



# *Bible & Life*

## *Bible Teaching Newsletter*

**BIBLICAL DOCTRINE & NEW TESTAMENT ASSEMBLY LIFE**

Vol. 21. No. 1

Jan. 1, 2014

### ***Why Christians Should Not Practice Polygamy***

By David Dunlap

For nearly two centuries, missionaries in Africa have struggled in changing hearts concerning the practice of polygamy. New converts from Islam also struggle with polygamy as they seek to live for Christ. However, in recent days some evangelical Christians in the United States have concluded that polygamy is an acceptable marital lifestyle. In the last sixteen years, the Christian polygamy movement has grown at breakneck speed. It is estimated that 50,000 evangelical Christians are practicing or sympathetic polygamists. This movement uses a network of websites, newsletters, and books to propagate its message. Leader Donald Milton of Arizona has written and published books on polygamy. Mark Henkel, the spokesman for a leading pro-polygamy organization, was interviewed in 2006 on the CBN/"700 Club" program about his polygamist views. A 2008 newspaper report on evangelical Christian polygamy reveals:

*"Evangelical Christian polygamists have no connection to the Fundamentalist LDS Church, which openly practices polygamy and is an offshoot of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While polygamy experts say there are about 35,000 FLDS polygamists in the United States, there is no exact number for Christian polygamists. Mark Henkel, the founder of TruthBearer.org, a Christian evangelical pro-polygamy organization, said that the polygamist movement has been growing steadily for the past 12 years. Henkel says there are less than 50,000 Christian polygamists, but experts cannot substantiate this."*<sup>1</sup>

The modern Polygamist movement's teaching is deceptive, misleading, and destructive to the family and church. Both leaders selectively quote leading Christians, such as reformer Martin Luther, among those that support polygamy.<sup>2</sup> Evangelical Christian leaders believe that polygamy will be an important doctrinal issue that the Church will battle in the coming years.

#### **God's Original Plan for Marriage: Adam-Eve and Noah**

At the outset, it should be noted that polygamy is never endorsed by God in Scripture and is usually presented in a negative fashion when mentioned. In Matt. 19:4, we are told by Jesus that God created "male and [one] female" and joined them in marriage. Mark 10:6-8 states:

*"But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh."*

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**Columbia News Service  
(2008)**

Marriage was to be a permanent union between man and woman, that they might be helpful to one another (Genesis 2:18). It represents a relationship of both spiritual and physical unity.

The “two as one” union is God’s pattern on how marriage was to be conducted from the beginning—NOT three or four as one. Eve was taken from Adam’s body and given back to him as his wife (singular), showing God’s approval of what the marriage union is to be like. God always spoke of man’s “wife,” as singular, not “wives.” The contexts of these passages shows us that in addition to one man and one woman, these were to leave—“his father and mother”— one father and one mother.

The same godly pattern of one man and one wife is illustrated by Noah. At the time of the Ark (Gen. 7:7), Noah took his *one wife* into the ark, and all his sons took *one wife*; God called Noah’s family righteous and pure. If polygamy were ordained of God, it would have made sense that Noah and his sons would have taken additional wives with them to repopulate the earth faster.

### **The Beginning of Polygamy in the Bible**

It was not until the of fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 4:23) that polygamy occurred. Lamech, a descendent of Cain, was the first to practice polygamy. The first time a polygamous relationship is found in the Bible is within a thriving but rebellious society where a murderer named “Lamech took for himself two wives” (Gen. 4:19, 23).

We have examples in the Old Testament of those who practiced polygamy, such as Solomon, but these are not approved by God. Many of the patriarchs took more than one wife. Abraham, by the recommendation of Sarah, took her maid as a wife. Unscrupulous Laban tricked Jacob into taking Leah first, and then Rachel as wife, to whom he had been betrothed. Polygamy was not God’s purpose in these ancient cultures, but rather it was a departure from the divine institution of marriage that God ordained.

In the Bible, fifteen examples of polygamy are mentioned since the time of Lamech. Many of these men were so powerful and influential that none would challenge their unsanctioned practice: Abraham (Genesis 16), Esau (Genesis 26:34; 28:9), Jacob (Genesis 29:30), Gideon (Judges 8:30), David (1 Samuel 25:39-44), Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-8), Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 11:18-23), Joash (2 Chronicles 24:3), and Ahab (2 Kings 10). Polygamy is mentioned (but not condoned) in the Mosaic Law and continued to be practiced all down through the period of Jewish history up to the Captivity, after which there is no instance of it on record. Furthermore, reading the Bible for all its worth involves recognition that the narratives of Scripture are often *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. The fact that Scripture reveals the patriarchs with all their warts and moles and wrinkles is to warn us of their failures; it is not to teach us to emulate their practices.

### **God’s View of Polygamy**

God never condoned polygamy; He allowed it to occur. However, this practice, in time, brought to pass devastating consequences. 1 Kings 11:3 says Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, violating the principle of monogamy that he was given through the Law of Moses. Consider that Solomon at one time was the wisest man in the world. In I Kings 11:4 we read: “*For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.*” Notice Solomon became a *polytheist* because he was influenced in *polygamy*. In his case, his many wives became

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many gods. Scripture has always commanded monogamy (Ps. 128:3; Prov. 5:18; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10-29; Eccl. 9:9). Deut. 17:14-17:

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

This is the command of God, and He has never changed it. Were Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon condemned or approved for practicing polygamy? The fact that every polygamist in the Bible, such as David, Jacob, and Solomon, (1 Chronicles 14:3) experienced polygamy’s devastating effect on their families should be evidence that this is not God’s will. The fact that God never prohibited polygamy or divorce should not be taken as divine permission. Scripture says, “He only permitted it (divorce) because of the hardness of their hearts” (Deut. 24:1; Matt. 19:8). Matt. 5:31-32 states:

*“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”*

The Bible says adultery is not a choice; one does not have to acquire another wife to satisfy his urges. Jesus said if you look upon another woman with desire (married or not) it is adultery, a sin. God hates polygamy as well as divorce, since it destroys the family (Malachi 2:16). The practice of the Patriarchs does not change the fact that the Bible condemns it.

Multiple wives were tolerated but never with God’s approval. God used the Mosaic Law’s bill of divorce to discourage the practice of polygamy and to encourage a greater degree of purity and faithfulness in the marriage relationship. *“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge”* (Hebrews 13:3,4).

### **The Illustration of the Church - The Bride of Christ.**

The Church is called “the bride of Christ,” collectively as one (singular). Each person is not a bride, as in plurality of wives and marriages (Ephesians 5:25-32). This illustration of the marriage bond is one of the greatest arguments in the Bible for monogamous marriage. Here we see one Man giving Himself in sacrifice and devotion for one woman. “Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). This marital love is sacrificial, faithful, and exclusive. It is a picture of God’s highest ideal of the marriage relationship—one Man’s (Christ’s) love for His one bride—for all eternity. Furthermore, the New Testament teaches that *“each man [should] have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband”* (1 Cor. 7:2). Paul insisted that a leader in the church should be “the husband of one wife;” a deacon or elder must have one wife (Tit.1:6). This verse must be interpreted against the backdrop of a polygamous first-century society. This instruction is certainly the biblical pattern for every Christian marriage now and then.

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***Deuteronomy  
17:17***

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## January 2014

### INFORMATION

Bible and Life is published periodically and sent out free of charge and is supported entirely by the free will offerings of the Lord's people. Checks should be made out to "Bible and Life Ministries, Inc."

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### Polygamy and 2 Samuel 12:8

The Lord, speaking through Nathan the prophet, says to King David, "I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have given you even more." At face value, this seems to suggest that God gave David multiple wives, and then stood ready to add more with divine approval. We need to be careful we do not interpret Scripture in a wildly literal fashion, because—the truth is—Nathan's words are intended to be *ironic*. David had just murdered a man in order to have another woman. Despite the generosity of the very God who had made him sovereign ruler of the land, the king had stolen the wife of a servant to satisfy his carnal lust. Thus, in language that dripped with irony, Nathan the prophet pronounces judgment against Israel's king. Therefore, 2 Samuel 12:8 hardly constitutes divine approval for the practice of polygamy.

### Conclusion

Monogamy has always been God's standard for the human race. From the very beginning God set the pattern by creating a monogamous marriage relationship—one man and one woman, Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:27; 2:21-25). How many wives did Adam have in Gen. 2:24? One, God did not take two wives out from his side. It cannot be interpreted that he became one with "each wife"; *then this would mean he would be a husband to each*, committing adultery. God certainly could have made two or more wives for Adam, thereby endorsing the idea of polygamy; but He made only one. Therefore, the Bible clearly and decidedly states that God does not condone or allow Christians today to practice polygamy.

### Endnotes

1. Zehra Mamdani, *Idaho Evangelical Christian Polygamists Use Internet*, (Columbia News Service, Feb. 28, 2008)
2. Mark P. Shea, *By What Authority*, (OSV Publishers, Indiana, 1996), p. 101

**Resources** - DVD - Lifting the Veil of Polygamy - Living Hope Ministries  
<http://www.equip.org/bookstore/dvd/lifting-the-veil-of-polygamy/>