

# The Doctrine of Polygamy

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**Preface:** There are several instances in the Bible when we have a man married to more than one woman; and there are several instances when a man has both wives and mistresses. What's up with that?

I took a slightly different approach to this doctrine. As I have gone along in my verse-by-verse examination of Scripture (at [www.kukis.org](http://www.kukis.org)), I have made comments now and again about polygamy. I have included pretty much all of those comments in this doctrine. Along with those comments, I also wrote some additional material on polygamy and it is all included here, so there will be some overlap in the material herein presented.

My personal prejudices: I am a normal male (sort of). Therefore, if I could justify polygamy Scripturally, I would. However, we are not allowed to bend Scripture to support this or that doctrine or cause.

Polygamy  
for You and Me!



- I. First, we must acknowledge that there are several instances of polygamy in Scripture:
  1. The first recorded instance of this is Gen. 8:19, where Lamech, also the writer of the first outlaw, bad-boy song, married two women. Lamech was a descendant of Cain, and he also killed another man. In other words, the first instance of polygamy is not a poster boy that we ought to emulate.
  2. Abraham had one wife Sarah, but her maid Hagar became his mistress, and Abraham fathered a child by her—at Sarah's insistence, by the way. The end result was a great deal of stress within the household, to the point where she and her child were sent away. This was very difficult for Hagar and her son Ishmael is called a *wild-ass of a man*. There are a lot of single mothers today who are raising the same kind of young man. Gen. 21
  3. Jacob obviously had two wives, and one might even find him more justified here than in any other case. He worked 7 months for his uncle Laban in order to take his daughter, Rachel, in marriage. Laban had Jacob marry the older sister, Leah, instead (apparently, Jacob did not find out until the next morning whom he had been with). After marrying and having sex with a woman, even though Jacob did not realize who she was, means there were no *take-backs*, and Jacob was stuck with Leah, the older sister. He worked another 7 years for Rachel. When he separated from Laban entirely (given Laban's behavior with regards to his daughters, it is reasonable to suppose that Laban took advantage

of Jacob in many ways), Jacob also ended up with the personal servant for each of his wives. Having children became more of a competition than the natural outgrowth of a marriage, and they ended up with 12 children, all 4 women participating as mothers. God did allow these 12 sons to make up the Jewish race, but we are told that God is able to work all things together for good (Rom. 8:28). To give you an idea as to how dysfunctional Jacob's family was, the brothers banded together to sell their youngest brother into slavery because they did not like him. Gen. 35 37

4. It is not clear whether Moses was a polygamist or not. His first wife left him, then she returned; and then we don't hear about her at all. At an advanced age, Moses marries an Ethiopian woman (a Cushite), which irritates Miriam and Aaron no end (Moses' sister and brother—Num. 12:1). I think that it is likely that Moses' first wife had deserted him by this time or had died. Her father seemed to be spiritually mature, but there is no indication that Moses' first wife ever was. In any case, there appears to be nothing wrong with what Moses did; and God even upbraided Miriam for being snitty about this marriage (it is possible that she was just concerned that this Ethiopian woman was from a different race; however, this was not her call to make). I digress.
5. Gideon, one of the judges, had many wives, which McGee comments on below:
6. David had a number of wives. He married two women before ruling in Hebron; and he married several women in both Hebron and Jerusalem. Now, even though to a man, this might appear to be the life; David has power, he has money and he has several wives; this is not necessarily the case. It will be clear that many of David's problems came from his man children whom he sired but obviously did not spend time raising. Obviously, as king, David is spread pretty thin; furthermore, he had 20 or so sons and daughters, which made things doubly difficult for him to have a fatherly influence over them. 2Sam. 3:1–5 5:13–16

1) Okay, you are now convinced as to the importance of the nuclear family; now, *why does God allow David to have several wives?* God is a gentleman and He respects our volition. God allows us to sin; He allows us to make grave mistakes. With David, this is a matter of teaching by example: if David, a man of great spiritual integrity and with almost unlimited resources, cannot control a half-dozen kids by as many wives, then it should be clear to us that we will be unable to properly raise our own children outside God's pre-designed family unit. I am sure that this has been said before, but *it does not take a village to raise a child; it takes a mother and a father.*<sup>1</sup>

7. The most famous example is Solomon, David's son, who has 1000 wives and mistresses. There were several problems: Solomon's foreign wives turned him away from God and to their own idols. Also, there was obviously little or no true happiness found here, as Solomon pines over the Shulamite woman in Song of Solomon. Can you imagine Solomon suffering from unrequited love when he has 1000 women to choose from? There is no possible way that Solomon could have gotten to know the souls of these women.



8. God does not completely restrict the free will of His people. That is, a person does not enter into marriage with a second wife and then immediately get struck down by lightning. However, simply because we find cases where God tolerates sin, that does not mean that it God sponsors sin. A simple example is: drunkenness is a sin, but many of us have the wherewithal to spend the remainder of our lives drunk. Now, God might remove us from this life via the sin unto death; but there would clearly be a period of time where God indulges our overindulgence. At no time should we interpret this lack of immediate discipline as God condoning this practice. So, simply finding instances of polygamy (and other sins)

Taken from: [http://student.ucr.edu/~smara002/cs6/all\\_the\\_questions/the\\_thousand\\_wives.jpeg](http://student.ucr.edu/~smara002/cs6/all_the_questions/the_thousand_wives.jpeg)

<sup>1</sup> Taken from my exegesis of 2Sam. 3:2.

in Scripture does not condone polygamy or the other sins. The Bible is a book of true human history, and we observe man, wars and all, within its pages.

II. Since it is obvious that God has allowed polygamy in the past, why can't we get some of that?

1. To summarize, just because men in the past have had multiple wives does not mean that God approves of polygamy or that polygamy is as valid a life choice as monogamy. God made Eve for Adam; God did not make Eve, Sally, Jessie, and Molly. By Eve, God established a precedent. Throughout Scripture, principles of marriage are applied to one man and one woman; and some categories of men, e.g., kings, are prohibited from having multiple wives. Furthermore, despite what we men might see as advantages in having more than one wife, is clearly outweighed by the disadvantages. You may recall the wives of Elkanah. First of all, he had a favorite wife, which is almost inevitable. Because of this, his second favorite wife gave his favorite a hard time—she found the one area in which she excelled and the favorite did not, and she rubbed that in. That caused continual tension in the household and the favorite wife was generally unhappy. When Elkanah's favorite wife was unhappy, Elkanah was also unhappy. These circumstances did result to the birth of Samuel, but it was not the circumstances of having two wives which actually led to this birth—that was God's will based upon a prayer of Hannah's. Our focus for this study is upon the obvious and continual tension within this household.
2. In my life, I have known a lot of women; and most of them appeared to be a handful, so to speak. I have even had two female roommates at one time, and, whenever one of them was out of kilter, the household was out of kilter as well. Knowing the little beasties as I do, women tend to get out of kilter quite a lot. When there are 2 or more women, the effect seems to be more exponential than cumulative.
3. As we will see later on in David's life, his having several wives did not cure him of having a roving eye; and he got himself in serious trouble over a woman, despite the fact that he had several wives.<sup>2</sup> The same was true of Solomon. Having a roving eye is a common male sin. Giving in to that temptation does not solve anything or make that sin go away. In many cases, in a monogamous relationship, it destroys the relationship. If this roving eye results in one more woman being added to the stable, aka polygamy, then, again, there are increased problems in the household (or households), and the roving eye is not quenched or satisfied.
4. We have also seen that, even with their unlimited resources, having several wives was still difficult for David or Solomon to manage.

III. Spirituality by imitation:

1. One of the principles of Scripture is, we don't simply pick a person in the Bible and copy them. This goes for the Old Testament, the gospels and the book of Acts. Some of the worst cults in history have been the result of simply copying the life or actions of this or that person in the Bible. The most prominent example of this is the charismatic crowd. They observe that a few people *get the ghost* in the book of Acts, that many of them speak in tongues, and so, they try to imitate this experience. Now, this may seem harmless enough; after all, *the men who spoke in tongues, who received the Holy Spirit, were great men, for the most part, and shouldn't we make an attempt to follow in their footsteps?* But here is where things fall apart:
  - 1) Paul, in his epistles, does not tell any church or any individual, *you know, you have no real spiritual life; you need to get the Spirit.* Neither did John in the book of Revelation when addressing the lukewarm church. In fact, there are no mandates anywhere in any epistle for us to seek out God the Holy Spirit and to *get Him*. We are told to be *filled with the Holy Spirit*; and that is a command; but that is to be restored to fellowship. It is for those who already have God the Holy Spirit.
  - 2) Secondly, and this is completely ignored by charismatics, the means by which they get the *spirit* bears no resemblance whatsoever to the New Testament historical narrative. They want to have this experience; they want others to share this experience, so you have them leaning their heads back, just letting sounds come out of their mouth, until they feel it or get it. Sometimes there can be an intense group pressure to get the *spirit*; sometimes not. But, in any case, the mechanics never match with what we find in the book of Acts, where the Holy Spirit descended

<sup>2</sup> Taken from my exegesis of 2Sam. 2:2.

upon the Apostles, and there did not seem to be any sort of decision which they made to get the Holy Spirit.

2. Now, I have gone off on a tangent here, but the simple principle is, you obey the *mandates* of Scripture; you do not try to imitate this or that experience or person. I can guarantee you that, between naming your sins to God, learning the Word of God from a good pastor, and obeying the mandates which you come across, there is not going to be any time for you to try to imitate anyone. It is going to be completely irrelevant to your life.
3. In other words, even though you read that David had many wives and that David was a man after God's own heart, this does not mean that you will be a man after God's own heart if you marry several women. David had the husband of a Bathsheba murdered; a woman that David took in adultery. This is clearly anti-God; so, despite the fact that David was a man after God's own heart, we still do not get to commit adultery whenever we have a chance or kill off various people that will cause us inconvenience.

#### IV. Causes of polygamy:

1. Simple sexual lust on the part of the man. David had a lot of things on his mind when he was king; so he did marry several women, but not as many as he could have. What appears to be his final marriage, to Bathsheba, is clearly preceded by lust for Bathsheba.
2. A large percentage of women, despite what we find in the media, desire a family and children. Under circumstances of war, particularly when a nation has been completely subdued in war, the women significantly outnumber the men. Either the men who have conquered them or the men (men of substance) who remain marry several women in order to fulfil the desire of the woman and to perpetuate the people. Even in these circumstances, all that I have said about polygamy still applies.

- V. Let me interject a general principle here: God has an ideal, and this ideal is designed both for individuals and for society as a whole. God does not rail against human pleasure, and therefore, bans everything that might be fun: polygamy, extra-marital sex, homosexuality, drugs, drunkenness, etc. There is a balance, and within that balance, there is room for relaxation and human pleasure. When satisfying human lust becomes the focus of a person's life, the end result is drug addiction, alcohol addiction, sexual addiction and a myriad of other addictions. These people who fall into these addictions, who attempt to satisfy their every lust, are not happy, they are a blight on society, they ruin their own personal lives, and they cause great disfunction within their own families. Quite obviously, this does not occur all at once; it is a gradual process where pleasure becomes more and more the focus of one's life, to the exclusion of all else and all others. God puts parameters upon human conduct, which parameters serve to increase one's happiness, not decrease it. It's like a football game. You cannot have a game where anything goes. A team cannot just choose to have a 5<sup>th</sup> down because they really want it. A dozen men cannot physically brutalize a member of the opposite team to death. Quarterbacks cannot take the ball into the stands, and run through the stands to make a touchdown. There are parameters to the game which makes it enjoyable to the sports fan and to the participants. Anytime these parameters are pushed or disregarded, there are problems. However, these parameters—these rules and regulations—are a part of what makes the sport enjoyable. You cannot simply put an arbitrary number of participants of varying sizes on a field, with arbitrary equipment (whatever they might have lying around the house), and then tell them to play ball (or whatever). There must be rules, guidelines, strategies, parameters. All of life is the same way. Although we stupidly blame oil companies when they make huge profits, this should not concern us. However, if these profits are achieved by lying, deceit, and murder, then we should become concerned. There must be parameters—ethics—in business. You simply cannot walk into the office of your biggest competitor and decimate their workforce. Even your diet and what you eat has parameters. I personally love deserts with chocolate, but, I cannot simply eat chocolate all day long. I would reduce my lifespan and suffer a myriad of health problems. There must be parameters on what I eat and when I eat. The same is true of marriage and family.

VI. You might say, *you can't legislate morality!* Virtually all legislation is morality. With respect to the illustration of business above, there is legislation which determines what is fair and ethical in business. In fact, we have even determined that, even if a business does so well as to shut down all of its competition, we cannot allow a monopoly either. That is a moral decision our society has made. Taxation and who pays what, is a moral decision. Personally, I think our tax structure is immoral, and that the high tax brackets for the rich is incredibly immoral. Personally, I'd rather see all taxes to range from 10–20%, and that even the poorest among us would have to pay taxes, because I think that it is moral that if they think the government must pay for this and that, that they understand that some of that money is coming right out of their pockets. You may completely disagree, but, the key here is, we are making moral decisions here with regards to taxation. We are legislating what we believe to be moral and right. When we can kill and when we can't is a moral decision. Some believe that, with regards to medical care, if someone wants this or that procedure, no matter how slight the chance is for survival, they should get it, without regards to cost, and any hospital or insurance carrier which disagrees is bad. All attempts to preserve life should be allowed; however, we have tolerated, as a society, the destruction of fetuses/babies in the womb. Without any scientific evidence whatsoever, we have, as a society, supported the whim of a mother (or *right of a mother*) to kill her child (or, *to terminate her pregnancy*). The very language that we use is designed to make us sound correct in our own *moral* judgment that we make. So, yes, you can legislate morality, and yes, we do it with each and every law that we pass. Therefore, we even have legislation which deals specifically with marriage and family.



<http://utopian-polygamy.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/jpg/utpolygamy.jpg>

VII. There have been other faiths which have believed in polygamy. Joseph Smith, a founder of the Mormons, claims that God gave him divine revelation concerning the rightness of plural marriage, which is found in *Doctrines and Covenants 132:61–62: And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood—if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him; for he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else. And if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him; therefore is he justified.* This is not Scripture, by the way; this is Mormon Scripture, so-called. They have other *scriptures* which reject polygamy: *Jacob 1:15 2:27 Ether 10:5.*<sup>3</sup>

1. We don't have confusion like that in the Bible; even though there are men who are polygamous and that is never hidden; neither is it justified or praised. As we will see in this doctrine, Scripture condemns polygamy.
2. One of the fascinating things about the books which Joseph Smith transcribed, is that he wrote them in King James' English several hundred years after King James. This language was used in churches, but not among common people; so, Smith's *holy books* are also written in a church-y language.

VIII. Biblical statements concerning polygamy: We have briefly looked at a few instances of polygamy, and, during narratives, rarely do we find a practice clearly disparaged in the narrative. However, in other areas of Scripture, we should be able to find Scripture which seems to support or reject polygamy.

1. God specifically designed one woman for one man. When Adam had been created, he observed, after naming the animals, that there was no corresponding creature for himself. God created a woman, a help designed for him, whom Adam named Eve. God created only one woman for Adam.

<sup>3</sup> There is a list of Mormon contradictions here: [http://www.mormonchallenge.com/ref\\_idscontra.htm](http://www.mormonchallenge.com/ref_idscontra.htm). Some are apt and some are not. The Scripture quotation came from the LDS website, and, surprisingly enough, I had to make two corrections in their text.

God did not create several women for Adam nor did God create another man for Adam, thus precluding polygamy and homosexuality by divine precedent. Gen. 2:18–23

2. Although the Bible records several instances of polygamy, in each and every case, where we know more about the relationship apart from it simply being polygamous, is that there were great problems as a result of polygamy.
    - 1) Sarah insisted that Abraham throw her maid and his son out of the house.
    - 2) Jacob's sons became so jealous as to sell their own brother into slavery.
    - 3) Even with many wives, David and Solomon both continued to lust after other women. David's sons and daughters caused huge problems for each other (including incest and murder) and for David; and it is clear that David was not there for them as a guiding light. Solomon's polygamy just about financially bankrupted Israel (along with his other projects).
  3. The person most able to have a polygamous marriage is the king of Israel, and early on—in fact, hundreds of years before Israel even had a king—God made it clear that kings could not have multiple wives. Deut. 17:17: **A king must not acquire many wives for himself so that his heart won't go astray. He must not acquire very large amounts of silver and gold for himself.** Two things a leader should not do: overtax and indulge his lusts. Here, here!
  4. Something which is rare in the Old Testament: narrative is combined with a moral judgment when it comes to Solomon's wives: **King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women from the nations that the LORD had told the Israelites about, "Do not intermarry with them, and they must not intermarry with you, because they will turn you away from Me to their gods."** Solomon was deeply attached to these women and loved them (1Kings 11:1–2).<sup>4</sup> Much of the narrative in Scripture refrains from making moral pronouncements. In the case of Solomon, his violation was so flagrant as to require it. Furthermore, this should indicate to us that polygamy is against God's plan.
  5. The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered them, **"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate"** (Matt. 19:4–6 Gen. 2:24). Although our Lord is not dealing with polygamy directly here, but divorce, the principle is, the two (a man and a woman) become one flesh. **What God joins together, man should not separate.** This indicates that marriage is a divine institution, and that a man and a woman are meant to be permanently joined. This at least implies the exclusion of same-sex marriage, polygamy and divorce.
  6. The one husband-one wife principle is upheld in the epistles of Paul: **But because of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. A wife does not have authority over her own body, but her husband does. Equally, a husband does not have authority over his own body, but his wife does** (1Cor. 7:2–4). Although Paul's topic here is not polygamy, it is clear that God designed one man for one woman and vice versa.
  7. Church leaders are to be the husband of *one wife* (1Tim. 3:2, 12).
  8. There is an obvious parallel between Christ and His bride, the church (and, in all analogous instances, the church is seen as one body). Eph. 5:31–32
- IX. Other reasons for monogamy in marriage:
1. All populations produce approximately 50% males and 50% females. Even nature (which is the design of God) devised the human race to pair off.
  2. In a polygamous marriage, the wife is seen primarily as a sexual object, a breeder and the one to handle the children (as the husband will likely not have the time). Even liberated women would object to this sexist emphasis.
  3. According to ISBE, *Polygamous nations have never been industrial inventors, have contributed little to science. They have usually ruined the fertility of the lands they have occupied. They have been heavily weighted with the lethargy of a system that appeals to nothing but the most primitive instincts*

<sup>4</sup> The rest of this passage goes into detail about Solomon turning against God.

and vices of man.<sup>5</sup> I can't think of any polygamous nations off the top of my head. Perhaps there are scattered tribes or groups where this is the case? They add: *Rome conquered the world while she was monogamous, and lost control of it when she dropped to the moral level of the sex corruption of the peoples that she had conquered.*<sup>6</sup> ISBE then notes two exceptions in civilization: *There may seem to be two exceptions - the establishment of the Mogul empire in India and the subjugation of Western Asia and Eastern Europe by the Turk. That in both cases there was great success in war is granted. They were authorized by their religion to exhibit the frenzy of bloodshed and indulge in lust. Indeed, enjoyment of the latter was a bright hope for the life to come. But when they had possession of a country, and massacres and ravishing were over, what then? For what is mankind indebted to them?*<sup>7</sup>

4. For most men, the draw of a polygamous marriage is a sexual one. Sex should not be our motivating factor in marriage or to marry. It is obviously a factor, and one to which Paul defers (1Cor. 7:2); but when one places personal sexual gratification at the top of one's priorities, the end result is not a union of any sort, but a vehicle for personal sexual gratification. We do not indulge sexual lust simply because we have it. Obviously, there are times when it is strictly forbidden: with children, with animals; and, in today's society, times when it ought to be forbidden: outside of marriage, with a person of the same gender. Paul counsels on sexual relations within a marriage one time—in 1Cor. 7: the woman's body belongs to the man and the man's body belongs to the woman. All other marriage counseling<sup>8</sup> which Paul does deals with the souls of the two participants.

[Return to the Beginning of the Doctrine](#)

[Return to the Charts, Maps and Short Doctrines](#)

In 1Sam. 1:2, I wrote the following comments on polygamy:

### **A Few Points on Polygamy** (taken from 1Sam. 1:2)

1. God did not provide Adam with several wives. He gave Adam with one wife (Gen. 1–3). In case you do not understand, this means that God has set a precedent.
2. The second, and most important point, is that there are relatively few polygamous relationships alluded to in Scripture. There are cults who lean toward polygamy, and rely on the Old Testament for support; however, whereas there are hundreds and hundreds of women mentioned with respect to their marriage; there are only a handful of polygamous marriages named.
3. The first recorded instance of polygamy in the Old Testament was in Gen. 4:19, where Lamech, several generations down in the line of Cain, took two wives to himself. Lamech was also the father of vigilantism (Gen. 4:23–24), therefore, if we conclude anything, it is that only the most degenerate of early man was a polygamist.
4. Abraham, at the insistence of his wife, had relations with her Egyptian personal servant, Hagar. Although Abraham was never officially married to Hagar, he had a son by her whom God had to protect, because of the conflict which arose under Abraham's roof (Gen. 16, 21). The end result was, Sarah, Abraham's wife, demanded that Hagar and her son be thrown out of the house.
5. Jacob, Abraham's grandson, had two wives and, in a manner of speaking, two mistresses (the two personal slaves of his two wives). Jacob had been tricked into marrying the first wife (whom he did not love). He was then able to marry the woman that he did love (whose life was relatively short). Nothing is said with regards to right or wrong concerning this instance of polygamy, and, to be fair, Jacob did not start out with the intention of marrying several wives; he was in love with Rachel, but was tricked into marrying her older sister first. Both of his wives then convinced him to have sexual relations with their

<sup>5</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; from E-Sword; Topic: Polygamy.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> And there is no indication that Paul ever did any personal marriage counseling; or any other kind, for that matter. Paul dealt with principles and doctrine; and he left it up to the church or to the individual believers to make the proper applications. The reason most people desire counseling is because they refused to grow spiritually or they refuse to obey God.

## A Few Points on Polygamy (taken from 1Sam. 1:2)

- mistresses, which Jacob went along with (the Bible reports this information but does not necessarily condone the behavior). In any case, God did bring from these two wives and two mistresses the tribes of Israel. What is clear is that Jacob rarely exhibited what we would think of as exemplary behavior for a believer (he was a chiseler early on in his life and a self-centered whiner at the end of his life). That all of Israel came from him was God taking what there was and making good come from it (Rom. 8:28).
6. Interestingly enough, after being raised in a polygamous home, none of Jacob's sons were recorded as having more than one wife (although Judah is recorded as having at least one extra-marital affair—Gen. 38).
  7. In Jacob's marriage, there was rivalry among the two wives and probably among their personal servants; and there was pronounced sibling rivalry. The older brothers sold the youngest son, Joseph, into slavery.
  8. The Law records an instance of how to deal with the situation when a man loves one wife over another (Deut. 21:15–17), indicating that this practice did occur in early Jewish society and some aspects of it required regulation. The law in question deals with favoritism when there is more than one wife. It is interesting that the Law of Moses did not forbid polygamy, except to the king.
  9. The genealogical portion of Chronicles, which is filled with family lines, records at least three men with more than one wife: King David (1Chron. 3:1), Ashhur in the line of Judah (1Chron. 4:5) and Shaharaim (1Chron. 8:8). This is in 8 or 9 chapters of genealogy. Therefore, we may conclude that polygamy, even though it existed, was relatively rare (or the resultant family lines were not worth recording).
  10. Gideon, one of the judges (or saviors) in the book of Judges, had a large number of wives (he took these wives on after his period of spiritual greatness).
  11. Our two most famous case histories are David and Solomon, the latter having 300 wives and 700 concubines (mistresses). Joash, another king of Israel (actually, one of the good ones) also had two wives (2Chron. 24:3). All in all, this gives us *fewer* than 10 polygamous marriages in the Old Testament.
  12. David's sons and daughters by his different wives have a sorted history of civil war, power lust and incest.
  13. Solomon's heart was turned from God from all of the foreign women that he had relations with.
  14. Furthermore, the Law warned against a king multiplying wives to himself (this is also where we find that the king was not to use his office for great personal gain—Deut. 17:17).
  15. In those relationships that we are allowed to examine in depth, there was *always* a favorite wife: Jacob preferred Rachel over Leah and his two mistresses. Elkanah preferred Hannah over Peninnah. Solomon was in love with a woman that he could not have (recall that he had a thousand wives and mistresses). Obviously (to a woman), once a preference has been stated or inferred, then there will be hell to pay in that particular household. Pretty much any woman could pick up on a preference, even if it is not clearly stated. This is apparently a super-power which man women have.
  16. Just as important as the fact that there are but a handful of polygamous marriages in Scripture, is this point: in all of these case histories, we have **no** instances of a happy home life for those involved in polygamy. Jacob's household was filled with strife, as was the household we have before us—Elkanah's. One book of the Bible is dedicated specifically to Solomon's frustration with falling in love with perhaps his right woman (had he not married all of the other women first) and, as a Lothario, not being able to woo her into his harem (this is the *Song of Solomon*, of course).
  17. Speaking of Solomon, I should also mention that the practice of polygamy is pretty much confined to the wealthy.
  18. In the Law, we do not find a prohibition against polygamy (although it is strongly discouraged for kings); however, we find little to recommend it either (there are more laws dealing with slavery than with polygamy).
  19. Even though there are regulations in the Mosaic Law governing polygamy, this does not grant approval for polygamous practices. The laws that deal with polygamy are primarily designed to protect the women involved in such marriages (and to protect the lesser of the wives).
  20. In the New Testament, we find pretty much an assumption of the correctness of monogamy.
    - a. A man who divorces one woman to marry another, apart from the offense of adultery, was said to commit adultery (Matt. 19:3–9). In this passage, Jesus quotes Genesis, where it reads: **And the two will become one flesh.**



## A Few Points on Polygamy (taken from 1Sam. 1:2)

- b. When the Sadducees try to trap Jesus with a question, they ask about a woman who has been married to several husbands; however, each husband dies before she remarries (she marries his brothers, according to the Law). There is a different point that Jesus makes, but the point I am making is that she does not marry several men at the same time (Matt. 22:23–32).
  - c. Whereas, we have two passages in the Law dealing with polygamy (those two mentioned), all New Testament passages deal with the marriage between one man and one woman (Eph. 5:22–33).
  - d. Paul tells Timothy that a pastor must be the husband of one wife. Although this passage is given several different interpretations; it can certainly be used to show that polygamy is not a part of the game plan for any pastor (1Tim. 3:2).
21. Given that we have no New Testament case histories of polygamy and that there are very few in the Old Testament (and none of those are given as peaceful); and given that God's original plan involved one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24), we are forced to the conclusion that it is God's perfect plan for one man to marry one woman.
22. An interesting question: there is no specific ban on polygamy in the Old Testament, but there appears to be in the New. Explain.
- a. The proper relationship between a man and a woman is one man for one woman; even though this is not a requirement of the Law, it is discouraged in the Old Testament.
    - i. By example: every detailed example of polygamy in the Old Testament is fraught with problems. However, there were a number of polygamous unions that we do not know much about (Gen. 4:19, 23 Judges 8:13 1Chron. 4:5 8:8 2Chron. 24:3). In at least the first two, we are sure that the families had more than their share of problems.
    - ii. By law: the king was not supposed to multiply wives to himself.
    - iii. By doctrine: the relationship between God and Israel is often spoken of in terms of a man and his right woman.
    - iv. However, to be accurate here, the Old Testament Law dealt with polygamy: **If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn, but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his** (Deut. 21:15–17). This does not tell us that it is right or wrong for a man to be polygamous; it just tells us that some were, and that Moses invoked this one regulation concerning polygamy.
  - b. There is not actually a ban in the New Testament; it was also discouraged, however:
    - i. By doctrine: all teaching about marriage is confined to one man and one woman.
    - ii. By church requirements: the pastor has to be a husband of one wife.
  - c. So actually, there is no ban against polygamy in the Old or New Testaments. However, it is strongly discouraged in both.
23. An interesting and final question: why doesn't the Bible come right out and condemn polygamy? Why is there not a commandment which requires all marriages to be strictly monogamous?\*
- a. We have three case histories of men whose relationship to Israel and to God was fundamental, and these three were all polygamists (Jacob, David and Solomon). Solomon, on the one hand, had the spiritual wherewithal to build a Temple for God (which, at once, spoke of our Lord to come, and of His eternal future presence on this earth as ruler over Israel and over all the earth). On the other hand, Solomon was the poster boy for how mixed up a person in polygamy could become.
  - b. Thieme has given the example many times of the tribal chief who is converted to Christianity, and then is told that he should be married to only one woman. This is the light at the end of the tunnel he has been looking for. He then throws his least favorite wife or wives out into the street (he has also found out the hard way that you do not want to have more than one wife living under the same roof), condemning them and probably their children to a lifetime of hardship and poverty. In fact, the one provision in the Law of God protects the interest and inheritance of a child who is the son

## A Few Points on Polygamy (taken from 1Sam. 1:2)

of the least favorite wife.

- c. Apparently, the Bible recognizes that, from time to time, there will be those involved in polygamous marriages who are saved within such a marriage. There is no commandment for this person to leave this marriage state.

\* A similar question might be, *why doesn't the Bible come right out and condemn slavery?*

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From 2Sam. 3:2: Polygamy seems like a dream for many men; therefore, let's answer the question...

### What's Wrong with Polygamy?

1. Perhaps, if the man can turn things around for a moment, he might understand better. Why do we rarely find one woman with several husbands? After all, there are queen bees, aren't there? The man has a particular role in the family unit, which involves authority. If there are several husbands, then who has the authority? Furthermore, the authority seems to be with the wife, as she has the several husbands. Similarly, a man with several wives has the problem that, a woman has a particular place in the household. She is second in command. Now, this, to the one with the highest authority, may not seem like much, but it is every bit as important as the man's authority. When there are several people with the same command position in the same home, we have a problem.
2. The family makes up a basic unit of society; God designed us the way we are to best function inside the family unit.
3. The husband and wife are a unit with respect to their children. A good husband and wife function as a unit before their children. Children tend to see their parents as a unity as well. None of this comes into play when there is one husband and several wives. That basic structure no longer exists.
4. We have illustrations throughout David's life as to how his children got out of control, even though David is a man after God's own heart. Because of the male and female roles in a marriage, it is easier for a husband and a wife, for instance, to raise 4 children, than it is for a husband and 4 wives to raise 4 children. With one husband and wife, we have the basic marriage unit, and we have the command center. The children, ideally, find themselves under the authority of one command center (and a child even at the age of 3 knows when there are two different commanders spouting different commands). This command center breaks down when there are several women occupying the post of second-in-command.
5. The unique intimacy between one man and one woman is breaks down when there are several women involved. When there is more than one wife, a woman belonging to David does not have unfettered access to him. When we have a half-dozen wives, each wife, for all intents and purposes, is out there on her own, as she may see David intimately once a week (and by *intimately* I do not mean sex, although that is the physical expression of soul intimacy). In 1Corinthians, the man is supposed to have control over the woman's body, and the woman is to have control over her husband's body. This commandment cannot be obeyed in a polygamous marriage, because there will be times when wife #2 simply does not have access to the husband.
6. Most men have had the experience of a woman becoming emotional and even rather irrational now and again. A household can afford at most, one woman, losing her control for a period of time. At this point, the husband has to gently, and with love, rein his wife in, and often take over her relationship with the children as well. No way does David have time for this with 2 or more women.
7. In our society today, millions of Black children function with absentee fathers; and a percentage of these actually have contact with their biological father. This has ruined several generations of Blacks. As we follow David's children while he is king, we will see that they have control issues; authority issues, lust issues, etc. Does this sound like the youth of the US today? Of course it does. I have been illustrating in several of these points that, polygamy does not work in a single household; of course, the male

## What's Wrong with Polygamy?

immediately thinks, *what if I make enough money to buy two or more houses?* We still have the problem that, neither the wife nor children have unfettered access to the husband-father, which destroys intimacy, training and discipline. Furthermore, it is the husband-father who is in charge of training and disciplining his children; not his wife. There will be points in time when the 2<sup>nd</sup> in command does not have the force or power to reign in the stubborn volition of a child (be he 5 or 15). At that point, the wife needs immediate assistance and attention from the husband. A husband with more than one wife cannot give of himself this way every time he is needed.

8. One man and one woman together make a perfect balance; not too much testosterone, not too much estrogen. God designed us that way, and throughout Scripture, this model is upheld as a basic unit of society. We need to be able to accept the fact that God knows what He is doing in the design of the male and female, and in the design of marriage and the family unit. In our imagination, we may think that we can come up with better alternatives (polygamy, gay marriages, single parent families, being raised by a village); however, even in one generation, it is clear that man's alternatives to God's approach do not work.

There is a television show on HBO now where polygamy is a part of the setup. HBO has some excellent shows, with outstanding writing and direction and acting. My guess originally was that, the difficulties of polygamy will be downplayed, so that they are peripheral and occasional issues at most (if these issues are raised at all). I have since seen a few episodes of *Big Love* and they clearly use many of the logical problems which would occur in such a marriage.



The photo is from <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/images/pics/BigLove1.jpg>

We have seen, on the other hand, a rather playful and positive approach to gay couples on television over the past decade or so. They are presented as behaving almost exactly as male-female couples, which is not the case. In the US, we have a particularly bad situation with regards to marriage—50–60% of mates stray (at one time, this percentage was in the single digits). However, in homosexual unions, I think the percentage is closer to 95%; this means, there is no true intimacy, since physical intimacy occurs outside of the relationship with virtually every gay couple.

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I have made comments throughout my examination of Scripture on this point; let me include those here; these are taken pretty much word for word:

### Additional Commentary on Polygamy

From Judges 8:30:

One of the many blessings in the ancient world was having many children—particularly sons. Gideon just had a ton of them and, as we will see in the next chapter, all for nought. Scripture is fairly easy on Gideon and the end of his life. He apparently falls into some idolatry, or setting up the ephod causes others to fall into idolatry. He obviously has a ton of wives, which is also not the textbook way of doing things (although Old Testament believers are not faulted too terribly for that). The end result is that he appeared to be blessed, but all of his children will die in the next chapter. As Thieme used to say, *a right thing done in a wrong way is wrong*.

## Additional Commentary on Polygamy

People who read their Bible superficially or just see what they want to see, combine their lust with a portion of this passage and determine that they should have multiple wives. Although this is not a tremendously prevailing mistake touted by too many faux-Christian religions, it is found with some shoots of Mormonism. It is pretty obvious to me that it will become legal in the United States for a man to have several wives future from the time I am writing this. After all, homosexuality, when I was in my teens and twenties (in the 60's and 70's), was clearly understood by all to be a sin and a deviation. At this point in time, there are a significant number of people, albeit, not a majority by any means, who believe that homosexuality should be taken as a valid, alternative lifestyle and, as of this writing, our society is moving in the direction of giving homosexuals the same rights and privileges which have been correctly extended to minorities, as though they are simply a minority. Give it some time, and there will come a time, if our nation continues on its present path, that polygamy will be sanctioned by the state as well, if there are enough people who lobby for it. This passage in no way supports or condones Gideon's behavior, it merely records it. In the next chapter, we will see that Gideon's Lothario-type behavior will be one of the factors in Israel falling into steep degeneracy.

From 1Sam. 1:2:

What is clear in the narrative to follow is that there was trouble in the Elkanah household because he had two wives. The friction between the two wives is the driving force behind this first chapter of Samuel. The end result is that Hannah's son, Samuel, would be given over to the Lord. Now, does that make polygamy okay? Again, certainly not. The ends do not justify the means. God took a bad situation, two jealous women under the same roof, and brought good from it. **For we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and to those who are called according to His pre-determined plan** (Rom. 8:28).<sup>9</sup>

From 1Sam. 1:6

This is the kind of behavior that you would expect from two women under the same roof. They both are dependent, emotionally and financially, upon the same man. What Elkanah gives to one, he cannot simultaneously give to the other. Peninnah is raising his children, and he is obviously going to have some interest in his own children. However, he prefers his wife Hannah, and Elkanah isn't smart enough to hide this fact (even if he did, there would be problems; but there are even more problems because they both know he prefers Hannah). So, Hannah is jealous of Peninnah because she is bearing her love's children; Peninnah is jealous of Hannah because the love of her life loves Hannah more. What we then have is the emotional response of the two women. Hannah is like the weak chicken on a farm, and Peninnah is one of the chickens who pecks away at her until she is dead. This is their psychological makeup. Hannah is the vulnerable and introverted one; Peninnah is more aggressive and she will lash out in anger concerning her own insecurities. One of my friends is a very attractive young lady who, whenever she begins a new job, there are almost always jealous women who peck away at her. One place where I worked, there were two ladies who almost daily pecked away at me. Women have the capacity for a vicious tenacity when expressing their inner anger and jealousy. There was little happiness under the Elkanah roof when these two stirred it up, which was probably quite often. Peninnah would make her comments and she would peck away at Hannah, and Hannah would eventually break down crying. The realities of being married to two women are far removed from what is in a man's imagination. Whatever you think polygamy might be, by way of fun and titillation, the reality of the situation is quite a bit different. Obviously, the biggest problem is their old sin natures. Remove the old sin natures, and they might all get along. ☺

From 2Sam. 3:2:

<sup>9</sup> The most classic illustration of this is Gen. 37–50, where the precursors of the Israelites, Joseph's brothers sold Joseph into slavery. Everything about what they did was wrong. However, God took that situation and used it to preserve the patriarchs of Israel. **"You thought evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."** is how Joseph explained it to his brothers in Gen. 50:20.

## Additional Commentary on Polygamy

One final note: none of these sons born to David in Hebron are ever celebrated as men of spiritual integrity; several of them whose background we do know, are infamous. If a man as great as David, with all the financial resources of a king, cannot control and guide several children by several wives, what do you think is going to happen to the children of the seeds that you so indiscriminately plant?

What you need to understand is, a husband and a wife form a unit, insofar as their children are concerned. Although my parents were very different in personality and interests, I never played one against the other, because their decisions concerning us were made jointly; they backed up one another. They took their responsibility of raising children seriously, and did so as a team. David cannot function as a team with a half-dozen different wives. He does not have the time. There is no unity and no coordination of discipline and guidance for these children. Even as a king with the resources of a king, David cannot properly father these children he has fathered. There are too many mothers and not enough fathers; and no unity and no unbreakable bond has been established. Now, bear in mind, we are speaking of a great man; David has great spiritual integrity. Over and over again when we have studied him, we find indications of this greatness. However, you cannot take your spiritual greatness outside of God's plan and make it work. It just won't.

From 2Samuel 5:13 and 1Chronicles 14:3:

David had 8 wives and 10 mistresses (2Sam. 15:16). For most men, they think this is the perfect arrangement. They have complete power; they have all the financial resources that they need; and they have several wives and mistresses, and it is all out in the open. There is no hiding, no apologizing, and no cheating, per se. However, the problem with all that is, it simply is not true. Most men think that this would be the ideal situation, but it is not. Despite man's predilection for infidelity, God has designed the family unit to function as a specific, nuclear family unit; and all other perversions of this do not work.

Women respond to a man from their soul—this is their makeup. They need to have reenforcement from the man to reenforce their soul response. No doubt, when David would first court a woman, there were be a modicum of exclusivity, and David would give enough of his soul for the woman to respond to. Or, her soul would respond to his wealth and power—however, after a certain point in time, when David was off elsewhere, there was no longer a man to whom this woman could respond to regularly. Her soul had no man to respond to; it became like a vacuum. A phenomenon which we see today, especially with so many split up families, is some women's souls begin responding to their sons or daughters. There is more than the mother's love and protectiveness. Now, I don't mean that there was pedophilia going on; but that the woman's soul, not having David's to respond to, would respond to the souls of her children. When it became clear to the woman that she could not jockey for first place with David, then she would attempt to place her children in first place within the palace. She would be in constant competition herself for David's interest; and she would have her children in constant competition for preeminence within the palace. When it came to David's wives and mistresses within the palace, there would be daily turmoil. I believe that this would be a fascinating psychological study—women and children and the household dynamic in a polygamous marriage.

So that I make myself abundantly clear here, and many men can attest to this—if the woman of the house is not happy, then their soul response or their soulish reaction is going to make most everyone else unhappy. Off in the future, as we study David's life, we are going to find him on the roof watching a woman from afar. Remember, he's got a house full of women, but where is he? He is on his roof where he can get away from his sons, daughters, wives and mistresses; and what is going through his mind? Sexual fantasies. He's got multiple wives to go to, and David's mind is still absorbed with sexual fantasies which they cannot fulfill.

After studying David, Solomon will be next, and Solomon will have a 1000 wives and mistresses, and yet, he will get all out of joint over one woman whom he writes about in Song of Solomon. The number of women which Solomon has is not enough. 1000 women is not enough!

## Additional Commentary on Polygamy

The focus of Scripture is certainly not monogamy versus polygamy; but now and again we are going to come across passages and, at times, whole books, which indicate that the fantasy of some men is a pretty unhappy reality.

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### McGee on Polygamy

McGee's comments would be apropos here: *Gideon had many wives and a concubine besides. He had a total of seventy-one sons. That is a real blot on this man's life. Now someone will say, as they did about Solomon, "How could God use a man like this and why did He use him?" Well, Gideon took these many wives and had all of these children after the battle. And the fact of the matter is that God used him in spite of this. God did not approve of what he did. The record makes it clear that his actions brought tragedy to the nation of Israel. The next chapter brings that out. God had forbidden inter-marriage outside the nation. He had forbidden the Israelites to have more than one wife. God did not create several Eves for Adam. He created only one. God did not remove all of Adam's ribs. God took out only one rib. Abraham, you remember, took a concubine, that little Egyptian maid named Hagar, and believe me, it caused trouble. God never sanctioned it. Through Abraham's son Isaac came the nation Israel. The Arabs are descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar. I talked to an Arab guide in Jericho who was very proud of the fact that he was a son of Abraham. He was also a Moslem. He said proudly, "I am a son of Abraham though Ishmael." That is true. That was the sin of Abraham, and God never blessed that, friends. God did not bless Solomon's actions in this connection, and He is not going to bless Gideon either. In fact, Gideon's actions split the kingdom and caused real tragedy. This is the blot in his life. God does not hide anything. God paints the picture of man as it is. Now if a friend of Gideon had been his biographer, he probably would have left this part of his life out of the story. God, however, did not. He paints mankind in all of his lurid, sinful color.*<sup>10</sup>

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