

What the Bible says about: Marriage, Divorce and Polygamy

This document has three main sections: New Testament, Old Testament and Polygamy. I placed the New Testament scriptures first, since it is most relevant to all people today, both Jews and the Gentiles. The word "Gentile" refers to anyone outside of the Jewish nation. The Old Testament contains the laws specific to the Jewish people, many of which were for specific time periods and/or purposes.

The New Testament is centered around Jesus Christ as being the Messiah, not only to the Jews, but to all people. The New Testament does not nullify the laws of the Old Testament. However, many are now obsolete. For example, Jesus has become the substitute for animal sacrifices as a means to pay retribution for breaking God's laws.

The section on Polygamy comes solely from the Old Testament. Even though you likely are not Jewish and obviously you are not living in ancient times, it is still good to read these scriptures because it will give you a good idea of God's preferred plan for humans on these topics.

The whole reason for the Bible is summed up by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40. Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: "Love your neighbor as yourself." The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew 5:27-32 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." 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."

Mark 6:17-29; Luke 3:19-20; Matthew 14:3-12 "For Herod had sent soldiers to arrest and imprison John as a favor to Herodias. She had been his brother Philip's wife, but Herod had married her. John [the Baptist] had been telling Herod, 'It is against God's law for you to marry your brother's wife.' So, Herodias bore a grudge against John and wanted to kill him." [Which she was successful in doing. Read that gruesome story in Matthew 14:1-12]

Mark 7:14-23 "Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. 'All of you listen,' he said, 'and try to understand. It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart.'"

Then Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowd, and his disciples asked him what he meant by the parable he had just used. 'Don't you understand either?' he asked. 'Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.' (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.)

And then he added, 'It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.'"

Mark 10:2-12; Matthew 19:3-9

NOTE: The Pharisees were a sect who kept strict observance of the Jewish laws.

“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?”

And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”

He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”

Mark 12:18-27; Matthew 22:23-32 “Then Jesus was approached by some Sadducees—religious leaders who say there is no resurrection from the dead. They posed this question: ‘Teacher, Moses gave us a law that if a man dies, leaving a wife without children, his brother should marry the widow and have a child who will carry on the brother’s name. Well, suppose there were seven brothers. The oldest one married and then died without children. So, the second brother married the widow, but he also died without children. Then the third brother married her. This continued with all seven of them, and still there were no children. Last of all, the woman also died. So, tell us, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? For all seven were married to her.’

Jesus replied, ‘Your mistake is that you don’t know the Scriptures, and you don’t know the power of God. For when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven. ‘But now, as to whether the dead will be raised—haven’t you ever read about this in the writings of Moses, in the story of the burning bush? Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said to Moses, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ So, he is the God of the living, not the dead. You have made a serious error.’

Luke 16:16-18 “Until John the Baptist, the law of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is eager to get in. But that doesn’t mean that the law has lost its force. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the smallest point of God’s law to be overturned. For example, a man who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery. And anyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

Luke 18:18-20; Matthew 19:16-19; Mark 10:17-19 “Once a religious leader asked Jesus this question: ‘Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus asked him. ‘Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.’”

Romans 7:2-3 “For example, when a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. So, while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries.”

1 Corinthians 7:1-16 NOTE: This is written by Paul, an apostle, to the church at Corinth.

“Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations. But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. The husband should fulfill his wife’s sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband’s needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won’t be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another.

So, I say to those who aren’t married and to widows—it’s better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can’t control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It’s better to marry than to burn with lust. But for those who are married, I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife.

Now, I will speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command from the Lord. If a fellow believer has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to continue living with him, he must not leave her. And if a believing woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him. For the believing wife brings holiness to her marriage, and the believing husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not be holy, but now they are holy. (But if the husband or wife who isn’t a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases, the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace.) Don’t you wives realize that your husbands might be saved because of you? And don’t you husbands realize that your wives might be saved because of you?

1 Corinthians 7:25-40 “I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord’s work and thinking how to please him. But a married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided. In the same way, a woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and in spirit. But a married woman has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband. I am saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.

But if a man thinks that he’s treating his fiancée improperly and will inevitably give in to his passion, let him marry her as he wishes. It is not a sin. But if he has decided firmly not to marry and there is no urgency and he can control his passion, he does well not to marry. So, the person who marries his fiancée does well, and the person who doesn’t marry does even better.

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but only if he loves the Lord. But in my opinion, it would be better for her to stay single, and I think I am giving you counsel from God’s Spirit when I say this.

Ephesians 5:21-33 “And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without

fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. And we are members of his body.

As the Scriptures say, 'A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' (Genesis 2:24) This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. So, again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Colossians 3:16-20 "Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged."

Hebrews 13:4 "Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery."

James 2:10-11 "For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. For the same God who said, 'You must not commit adultery,' also said, 'You must not murder.' So, if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law. For he who said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' also said, 'You shall not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker."

1 Peter 3:1-7 "In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands. Then, even if some refuse to obey the Good News, your godly lives will speak to them without any words. They will be won over by observing your pure and reverent lives. Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They put their trust in God and accepted the authority of their husbands. For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do. In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered."

OLD TESTAMENT

GOD'S ORIGINAL MARRIAGE PLAN

Genesis 1:27-28 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

Genesis 2:20-24 “He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him. So, the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the opening. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.

‘At last!’ the man exclaimed. ‘This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’ This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

PLAN ALTERED: ENTER SATAN

NOTE: **Genesis Chapter 3** tells the story of the serpent tricking Eve in the Garden of Eden. In turn, Eve also gets Adam to break the one and only law that God had given them. “Do not eat of the tree in the midst of the garden.” This was the tree of knowledge about good and evil. Thus, Satan gains his first toe hold on God’s beloved creation, human beings. Satan’s deceptions continue to this day, doing all he can to keep people from loving and relying on the Creator.

Due to choosing Satan’s will instead of God’s will, new rules were set in place, the first couple are evicted from the garden and things have downhill from there, whenever one makes choices not in alignment with God’s will. In this chapter, we find the first use of the words “husband” and “wife.”

Genesis 3:16 “Then he [God] said to the woman, ‘I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.’ “

DNA CLEANSE

NOTE: Genesis Chapter 6 summarizes how events on earth continued to go downhill. “Sons of God,” which are believed to be demons or aliens, began to take “daughters of men” as their wives, whether the women were willing or not. This began a breed of nasty human-like giants who worshipped false gods, aggressively warred against mankind and found humans to be tasty snacks. God comes up with a plan to cleanse the DNA pool and push the “reset” button by flooding the earth and killing the rebellious people. Sadly, only eight humans were not being deceived by the demons, choosing instead to love God and follow His will.

Genesis 6:5-8 “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So, the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’ But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”

Genesis 6:18 “But I [God] will confirm my covenant with you [Noah]. So, enter the boat—you and your wife and your [three] sons and their wives.”

NEW PLAN: FOCUS ON A SPECIFIC LINEAGE

NOTE: It wasn’t long after the flood that people returned to worshipping idols and falling into rituals and practices that honored the created, rather than the Creator. Rather than destroying all humans again, God chose Abram (aka Abraham), the most righteous man on earth, to implement His next plan of action. He promised to bless Abraham and his descendants as long as they put God first and avoided the demonic practices of idolatry, witchcraft, etc. Over time, Abraham’s descendants went back into these practices and found themselves as captives in Egypt for over 400 years.

While there, instead of repenting and relying on God, once again, they adopted the practices of idolatry and other rebellious acts against God. We will talk about the 3 generations of patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the Polygamy section below.

It was the second generation after Jacob that Moses was chosen to get the people freed from Egyptian slavery and to move to the land of Canaan that was promised to their ancestor, Abraham. Although the following marriage laws were written for the ancient Israelites, it does show us the kind of behavior that the Creator prefers for all humankind.

Leviticus 18:1-5 "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. I am the Lord your God. So do not act like the people in Egypt, where you used to live, or like the people of Canaan, where I am taking you. You must not imitate their way of life. You must obey all my regulations and be careful to obey my decrees, for I am the Lord your God. If you obey my decrees and my regulations, you will find life through them. I am the Lord.'"

Exodus 20:2–17, Deuteronomy 5:6-21 The following are two of the infamous "Ten Commandments." "You shall not commit adultery" and "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Exodus 22:16-17 "If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to anyone and has sex with her, he must pay the customary bride price and marry her. But if her father refuses to let him marry her, the man must still pay him an amount equal to the bride price of a virgin."

Exodus 34:15-17 "You must not make a treaty of any kind with the people living in the land. They lust after their gods, offering sacrifices to them. They will invite you to join them in their sacrificial meals, and you will go with them. Then you will accept their daughters, who sacrifice to other gods, as wives for your sons. And they will seduce your sons to commit adultery against me by worshipping other gods."

Leviticus 6:23 This is a list of who the men of Israel were not to have sexual relationships with. It's interesting to note that only one law deals with the woman as the offender.

"your mother... any of your father's wives... sister, half-sister, stepsister... granddaughter... aunt... daughter-in-law... brother's wife... wife's sister while wife is still living, because they would be rivals... neighbor's wife... both a woman and her daughter or granddaughter. They are close relatives, and this would be a wicked act. Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman. It is a detestable sin. Man or woman not have sex with an animal. This is a perverse act."

Leviticus 20:10-22 The following are the penalties for the previously mentioned sexual offenses.

"If a man commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, both the man and the woman who have committed adultery must be put to death. If a man violates his father by having sex with one of his father's wives, both the man and the woman must be put to death, for they are guilty of a capital offense. If a man has sex with his daughter-in-law, both must be put to death. They have committed a perverse act and are guilty of a capital offense.

If a man practices homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman, both men have committed a detestable act. They must both be put to death, for they are guilty of a capital offense. If a man marries both a woman and her mother, he has committed a wicked act. The man and both women must be burned to death to wipe out such wickedness from among you.

If a man has sex with an animal, he must be put to death, and the animal must be killed. If a woman presents herself to a male animal to have intercourse with it, she and the animal must both be put to death. You must kill both, for they are guilty of a capital offense.

If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a shameful disgrace. They must be publicly cut off from the community. Since the man has violated his sister, he will be punished for his sin. If a man has sexual relations with a woman during her menstrual period, both of them must be cut off from the community, for together they have exposed the source of her blood flow.

Do not have sexual relations with your aunt, whether your mother's sister or your father's sister. This would dishonor a close relative. Both parties are guilty and will be punished for their sin. If a man has sex with his uncle's wife, he has violated his uncle. Both the man and woman will be punished for their sin, and they will die childless. If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity. He has violated his brother, and the guilty couple will remain childless.

You must keep all my decrees and regulations by putting them into practice; otherwise, the land to which I am bringing you as your new home will vomit you out. Do not live according to the customs of the people I am driving out before you. It is because they do these shameful things that I detest them. But I have promised you, 'You will possess their land because I will give it to you as your possession—a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the Lord your God, who has set you apart from all other people."

Deuteronomy 27:20 "Cursed is anyone who has sexual intercourse with one of his father's wives, for he has violated his father."

Numbers 5:11-31 Husband Suspicious of Wife Committing Adultery Test

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. Suppose a man's wife goes astray, and she is unfaithful to her husband and has sex with another man, but neither her husband nor anyone else knows about it. She has defiled herself, even though there was no witness and she was not caught in the act. If her husband becomes jealous and is suspicious of his wife and needs to know whether or not she has defiled herself, the husband must bring his wife to the priest. He must also bring an offering of two quarts of barley flour to be presented on her behalf. Do not mix it with olive oil or frankincense, for it is a jealousy offering—an offering to prove whether or not she is guilty.

The priest will then present her to stand trial before the Lord. He must take some holy water in a clay jar and pour into it dust he has taken from the Tabernacle floor. When the priest has presented the woman before the Lord, he must unbind her hair and place in her hands the offering of proof—the jealousy offering to determine whether her husband's suspicions are justified.

The priest will stand before her, holding the jar of bitter water that brings a curse to those who are guilty. The priest will then put the woman under oath and say to her, 'If no other man has had sex with you, and you have not gone astray and defiled yourself while under your husband's authority, may you be immune from the effects of this bitter water that brings on the curse.

But if you have gone astray by being unfaithful to your husband, and have defiled yourself by having sex with another man— at this point the priest must put the woman under oath by saying, 'May the people know that the Lord's curse is upon you when he makes you infertile, causing your womb to shrivel and your abdomen to swell. Now may this water that brings the curse enter your body and cause your abdomen to swell and your womb to shrivel.' And the woman will be required to say, 'Yes, let it be so.' And the priest will write these curses on a piece of leather and wash them off into the bitter water. He will make the woman drink the bitter water that brings on the curse. When the water enters her body, it will cause bitter suffering if she is guilty.

The priest will take the jealousy offering from the woman's hand, lift it up before the Lord, and carry it to the altar. He will take a handful of the flour as a token portion and burn it on the altar, and he will require the woman to drink the water. If she has defiled herself by being unfaithful to her husband, the water that brings on the curse will cause bitter suffering. Her abdomen will swell and her womb will shrink, and her name will become a curse among her people. But if she has not defiled herself and is pure, then she will be unharmed and will still be able to have children.

This is the ritual law for dealing with suspicion. If a woman goes astray and defiles herself while under her husband's authority, or if a man becomes jealous and is suspicious that his wife has been unfaithful, the husband must present his wife before the Lord, and the priest will apply this entire ritual law to her. The husband will be innocent of any guilt in this matter, but his wife will be held accountable for her sin."

Deuteronomy 22:13-21 "Suppose a man marries a woman, but after sleeping with her, he turns against her and publicly accuses her of shameful conduct, saying, 'When I married this woman, I discovered she was not a virgin.' Then the woman's father and mother must bring the proof of her virginity to the elders as they hold court at the town gate. Her father must say to them, 'I gave my daughter to this man to be his wife, and now he has turned against her. He has accused her of shameful conduct, saying, 'I discovered that your daughter was not a virgin. But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity.' Then they must spread her bed sheet before the elders. The elders must then take the man and punish him. They must also fine him 100 pieces of silver, which he must pay to the woman's father because he publicly accused a virgin of Israel of shameful conduct. The woman will then remain the man's wife, and he may never divorce her.

But suppose the man's accusations are true, and he can show that she was not a virgin. The woman must be taken to the door of her father's home, and there the men of the town must stone her to death, for she has committed a disgraceful crime in Israel by being promiscuous while living in her parents' home. In this way, you will purge this evil from among you."

Deuteronomy 22:22 "If a man is discovered committing adultery, both he and the woman must die. In this way, you will purge Israel of such evil."

Deuteronomy 22:23-27 "Suppose a man meets a young woman, a virgin who is engaged to be married, and he has sexual intercourse with her. If this happens within a town, you must take both of them to the gates of that town and stone them to death. The woman is guilty because she did not scream for help. The man must die because he violated another man's wife. In this way, you will purge this evil from among you. But if the man meets the engaged woman out in the country, and he rapes her, then only the man must die. Do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no crime worthy of death. She is as innocent as a murder victim. Since the man raped her out in the country, it must be assumed that she screamed, but there was no one to rescue her."

Deuteronomy 22:28-29 "Suppose a man has intercourse with a young woman who is a virgin but is not engaged to be married. If they are discovered, he must pay her father fifty pieces of silver. Then he must marry the young woman because he violated her, and he may never divorce her as long as he lives."

Deuteronomy 22:28-30 "A man must not marry his father's former wife, for this would violate his father."

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 “If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.”

Deuteronomy 24:5 “A newly married man must not be drafted into the army or be given any other official responsibilities. He must be free to spend one year at home, bringing happiness to the wife he has married.”

Deuteronomy 25:5-10 “If two brothers are living together on the same property and one of them dies without a son, his widow may not be married to anyone from outside the family. Instead, her husband’s brother should marry her and have intercourse with her to fulfill the duties of a brother-in-law. The first son she bears to him will be considered the son of the dead brother, so that his name will not be forgotten in Israel.

But if the man refuses to marry his brother’s widow, she must go to the town gate and say to the elders assembled there, ‘My husband’s brother refuses to preserve his brother’s name in Israel—he refuses to fulfill the duties of a brother-in-law by marrying me.’ The elders of the town will then summon him and talk with him. If he still refuses and says, ‘I don’t want to marry her,’ the widow must walk over to him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal from his foot, and spit in his face. Then she must declare, ‘This is what happens to a man who refuses to provide his brother with children.’ Ever afterward in Israel his family will be referred to as ‘the family of the man whose sandal was pulled off!’”

NOTE: Just as the first book of the Bible talks about a married man and woman becomes one, thus ends a reminder in the last book of the Old Testament.

Malachi 2:11-16 NOTE: Malachi was a prophet sent by God to give this message to the priests. “The men of Judah have defiled the Lord’s beloved sanctuary by marrying women who worship idols. May the Lord cut off from the nation of Israel every last man who has done this and yet brings an offering to the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

Here is another thing you do. You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your offerings and doesn’t accept them with pleasure. You cry out, ‘Why doesn’t the Lord accept my worship?’ I’ll tell you why! Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows.

Didn’t the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit, you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So, guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. ‘For I hate divorce!’ says the Lord, the God of Israel. ‘To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. ‘So, guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.’”

POLYGAMY

NOTE: From the previous scriptures, the Bible is clear that God's plan was for one man and one woman to marry, for life, thus becoming one. However, the Old Testament does allow polygamy in some cases. First, I would like to point out that I didn't find any scriptures mentioning a woman having multiple husbands.

The first recorded case of polygamy is found in **Genesis 4:19** "Lamech married two women. The first was named Adah, and the second was Zillah." Lamech was the sixth generation from Adam.

Although there are many mentions of men in the Old Testament having multiple wives, I selected the historical events around the three patriarchs and two of the most notable Jewish kings. In several cases, for brevity, I have condensed the stories. However, I encourage you to read the full scripture for all the juicy details.

As was mentioned regarding the previous Old Testament scriptures, they were transcribed by Moses. For the following, we will rewind back 400 years to the first Jewish patriarch, Abram aka Abraham.

Genesis Chapters 12-22, God makes his covenant with Abram. First, he pulls him out of his homeland, Ur of the Chaldeans. This was likely to get him away from the pagan culture, religion and philosophy he was brought up in. Ur was located about 140 miles from the famed Tower of Babel, which was destroyed well before his birth. The ruins of Ur are about 200 miles from the modern capital of Iraq, Baghdad.

God makes a promise that Abram will become a great nation. He further promises that he will give the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants, if they put their love for God first. Abram packed up his wife, Sarai, and all their belongings and moved to the land of Canaan. He was 75 years old and Sarai was 65; they had no children at this time.

Genesis Chapter 16: After being in the land of Canaan for ten years, Sarai was still barren. Likely worrying about the promise of being a great nation, as well as the cultural disgrace of being barren, Sarai comes up with a plan. Sarai entices Abram to marry her Egyptian servant, Hagar and bear children through him. Abram agreed and soon after, Hagar was pregnant. Jealousy and pride grew between the two women. Long story short, Sarai treats Hagar badly. Hagar runs away and escapes in the wilderness. An angel tells her to back and be in submission to Sarai aka Sarah. He foretells the baby Hagar is pregnant with will be a boy and he is to be named Ishmael. **Genesis 16:12** "This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives."

Sixteen years later, Abraham and Sarah finally have a child, a son named Isaac.

Genesis 21:8-20 ⁸When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to celebrate the occasion. ⁹But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac. ¹⁰So she turned to Abraham and demanded, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won't have it!" ¹¹This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son. ¹²But God told Abraham, "Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted. ¹³But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar's son because he is your son, too."

¹⁴So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar's shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba. ¹⁵When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush. ¹⁶Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away. "I don't want to watch the boy die," she said, as she burst into tears. ¹⁷But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, "Hagar, what's wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants." ¹⁹Then God opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink. ²⁰And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became a skillful archer, ²¹and he settled in the wilderness of Paran. His mother arranged for him to marry a woman from the land of Egypt."

NOTE: Ouch! Abraham was a wealthy man, yet, due to the nagging of Sarah, he gives Hagar and Ishmael the bare necessities and kicks them out. I can only imagine the animosity of Ishmael, a teenager, to suffer that humiliation. If it wasn't for divine intervention, they both would have died in the wilderness. The prophesy about Ishmael living in open hostility against his relatives rings true even today. Look at the Middle East. Isaac is the father of the Jewish nation. Ishmael is the father of the Arab nation. I wonder what the world would be like if Sarai had trusted in God and not tried to force the promise of having many descendants by enticing Abram into polygamy. However, on the other hand, God knows all things, so perhaps, this was part of His original plan.

NOTE: Following Abraham's lineage with Isaac, we find that Isaac had only one wife, Rebekah. Perhaps he chose only one wife after enduring the family strife between his mother, stepmother and harassment by his half-brother, Ishmael. But, not so, with Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, who both practiced polygamy. Let's see how that worked for them.

Genesis 27-35 In these chapters, you can read about the birth and prophecies related to Esau being the first born, yet the Abrahamic covenant of God would come through the younger twin, Jacob.

In these chapters, we find that Esau was Isaac's favorite son, while Rebecca was more partial to Jacob. There is also the incident when during a moment of weakness, Esau sells his birthright to Jacob in exchange for a bowl of stew. Later, when Isaac was blind and near death, Rebecca deceitfully got Isaac to bestow the inheritance blessing onto Jacob, the younger twin.

When Esau realizes he has been tricked out of his inheritance, he is enraged. Rebecca finds out that he plans to kill Jacob as soon as their father dies. So, Rachel concocts a story in order to get Isaac's blessing to send Jacob to her brother, Laban, until Esau cools off. While there, Jacob falls in love with his cousin Rachel and strikes a deal with her father to work seven years for him in order to marry Rachel. When that time was fulfilled, on Jacob and Rachel's wedding night, Laban deceives the newlyweds and sneaks his oldest daughter, Leah, into Jacob's tent. They have sex without Jacob realizing he is with Leah, not Rachel.

When confronted by Jacob the next day, Laban states that culturally, the oldest daughter is married first. So, he struck another deal with Jacob. That ended up with Jacob receiving Rachel a week later with the promise of working for Laban another seven years to pay for her dowry. One can only imagine the animosity between the two sisters. Leah is stuck in a marriage, being the less favored wife. Rachel has to share her sister with her husband, as well as dealing with the deceit of her father and sister.

Over the next few years, Leah has four sons while Rachel remains childless. Rachel is jealous and has Jacob take her maid as his concubine in order for Bilhah to have babies "for" Rachel. Then Leah stops having babies and gives Jacob her maid to Jacob to bear more babies. Then Leah has three more children and Rachel finally has her first son, the infamous Joseph who had the coat of many colors. Later, Rachel died while giving birth to her second son. Altogether, the four women produce 12 sons and several daughters.

There is no mention of God being displeased by any of this. However, some of the results that came of this was the dissension and jealousy between the four wives. The Leah's daughter, was raped, which ended up with two of her brothers killing the family of the rapist, even though he wanted to marry her.

Joseph, being the first born of the beloved wife, Rachel, was Jacob's obvious favorite. That created a lot of jealousy with his siblings. When Joseph was young, he told his family about a dream he had in which his brothers would all bow down to him. That didn't sit well with his half-siblings. One day, they plotted to kill Joseph but instead, they ended up selling him to a caravan that was passing by. Coincidentally, that caravan were family members of their uncle, Ishmael (the father of the Arab nation). So, although there was all this strife stemming from the unfavored wives and their offspring, Joseph's prophetic dream and the events that have happened throughout history, tells me that all of this was part of God's plan.

Now, let's backtrack to Jacob's twin brother, Esau.

Genesis 26:34-35 "At the age of forty, Esau married two Hittite wives: Judith, the daughter of Beerli, and Basemath, the daughter of Elon. ³⁵ But Esau's wives made life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah."

NOTE: Rebecca continues to cover up her deceit in getting Isaac to bestow the birthright blessing on Jacob instead of Esau. The following is the story she concocted to receive Isaac's blessing to send Joseph to her brother, Laban. Her real reason is to keep Jacob from being murdered by Esau when their father dies.

Genesis 27:46: "Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women (Esau's wives). If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living."

Genesis 28:6-9 "Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him, he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael, son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had."

NOTE: Ishmael was the son of Abraham, born to Sarah's handmaiden. He's the son that was exiled with his mother because of Sarah's jealousy. Also, remember that the covenant God made with Abraham included that no one in the lineage was to marry foreigner women, due to their idolatry and other ungodly practices. Esau broke this covenant by marrying the Hittite women. Now, trying to win his father's favor, he marries within the family

Genesis 36 follows up with the lineage of Esau and how they eventually moved further away. Through history, the division between Abraham's sons Isaac (father of Jewish nation) and Ishmael (father of Arab nation) continued through the division in the family line between Jacob and Esau.

NOTE: Fast forward close to 400 years. God had Moses supernaturally lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. They've been wandering in the wilderness for forty years. The reason? They still were stubborn and worshipping false gods. So, they wandered until a full generation passed who had not paid homage to the pagan Egyptian gods they were introduced to while in captivity. Also, this generation was now old enough to do battle and take the land that was promised. Just before entry into the land of Canaan, God sets down very strict laws to help keep them pure from idolatry and other demonic influences. The hope was they would offer their full love, homage and reliance on God. When you read about the miracles God performed to bring them out of Egypt and to keep them alive during the forty years in the wilderness, one would think they would recognize God as the highest power. But we humans are soooo ignorant and rebellious.

Deuteronomy 17: 14-17 "You are about to enter the land the Lord your God is giving you. When you take it over and settle there, you may think, 'We should select a king to rule over us like the other nations around us.' If this happens, be sure to select as king the man the Lord your God chooses. You must appoint a fellow Israelite; he may not be a foreigner. 'The king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself or send his people to Egypt to buy horses, for the Lord has told you, 'You must never return to Egypt.' ***The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the Lord.*** And he must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself.

NOTE: God is all-knowing and that is demonstrated repeatedly through the inspired prophets, who often foretold of events that were fulfilled hundreds of years later. So, God knew the Israelites would start grumbling and want to have a king like the other nations. However, it has always been God's desire that we rely on Him instead of people, rituals and other "gods and goddesses." Keep in mind that whenever we rely on the created, rather than the Creator, we open ourselves to demonic interference.

In the above passage, there is no mention of polygamy being sexually immoral. The law was specifically for any who became king of Israel. The purpose was to avoid the demonic practices of idolatry, sorcery, astrology, etc. practiced by the neighboring cultures. So, let's see how two of the most famous and blessed Jewish kings fared with this law.

Let's start with King David. This is the same David who, when a young shepherd, slew the Philistine giant, Goliath. He was ordained by God to become the king of the Israelites. And even more importantly, it was known that the future Messiah would come through his lineage. So, David is highly anointed and blessed by God. Let's see how polygamy turned out for him.

It is unknown how many wives and concubines David had. Eight wives are mentioned by name, but there were likely many more. We read about his first wife in **1 Samuel 18:27** "So [King] Saul gave his daughter **Michal** to David to be his wife." Then two more wives are mentioned in **1 Samuel 30:5** "David's two wives, Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel, were among those captured."

But wait, there's more! **2 Samuel 5:13** "After moving from Hebron to Jerusalem, David married more concubines and wives, and they had more sons and daughters."

The plot thickens and juicy details emerge. **2 Samuel 11:1-16** "In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. ²One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, ³and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

⁶So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. ⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So, Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

¹⁰David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So, he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?" ¹¹Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" ¹²Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So, Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.

¹⁴In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." ¹⁶So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. ¹⁷When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died."

2 Samuel 11:26-27 "When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. When the period of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her to the palace, and she became one of his wives. Then she gave birth to a son. But the Lord was displeased with what David had done."

2 Samuel 12: 1, 7-18 The Lord sent Nathan [a prophet] to David. “The Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. **I gave you your master’s [King Saul] house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.** And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more.’⁹ Why, then, have you despised the word of the Lord and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife.¹⁰ From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking Uriah’s wife to be your own.”

¹¹ “This is what the Lord says: Because of what you have done, I will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man before your very eyes, and he will go to bed with them in public view.¹² You did it secretly, but I will make this happen to you openly in the sight of all Israel.”

¹³ Then David confessed to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan replied, “Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you, and you won’t die for this sin.¹⁴ Nevertheless, because you have shown utter contempt for the word of the Lord by doing this, your child will die.”¹⁵ After Nathan returned to his home, the Lord sent a deadly illness to the child of David and Uriah’s wife.¹⁶ David begged God to spare the child. He went without food and lay all night on the bare ground.¹⁷ The elders of his household pleaded with him to get up and eat with them, but he refused.¹⁸ Then on the seventh day the child died.”

NOTE: Did you catch the sentence, “I gave you your master’s [King Saul] house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.” So, there isn’t an issue with David having multiple wives and concubines, even though he was breaking the law, “*The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the Lord.*” And David had also married foreign women, including Bathsheba. However, there was a hefty punishment for plotting Uriah’s murder to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba. Another thing to note is that David confessed what he had done wrong and was forgiven. This story is just one of many that shows God’s mercy when we repent and have a change of heart.

NOTE: There are several other cited cases of various Israelite leaders who were polygamous, but there is no reference to whether this pleased or displeased God. We’ll wrap up this section of polygamy with the man who holds the world record for the most number of wives. That is David’s son, Solomon, whose mother is Bathsheba from our previous story. Solomon was also considered to be the wisest man in the world, not to mention high up there in the richest category, as well.

He was also an extremist when it came to living life to the fullest. With a count of 700 wives and 300 concubines, I’d be more concerned about his sanity. Yet, with all his wealth and life experiences, the refrain of his life is “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” Let’s see how Solomon did in the eyes of God in regards to marriage and polygamy. Keep in mind that like his father, David, and his ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Solomon was highly favored, anointed and blessed by God.

Our story opens in **2 Samuel 12:24** after the illegitimate baby dies. “Then David comforted Bathsheba, his wife, and slept with her. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and David named him Solomon. The Lord loved the child.”

1 Kings 11:1-13 “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh’s daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites.² The Lord had clearly instructed the people of Israel, “You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods.” Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway.³ He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the Lord.

⁴In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the Lord his God, as his father, David, had been. ⁵Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁶In this way, Solomon did what was evil in the Lord's sight; he refused to follow the Lord completely, as his father, David, had done.

⁷On the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, he even built a pagan shrine for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab, and another for Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁸Solomon built such shrines for all his foreign wives to use for burning incense and sacrificing to their gods.

⁹The Lord was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. ¹⁰He had warned Solomon specifically about worshiping other gods, but Solomon did not listen to the Lord's command. ¹¹So now the Lord said to him, "Since you have not kept my covenant and have disobeyed my decrees, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants. ¹²But for the sake of your father, David, I will not do this while you are still alive. I will take the kingdom away from your son. ¹³And even so, I will not take away the entire kingdom; I will let him be king of one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, my chosen city."

NOTE: Once again, we see that polygamy wasn't the issue addressed by God. It was taking on wives from cultures who were worshipping false gods that was the issue. When you think of any pagan or false god, you can interject the word "demon" and perhaps understand better why God kept trying to keep people from worshipping idols. In verse 7, it states that Molech was a detestable God. Why was he one of the worst? Because the demon, Molech, loves live human baby sacrifices.

In summary, there are three basic Bible verses that offer clues to God's preference regarding marriage, divorce and polygamy.

Marriage: Going back to the time of Adam and Eve, **Genesis 2:24** which implies monogamy as being preferential for humans. "This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one."

Divorce and Adultery: **Matthew 9:3-9** states, "Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: 'Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?'"

'Haven't you read the Scriptures?' Jesus replied. 'They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' And he said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.'

'Then why did Moses say in the law that a man could give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away?' they asked.

Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not what God had originally intended. And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery—unless his wife has been unfaithful.'"

Polygamy: Deuteronomy 17:17 "The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the Lord."