanson, The Pastoral Epistles, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 78; Samuele Bacchiocchi, The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1991), 197-200.

[4]Robert L. Saucy, "The Husband of One Wife," Bibliotheca Sacra 131 (July-September 1974): 234.

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Pearson likewise disputes this third view, noting that "if Paul's intention was divorce, he would have likely said, 'married only once.'"[1] After considering other grammatical factors, he concludes that "the textual evidence clearly denies that divorce is the explicit teaching of this phrase."[2]

A fifth perspective is that the phrase "husband of one wife" means that in order to be a church leader, a man "must not have contracted a second marriage after the death of his wife."[3] Fred Gealy notes that this "view is by and large that of the patristic period, of Thomas Aquinas, and of course of contemporary scholars in the Roman Catholic Church."[4] However, as Glasscock remarked: "If one is set free from the previous marriage bond by death ([Rom] 7:2) and is free to remarry without guilt or offense (7:3), it hardly seems fitting to imply that remarriage after the death of one's wife would make a man unfit to serve as an

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[1]Pearson, 47.

[2]Ibid., 48.

[3]Joseph Reuss, The First and Second Epistles to Timothy, New Testament for Spiritual Reading (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 36. See also the following who hold a similar position: Kelly, 75; Bacchiocchi, 199; Alfred Plummer, "The Pastoral Epistles," The Expositor's Bible (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1908), 122-126; Bernard Orchard, ed., A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), 1146; Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, eds., The Jerome Biblical Commentary, 2 vols. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 2:354.

[4]Gealy, 411.

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elder or deacon."[1] Pearson notes: "This view is not a valid exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:2."[2]

A sixth interpretation holds that the "husband of one wife" means that church leaders must live exemplary lives of marital fidelity.[3] The following grammatical analysis appears to support this view:

> The Greek is *mias* (one) *gunaikos* (woman) *andra* (man). The word "man" is not *anthrōpos*, the generic term for man, but *anēr*, the term used of a male individual of the human race. The other two words are in the genitive case, while *anēr* is in the accusative. The literal translation is, "a man of one woman." The words when used of the marriage relation come to mean, "a husband of one wife." The two nouns [for "woman" and "man"] are without the definite article, which construction emphasizes character or nature. The entire context is one in which the character of the bishop is being discussed. Thus, one can translate, "a one-wife sort of a husband," or "a one-woman sort of a man." . . . Since character is emphasized by the Greek construction, the bishop should be a man who loves only one woman as his wife.[4]

The verse begins by emphasizing that "an overseer, then, must be above reproach" (1 Tim 3:2 NASB), "blameless" (KJV), "have an impeccable character"

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[1]Glasscock, 247.

[2]Pearson, 64.

[3]See Gordon D. Fee, 1 and 2 Timothy, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 81; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 580-582; Wise, 86-93; Saucy, 237-240; Glasscock, 249-257; Pearson, 65-87; Hall, 55-60.

[4]Kenneth S. Wuest, The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), 53. Though Wuest emphasizes this "character" aspect, he nevertheless maintains that this text forbids polygamy. See also H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), 149-150.

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(NJB). Thus, "apparently the main qualification for a bishop is that he is to be 'blameless' with the other categories serving as areas in which this 'blamelessness' is to be evidenced,"[1] the first of which is that he must be "one wife's husband."[2] This stress on fidelity would fit well in the morally corrupt Roman Empire of the first century A.D.

Even though this sixth view has much to support it, it has not remained without criticism. Quinn, for example, has noted that "it is difficult to interpret the phrase simply in terms of marital fidelity and avoidance of sexual promiscuity. Greek had adequate terminology available, both positive and negative, for denoting such conduct."[3] Therefore, it appears that something else in addition to marital fidelity is indicated here in this phrase.

The final viewpoint, similar to the first perspective mentioned above, differs in that no Christian should be polygamous. The phrase, "husband of one wife," should be interpreted in its literal sense, meaning that a church leader cannot be polygamous,[4] but his monogamous example was to be followed by all.

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[1]Pearson, 84.

[2]Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon, 580.

[3]Quinn, 86 (emphasis added).

[4]See Holmes Rolston, The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Thessalonians, The First and Second Letters of Paul to Timothy, The Letter of Paul to Titus, The Letter of Paul to Philemon, The Layman's Bible Commentary (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1963), 77; Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. 4, The Epistles of Paul (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931), 572; Adam Clarke, 6, comment on 1 Tim 3:2.

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The position of the word "one" (*mias*) at the beginning of the phrase in the Greek, appears to emphasize this monogamous relationship.[1] As one commentator put it: "The obvious is the correct interpretation, forbidding the polygamy still found in Judaism."[2] Writing at that time, Josephus admitted that "it is the ancient custom among us to have many wives at the same time."[3] Some decades later, Justin Martyr (110-165) noted that Jewish men were still permitted "to have four or five wives."[4]

Apparently, the socio-cultural situation of the time necessitated the call for monogamy.[5] The danger existed that the practice of polygamy among the

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[1]A position at the beginning of the sentence provides emphasis in Greek. See J. W. Wenham, The Elements of New Testament Greek (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 31.

[2]A. R. C. Leaney, The Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1960), 56. Other commentators also see this as the "obvious" interpretation; see Albert Barnes, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon, Notes on the New Testament, Explanatory and Practical (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1955), 142; Gordon H. Clark, The Pastoral Epistles (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1983), 55; Simpson, 50.

[3]Josephus Antiquities of the Jews 17.2.

[4]Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho 134.

[5]Some writers, such as Hall (55), Pearson (65), and Kronholm (89-90), have argued that the term "wife of one husband" in 1 Tim 5:9, disqualifies the anti-polygamy view. Suggesting that the two phrases of 1 Tim 3:2 and 5:9 have an identical grammatical structure, they maintain that, if the "husband of one wife" forbids polygamy, then the "wife of one husband" must forbid polyandry. Since there is no record of polyandry at that time, they conclude that both phrases must be understood as having nothing to do with plural marriage. Ed Glasscock has shown, however, a crucial difference: a present tense infinitive (*einai*, "be") used in 1 Tim 3:2, and a perfect participle (*gegonuia*, "having been") in 1 Tim 5:9. He notes: "Thus the condition in 1 Timothy 5:9 is the widow's condition before her present consideration, and the condition in 1 Timothy 3:2 is the man's condition at

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Jews "might easily find its way into the Christian community."[1] That polygamy was forbidden was the understanding of several prominent early Christians,[2] including Chrysostom (347-407),[3] and Jerome (345-420).[4]

As noted in the first position outlined above, some writers have concluded that this Pauline phrase indicated that only church leaders were to be monogamous while other members could be polygamous. This type of conclusion has been seriously questioned over the centuries. As early as A.D. 208, Tertullian challenged those who ignored the rest of the qualifications for leaders while singling out monogamy: "For if bishops have a law of their own teaching monogamy, the other (characteristics) likewise, which will be the fitting concomitants of monogamy, will have been written (exclusively) for bishops."[5] In agreement, John Calvin noted: "When it is expressly prohibited to bishops, it

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the time of his consideration. . . . So 1 Timothy 5:9 does not offer firm proof for the meaning of 1 Timothy 3:2," 256 (emphasis original).

[1]Gray and Adams, 5:382.

[2]See Harvey, 38.

[3]Chrysostom Homilies on Timothy 10.

[4]Jerome Letter 69 3; Against Jovinianus 1.34.

[5]Tertullian On Monogamy 12. See also the following who hold basically the same view: Makanzu, 63; James E. Karibwije, "Polygamy and the Church in Nigeria: A Study of Various Christian Positions" (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1986), 37; Gary W. Demarest, 1, 2 Thessalonians, 1, 2 Timothy, Titus, The Communicator's Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 187.

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does not therefore follow that it is freely allowed to others."[1] Though in her writings Ellen White never commented on the precise meaning of the phrase "husband of one wife," she indicated that this requirement was for church leaders,[2] as well as for other church members.[3] As C. H. Dodd commented: "There is therefore no ground for the suggestion that this passage proves that polygamy was tolerated in the early Church, though forbidden to the clergy."[4]

Since the last two interpretations appear to be more reliably based on biblical sources, it might be best to understand this phrase as calling for "monogamous fidelity."[5] This idea comes out in the NEB rendition, that the leader must be "faithful to his one wife" (1 Tim 3:2). As Ralph Earle put it: "It

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[1]John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 78. However, Calvin, believing that it would be wrong for preconversion polygamists to send away their additional wives, felt that they could become members, but not bishops.

[2]White, Testimonies for the Church, 5:617; idem, Manuscript Releases, 5:449.

[3]White, Manuscript Releases, 10:110.

[4]Dodd, 116. The seventeenth-century Lutheran theologian, John Gerhard, stated that these were virtues that bishops were to have in common with all Christians; see Willard Burce, "Polygamy and the Church," Concordia Theological Monthly 34 (April 1963): 224.

[5]See Sydney Martin, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Beacon Bible Expositors (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977), 125-126; E. M. Blaiklock, The Pastoral Epistles: A Study Guide to the Epistles of I and II Timothy and Titus (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 37; Lock, 36-37.

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means monogamy--only one wife at one time--and that the overseer must be completely faithful to his wife."[1]

The investigation of the phrase "husband of one wife" has brought to light several facts. This contested phrase has been subject to a variety of interpretations. It has been viewed as prohibiting only church leaders from polygamy while permitting laity this practice. Also, it has been interpreted as suggesting that the bishop is married to the church and therefore must remain celibate, that a church leader must be married in order to serve, and that no remarried divorcees or remarried widowers can hold leadership posts in the church. Since each of these views stands in tension with the context and text itself, none has been considered an acceptable interpretation of the contested phrase. However, valid linguistic support can be adduced for understanding the "husband of one wife" to refer to monogamous fidelity. Nothing in the text or context limits this requirement to only church leaders. In brief then, the Pauline writings on marital structures indicate a consistent position concerning the form of marriage acceptable for Christians. Monogamy is enjoined.

Summary of New Testament Passages Related to Polygamy

Due to the silence of any direct references to polygamy in the entire New Testament, this chapter addressed materials dealing with marital relationships that might have implications for polygamy. The crucial statements of Jesus on

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[1]Ralph Earle, "1, 2 Timothy," The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 11:364.

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marriage were considered. It was concluded that Jesus' use of the phrase "the two shall become one flesh" implied an exclusion of polygamy as an acceptable form of marriage. Furthermore, it was indicated that the discussion of the levirate illustrated the fact that this custom was practiced in a monogamous manner, without any polygamous implications. In both cases examined, monogamy was upheld as the standard.

The counsel of the early church, especially in regard to the term *porneia*, was analyzed. A close reading of Acts 15 reveals that the four prohibitions for the Gentiles constitute a summary of the universal prohibitions found in Lev 17-18, which include the regulation against polygamy. Thus, recognizing that the *porneia* forbidden in Acts 15 includes polygamy, it was concluded that this passage outlaws all plural marriages.

The writings of the apostle Paul were investigated with the view to discovering his counsel regarding marital forms. It was determined that 1 Cor 7:1-4 commands monogamy, thus excluding and forbidding polygamy. Concerning the extended application of the so-called "Pauline privilege," it was concluded that it is inappropriate to maintain that this passage allows practicing polygamists into the church. Rather, this passage enjoins Christians to conform to God's monogamous standard. In basic agreement with these passages, it was concluded that the disputed phrase "husband of one wife" calls for monogamous marital faithfulness.

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PART TWO

MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR A POLYGAMY POLICY

CHAPTER VI

SYNOPSIS OF PRINCIPLES ARISING FROM THE RESEARCH

From the study of the original institution of marriage, the regulations related to polygamy, and the case histories of polygamists in Scripture, several factors significant for the issue of polygamy have been observed. Emerging from these conclusions are several theological principles which provide guidelines for determining a missiologically sound policy on polygamy.

This synopsis first considers the form of marriage as divinely instituted in Eden. Second, the Old and New Testament stipulations relating to polygamy are addressed. Third, the significance of other passages connected with marital forms is appraised. Fourth, the manner in which practicing polygamists are spoken of and treated in the Bible is discussed. Finally, the missiological implications of these findings for a theologically sound policy on polygamy are outlined.

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The Form of Marriage Instituted in Eden

From a scriptural point of view, marriage cannot be considered merely a societal convention. According to the Genesis account of the first human couple, God Himself instituted marriage as a special relationship between one man and one woman. Marriage has God as its divine originator and author. Therefore, while it is recognized that the customs and traditions of various peoples might affect certain elements related to this institution, the fundamental nature and structure of marriage must derive from a consideration of the divine will.

The record of the first marriage shows that it was unquestioningly monogamous. One man and one woman were joined into a reciprocal relationship in which the two became "one flesh." Not only was this monogamous union the prototype or pattern, but it was in reality set up by God as the "order and law"[1] for all future marriages. This divine design was in essence reinstituted at the time of the worldwide deluge through the monogamous marriages of Noah and his three sons. Thus, the new world began just as the original one had in Eden, with monogamy as God's standard.

The New Testament materials confirm this Old Testament view of marital structure. In discussing marriage, Jesus pointed His listeners back to the norm established by God. By His choice of words, He indicated that monogamy is the divine requirement. This emphasis on monogamy becomes very clear in the

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[1]White, "The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels: The Flood," 66.

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writings of the apostle Paul. In a chapter devoted to marital issues, he specifically and repeatedly indicates that true marriage can only be monogamous. His use of language indicates that monogamy is not merely a choice among other types of marital forms. Rather, like the Genesis statement, Paul appears to prescribe monogamy with the force of a command.

This evidence suggests that, in its consideration of how to deal with polygamists desiring baptism, the church needs to recognize the sanctity of the marital standard established by the Creator. Monogamy thus appears in the biblical materials not just as an ideal to be followed when convenient, but rather as the only permissible form of marriage.

Laws and Regulations Regarding Polygamy

Walter Kaiser remarks that "it is all too common to see statements by Christian anthropologists, sociologists, and theologians to the effect that the prohibition of polygamy based on Scripture is on extremely shaky ground."[1] This project dissertation suggests that there is sufficient evidence in the Bible to propose that the practice of polygamy has been specifically forbidden by God.

An extended study of Lev 18:18 indicated that, according to the structural and linguistic contexts, plural marriage was the specific target of this regulation. The weight of evidence showed that Lev 18:18 is a universal law that distinctly and deliberately prohibits polygamy for believer and non-believer alike.

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[1]Kaiser, 188.

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A similar legislation is located in Deut 17:17, among the specific commands for future rulers of the people. Since these rulers were to be the role models for the people, it is evident that this law also forbade all from practicing plural marriage.

While in the New Testament nothing is directly stated about polygamy, Acts 15 and the writings of Paul apparently refer to this practice. Among other things, the instructions in Acts 15 indicate that all new Gentile converts must avoid *porneia*. In outlawing *porneia*, which in the larger context of Lev 17-18 included polygamy, the Jerusalem Council in essence prohibited plural marriage. Similarly, the discussion of 1 Cor 7, which maintains that monogamy is the standard for all, calls upon new believers to bring their lives into conformity with God's moral standards. In delineating the qualifications for church leaders, Paul noted that the leader had to be the "husband of one wife." Just as with the rulers of Israel, it appears that these leaders were to be the role models for the people. Thus, this exclusion of polygamy can be viewed as applying to all members. These conclusions concur with Ellen White's stand that "the gospel condemns the practice of polygamy."[1]

In both the Old and New Testaments, therefore, there appears to be clear evidence forbidding the practice of polygamy. These regulations confirm and support the monogamous law as originally set up. In brief then, as Mavumilusa Makanzu states: "The whole of God's word condemns polygamy."[2]

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[1]White, "The Work of a Peace-Maker," 642.

[2]Makanzu, 65.

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Other Passages Related to Marital Forms

Several other passages were addressed in the above investigation of the Bible. As noted, many of these regulations have been understood as permitting, sanctioning, regularizing, promoting, or even requiring polygamy under certain circumstances. The research done in this project indicates that the laws related to the female slave, the rights of the firstborn, and illicit sexual relations with an unengaged woman, as well as passages with polygamous symbolism, do not appear to support or institutionalize polygamy. On the contrary, all of these passages are in accord with the laws sanctioning monogamy and forbidding polygamy.

Since the levirate has been so frequently seen as permitting and promoting plural marriage, this issue was considered in some depth. From a close reading of the law and practice, as outlined in both Old and New Testaments, it has become evident that this ancient custom was viewed as a regular marriage for the purpose of raising up an heir for the childless deceased man. It was noted that in every case in Scripture, the levirate appears to have been employed in a monogamous fashion. Thus, in both its legal promulgation as well as in its practice among the people, this marital system had no polygamous implications. This institution also synchronized with the other stipulations concerning marriage.

In brief then, this examination of laws and passages related to polygamy indicates a harmony between these passages and those specifically endorsing monogamy and condemning polygamy. Taking into account all of the relevant passages of Scripture, it could be said that "God's purpose for marriage is a total

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and complete union of two beings, in which there is no room at all for another person, in other words, a monogamous marriage."[1]

The Treatment of Practicing Polygamists

In order to observe the way in which the practice of polygamy was perceived, the lives of the major polygamists, of whom there is a story line in the Bible, were analyzed. Close examination of these narratives showed that in no case was polygamy viewed positively. The move into polygamy occurred when these characters turned away from trusting God and from doing His will. While in no instance was there any divine approval for this type of marital alliance, in most cases some sort of judgment or punishment is indicated.

While in certain cases those who practiced polygamy drifted further into apostasy, in the case of the antediluvians God brought the flood on them as a specific judgment on their polygamous ways. In the cases of Abraham, Jacob, and David, their polygamy resulted in jealousy, disharmony, strife, and tension in the home. In Solomon's case his wives led him into apostasy. God clearly interposed in these four cases with messages designed to bring about reformation. In each of these four cases there appears to have been a transformation of life, coupled with a return to a monogamous relationship with the original or remaining wife.[2] From

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[1]Ibid.

[2]In Solomon's case too little information is recorded to know which wife he lived with after he apparently terminated his polygamy.

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the available biblical data it is evident that the women and children were not abandoned, but were properly cared for.

It is significant to recognize that, in connection with the four men who were specifically called by God for a special task, all were summoned prior to becoming polygamous. While Abraham and Solomon were monogamous when God called them, Jacob and David were set aside by God while they were still single men. Only later did they become polygamous. In fact, there is no record of God calling any polygamist into service for Him or His people.

In short, it appears that there is no evidence that God ever approved, condoned, or freely permitted[1] the polygamous marriages of any Bible characters. Gleason Archer notes that "every case of polygamy or concubinage amounted to a failure to follow God's original model and plan."[2] As Ellen White put it: "God has not sanctioned polygamy in a single instance."[3] Instead, as observed in the cases shown above, by means of judgments and punishments, He worked at bringing all polygamists back to His standard of monogamy.

Missiological Implications of This Study

Other scholars have come to somewhat similar conclusions from their study of the Bible. For example, Makanzu simply posits that "the entire teaching

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[1]That is, just as God did not freely permit murder, lying, incest, etc. Yet people indulged in these sins, often with no recorded explicit divine judgment.

[2]Archer, 122.

[3]White, The Story of Redemption, 76.

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of the New Testament categorically condemns polygamy."[1] This view concurs with Albert Barnes, who maintained that "polygamy is unlawful under the gospel."[2]

This study of polygamy in the Bible provides some insights that have a bearing on missiological thinking and practice. First, the Scriptures are not silent regarding monogamy and polygamy. Rather, they contain sufficiently plain teachings concerning what God expects and requires of people in the area of marital relationships. Second, the view that various regulations of the Old and New Testaments permit or even promote polygamy will now need to be reconsidered in light of the findings of this research project. Third, no longer can it be simply assumed that it was acceptable to practice polygamy in Bible times. The examination of biblical case histories indicated that those who became involved in polygamy came under God's disapproval.

If the conclusions of this study are correct--that throughout Scripture monogamy is set forth as the only standard, while polygamy is forbidden--then a missiologically sound church policy on polygamy needs to reflect the various theological principles that emerge from this research.

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[1]Makanzu, 64.

[2]Barnes, I Corinthians, 112.

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CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Synopsis of the Project

In chapter 1 it was shown that polygamy is still a universal factor that affects the lives of many people in different parts of the world. Since the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a global mission to reach all peoples, it must take into account how to deal with the issue of polygamy. In this connection, two questions are considered vital: First, what does the Scripture teach about polygamy? And second, what fundamental theological principles emerge from this study which can provide the basis for a scripturally reliable and missiologically sound policy on polygamy?

To provide the proper foundation, chapter 2 addressed the original institution of marriage in Eden and the marital pattern at the flood. The evidence from Gen 1 and 2 reveals that God is the author and originator of marriage. This first marital union is described as unambiguously monogamous. More importantly, this study demonstrates that God established monogamy as the norm for all humanity. Furthermore, at the time of the worldwide flood, this pattern was replicated and reinstituted in the lives of Noah and his family.

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Chapter 3 consisted of an investigation of the major Old Testament passages related to plural marriage. Based on a contextual study of the laws concerning the female slave (Exod 21:7-11), the rights of the firstborn (Deut 21:15-17), and sexual relations with an unengaged woman (Exod 22:16, 17; Deut 22:28, 29), as well as the marriage symbolism in Ezek 23, it was concluded that none of these passages either promoted or permitted the practice of polygamy. In connection with the levirate, both the law (Deut 25:5-10) and the practice of the people (Gen 38; Ruth) indicate that this was an optional custom designed to raise up an heir for a childless deceased man. Since it apparently applied to single men only, levirate marriage never supported or institutionalized polygamy. Most significantly, the weight of evidence from structural, linguistic, and contextual analyses reveals that the laws recorded in Lev 18:18 and Deut 17:17 distinctly prohibit the practice of polygamy.

Chapter 4 examined the accounts of the major polygamists of whom there is a story line in Scripture. In addition to the antediluvians in general, the marital lives of the following men were discussed: Lamech, Abraham, Jacob, Esau, Moses, Gideon, Elkanah, David, Solomon, and Joash. The evidence indicates that, while Moses appears as monogamous, the polygamy of the other men is placed in a rather negative light in Scripture. In different ways their practice of polygamy is seen as condemned and judged as a violation of God's law. As a result of God's interposition, Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon

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apparently terminated their polygamy. In no case does it appear that God approved of polygamy.

Since no specific reference to polygamy has been located in the New Testament, chapter 5 addressed some passages related to marriage in general with implications for polygamy. From a study of Jesus' statements on marriage (Matt 19:3-6), it was concluded that He held marriage to be monogamous. As in the Old Testament, the levirate (Matt 22:23-28) was practiced as a regular monogamous marriage. The writings of Paul confirm this emphasis on monogamy. In concord with the original establishment of monogamy, 1 Cor 7:1-4 evidently mandates this form of marriage. The extended use of the "Pauline privilege" (1 Cor 7:12-24) cannot legitimately be used as a basis for permitting practicing polygamists into the church. Rather, the exposition of Acts 15 indicates that all Christians, including new believers, need to abstain from all polygamy. Furthermore, the "husband of one wife" requirement (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6) calls for monogamous marital fidelity.

Based on the preceding investigation of biblical materials, chapter 6 provided a synopsis of theological principles that emerge from the research. It was concluded that God instituted monogamy as the only permissible form of marriage for all peoples in all cultures. Other laws specifically forbid polygamy. The weight of evidence suggests that all other passages related to marital forms harmonize well with this biblical position. The data on the polygamists in Scripture indicate that in no case were their plural marriages considered acceptable

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and right. Rather, their polygamous practices came under the disapproval of God. The underlying consistent teaching of the Bible, which endorses monogamy and prohibits polygamy, needs to be taken into account in connection with a missiologically sound policy concerning the issue of polygamy.

Recommendations for Further Research

This project has dealt with many passages and narratives related to polygamy. However, not every concern connected with marital structures has been considered. Several issues need further investigation.

The similarities and differences between polygamy and remarriage after divorce need to be addressed. This study would need to include the significance of the marriages dissolved by Ezra and Nehemiah, the meaning of Mal 2:10-16, and the interpretation of *porneia* in Matt 5:32 and 19:9.

Other subjects that need to be researched include the following: (1) the relationship between polygamy and adultery as indicated in both the biblical materials and the writings of Ellen White; (2) the meaning of the term *mamzēr* in Deut 23:2; and (3) the interpretation and significance of the passage in 1 Pet 3:20, 21 that discusses the flood of Noah's day as a symbol for baptism. All of these factors, together with the rest of the biblical materials, need to be thoroughly integrated into a holistic theology of marriage.

Finally, recognizing the need to contextualize the gospel in every culture, a comprehensive compilation of workable methods and practical procedures for dealing with polygamists in different situations needs to be made.

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This will provide local members and cross-cultural workers with ideas to be considered as they share with people the biblical standard of monogamy.

Final Conclusion

From beginning to end the Bible maintains that monogamy is the only permissible and legitimate form of marriage. The practice of polygamy is repeatedly prohibited, both in the legislation as well as in the chronicles of Scripture. The theological principles that emerge from this biblical study can provide the basis for a missiologically sound church policy on polygamy.

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