

# CHAPTER 2

## POLYGAMY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

by Richard M. Davidson<sup>1</sup>

### Affirmations Of The Edenic Divine Design

This chapter surveys the biblical evidence regarding monogamy as the divine creation ideal, examines the prevailing ancient near eastern attitudes and practice concerning polygamy and concubinage, analyzes the various Old Testament passages that refer (or allegedly refer) to these practices, and assesses the continuing relevance of the Old Testament witness on this ethical issue for today.

The Edenic divine norm of heterosexual monogamy summarized in Genesis 2:24 is assumed throughout the rest of Scripture. This continuing standard is apparent in the normal configuration of the nuclear family in the first five books of the Bible. Witness a sample list of heterosexual monogamous marriage partnerships throughout this period: Adam and Eve (Gen 2-4), Cain and his wife (Gen 4:17), Noah and his wife (Gen 7:7, 17), Noah's three sons and their respective wives (Gen 7:7, 13), Nahor and Milcah (Gen 11:29; 24:15), Abram and Sarai (Gen 11:29, etc. – regarding Hagar, see below), Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 24, 27, 49:31), Hadar and Mehetabel (Gen 36:39), Er and Tamar (Gen 38:6), Joseph and Asenath (Gen 41:45), Amram and Jochebed (Exod 6:20; Lev 26:59), Aaron and Elisheba (Exod 6:23), Eleazar and his wife (Exod 6:25), and Moses and Zipporah (Exod 2:21; 18:2, 5; Num 12:1).<sup>2</sup>

The Pentateuchal legislation mentioning husband and wife together and the portrayals of marriage in the prophetic and wisdom literature also assume heterosexual monogamy. This seems to be implied by the use of the singular "wife," and not the plural "wives," as the standard reference to the marriage relationship. For example, the tenth commandment refers to "your neighbor's wife [singular, not 'wives,' plural]" (Exod 20:17).<sup>3</sup> Again, the prophet Malachi speaks of those who "deal treacherously with the wife [singular, not 'wives,' plural] of his youth" (Mal 2:15). Similarly, the wise man Solomon counsels his son to "rejoice with the wife [not 'wives']

of your youth" (Prov 5:18); to "enjoy life with the wife [not 'wives'] whom you love" (Eccl 9:9).<sup>4</sup>

As in the beginning, the monogamous standard is ultimately rooted in the monotheistic nature of the biblical God, and in the concept of *imago Dei*. The Lord God, who is "one" (Deut 6:4), is not involved in promiscuous relationships within a polytheistic pantheon, and His creatures are to be united in an exclusive relationship with Him alone, and He with them alone (Exod 20:3). In the same way as humans should worship only one God – a monotheistic relationship with God, so husbands and wives created in God's image, are to be monogamous in their marital relationship with each other.

What does one do with the deviations (described in Pentateuchal and Prophetic narratives) and alleged exceptions (in Mosaic legislation)? What does a careful and close reading of the text actually indicate, as it relates to the Edenic institution of marriage? It is now time to turn our attention to these deviations and alleged exceptions.

## **Plural Marriages: Polygamy And Concubinage**

### **Ancient Near Eastern Background**

In the ancient Near East, where polytheism abounded, the practice of plural marriage, in particular polygyny (more than one wife), was acknowledged and accepted within the various law codes. According to the earliest known laws of the Sumerians, the law reforms of King Uru-inimgina of Lagash (i.e., the Early Dynastic period of the Sumerians, ca. 2378-2371 B.C.), women in earlier times could marry more than one husband (polyandry), but King Uru-inimgina forbade continuation of this practice and made it a capital crime.<sup>5</sup> In the Sumerian Lipit Ishtar Law code (ca. 1850 B.C.) at least four different inheritance laws tacitly assume the social institution of polygyny.<sup>6</sup> The Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1700 B.C.) also acknowledged the practice of polygyny, allowing for a husband to take a concubine if his wife was infertile (as in the case of Abram), or to take a second wife if his first became diseased, or if his first wife tried to obtain a divorce by means of public scandal.<sup>7</sup> The Middle

Assyrian Law codes (ca. 1450 B.C.) seem to have taken polygamy and concubinage for granted, placing no limit on the number of concubines that a man could have, regardless of his wife's fertility status.<sup>8</sup> Ancient Egyptian texts likewise reveal that the practice of polygamy was common during the second millennium B.C. among the pharaohs and the wealthy royal class who could afford plural wives.<sup>9</sup> Polygamy among the Hittites was apparently similar to the practice in Mesopotamia,<sup>10</sup> and the Ras Shamra texts reveal the widespread practice of polygamy in Ugarit.<sup>11</sup>

### Pentateuchal Narratives

In the patriarchal period there are several examples of plural marriages. Though no explicit verbal condemnation of this practice is given in these biblical narratives, the narrator presents each account in such a way as to underscore a theology of disapproval. The record of these polygamous relationships is bristling with discord, rivalry, heartache, and even rebellion, revealing the motivations and/or disastrous consequences that invariably accompanied such departures from God's Edenic ideal.<sup>12</sup> Here, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, narrative theology of divine disapproval often speaks even louder, and more eloquently, than explicit condemnation.<sup>13</sup>

**The Bigamy of Lamech.** In Genesis 4 the description of Adam's intimate sexual encounters with Eve (vss. 1 and 25) is interrupted with the account of the bigamist Lamech (vss. 18-24), the first recorded polygamist. Verse 23 records his bigamy: "Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah." Lamech's boasting to his wives makes clear that these were contemporaneous rather than successive wives (vss. 23-24): "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; O wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

These latter verses not only reveal Lamech's marital status, but give an indication of his reprobate moral character leading to actions filled with violence and even murder, vengefulness, and insolent boasting. Note that

in the parallel genealogies of Genesis 4-5, Lamech appears as the seventh from Adam in the line of Cain, in contrast to Enoch's appearance as the seventh from Adam in the line of Seth. The narrator clearly pauses in each contrasting genealogy precisely at the *seventh* generation (seven representing completeness or fullness),<sup>14</sup> for a theological spotlight, as it were, on the "fullness" of the way of Cain – those who rebelled against God – and the "fullness" of the way of Seth – and those who called on the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26).

The poetic boasting of Lamech, with the play on the number seven, gives some indication that Lamech was even conscious that his reprobate morality represented the "fullness" of what it means to rebel against God.

In contrast, note the narrator's description of Enoch as one who "walked with God" so fully – especially after the birth of his son – that "he was not, for God took him – translated him without tasting death" (Gen 5:21–24). By means of juxtaposing these two illuminating character portraits and paralleling their position of "completeness" or "fullness" as seventh in the respective genealogical lines, the narrator succeeds in condemning the practices of Lamech just as effectively – and perhaps even more so – than could have been accomplished by an explicit verbal denouncement. In particular, the narrator highlights Lamech's bigamy by referring *three* times to this fact of his marital status (vss. 18, 23a, 23b). Thus the narrative emphatically represents the practice of plural marriage as a departure from the monogamous order of creation.

**Polygamy at the Time of the Flood.** There has been much debate through the centuries as to the interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4. Four major theories have been propounded as to the identity of the "sons of God" in this passage; (1) divine beings; (2) angels; (3) rulers; and (4) Sethites. This is not the place for a detailed discussion.<sup>15</sup> Several recent studies have reviewed the various interpretations and provide cogent evidence that the "Sethite" view best fits the literary context and overall flow of the book of Genesis.<sup>16</sup> The "Sethite" interpretation sees the "sons of God" as the godly line of Seth (described in the genealogy of Gen 5) intermarrying with the women from the line of Cain who are called the "daughters of men."

If it is accepted that the “sons of God” are the godly line of Seth, then verse 2 describes a situation in which the godly line has begun to accept the ways of the line of Cain: “they [the sons of God] took wives for themselves of all whom they chose [*wayyiqhû lahem nāšim mikkāl 'āšer bahārû*].” The Hebrew of this verse, with the partitive preposition *min* (“from”) plus the noun *kāl* “all” seems to imply an introduction of polygamy into the marital practices of Seth’s descendants. I concur with David Clines’ translation: “taking for themselves wives of as many women as they chose.”<sup>17</sup> Emil Kraeling rightly concludes from this verse: “A polygamous situation is here implied in these words.”<sup>18</sup> The implication of this translation fits the context of the Flood that follows: prevalent polygamy is given as one of the main ingredients in the “corruption” (Heb. *šāhat, nip’al*) of the earth that caused the Lord to set a probationary period of 120 years (Gen 6:3), and that finally prompted the divine decision to destroy (*šāhat, hip’il*) the earth by the Flood (Gen 6:5, 11-13). This narrative in no way countenances polygamy: “It was precisely because of man’s autocratic and polygamous ways that God destroyed the earth with a flood. That could hardly be construed as tacit divine approval of polygamy – it is the reverse!”<sup>19</sup>

**Abraham’s Polygamy/Concubinage.** Abraham (then called Abram) came out of a land of idolatry polygamy. His own brother Nahor was a polygamist (Gen 22:20-24). It is not necessary to retell the familiar story of Abram’s divine call, his traveling to Canaan, God’s promise of a seed that would become a great multitude, Sarah’s (Sarai’s) infertility, and her suggestion that Abram have children by her servant. Genesis 16:3 summarizes the immediate circumstances of Abram’s carrying out of his wife’s suggestion and move into polygamy ten years after his arrival in Canaan: “Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.” Even though Hagar is called Abram’s “wife” [*iššā*], in reality she still functioned under Sarai as a slave girl. This action of Sarai was a common practice in the ancient Near East at the time of the patriarchs: “If the marriage proved to be infertile, the husband normally took matters into his own hands, but on certain occasions, the wife was able to present one of her slave girls, sometimes

especially purchased, to her husband to produce children for their own marriage. . . . [T]he authority over the children resulting from this union belonged not to the slave girl who bore them but to the chief wife."<sup>20</sup>

Although Hagar was humanly regarded as Abram's wife, the narrator carefully records the contrast between human understanding and the divine perspective. Throughout the narrative God never refers to Hagar as Abram's wife. While God, in addressing Abram, emphatically speaks of Sarai/Sarah "your wife" (Gen 17:15, 19; 18:9, 10), by contrast he refers to Hagar as "Sarai's maid" (Gen 16:8) or "your maid" (Gen 21:12). Notably, when addressing Hagar, after she had fled from the presence of Sarah, God told her to "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand" (Gen 16:9). Nothing was said about her returning to be Abram's wife.<sup>21</sup>

A close look at the narrative intertextuality between the polygamous relationship of Abram with Sarai and Hagar and the fall narrative in Genesis 3 is instructive. There are strong verbal parallels between Genesis 16:2-3 and 3:6, 16. In the Garden of Eden the woman "took" the fruit and "gave" it to her husband (Gen 3:6); so Sarai "took" Hagar and "gave" her to her husband (Gen 16:2). The same Hebrew words are used in the same order. Again, Adam "listened to the voice of" his wife (Gen 3:17); so Abram "listened to the voice of" his wife Sarai (Gen 16:2). Again identical Hebrew expressions are employed. These verbal parallels may well constitute intentional intertextual echoes on the part of the narrator, to indicate that Abram and Sarai, in the Hagar scandal, fell even as Adam and Eve fell in Eden.<sup>22</sup>

The divine disapproval of Abraham's polygamy is underscored by the narrator's detailed description of the strife and disharmony that polygamy brought to Abraham's household: the rupture in the relationship between Sarai and Hagar (Gen 16:4-6), the strife between the children of the two wives (Gen 21:9-10), and the deep distress on the part of Abraham (Gen 21:11-12). It is possible that the divine plan for monogamy also may be upheld in the narrative by closely juxtaposing the account of Abraham's return to a monogamous status (Gen 21) followed immediately by the account of Abraham's supreme test of faith on Mt. Moriah (Gen 22). Does this juxtapositioning perhaps suggest that it was after returning to faithfulness in his marital status that Abraham was prepared to pass the

test of loyalty to God and to worship him at the site of the future temple? This interpretation seems implied by the inclusion of the clause "Now it came to pass after these things" (Gen 22:1) following Abraham's return to monogamy and just before the test on Mt. Moriah.<sup>23</sup>

Abraham is a prime example of an Old Testament figure who remarried after the death of his first wife. According to Genesis 23 Sarah died at the age of 127 and was given an honorable burial. Later, according to Genesis 25:1, "Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah." In the narrative of Abraham's second marriage after his first wife died, there is no hint given by the narrator that this marriage was out of the ordinary or contrary to the divine will. Remarriage after the death of the first spouse seems to be a normal accepted practice in Old Testament times.

Later, Keturah is referred to as Abraham's "concubine" [*pīlegeš*] in 1 Chronicles 1:32. The Hebrew term for "concubine" is probably not of Semitic origin,<sup>24</sup> and seems most frequently to refer to a secondary or inferior wife, or to a slave girl of a Hebrew family that bore children. The term is sometimes used in the Hebrew Bible in clear contradistinction to a wife.<sup>25</sup> Based upon the biblical and ancient near eastern evidence, in these cases it appears that the concubine probably was taken without a legal ceremony or any formalization by means of the dowry, and may not have had the same legal status as the wife or wives.<sup>26</sup> In other biblical passages, however, the term *pīlegeš* appears to be used virtually synonymously with *'iššâ* "wife."<sup>27</sup> The only difference in these cases is that the term "concubine" is never used to describe a man's original, first wife. In the case of Abraham, the context makes clear that Keturah was his full and legitimate wife, whom Abraham married after the death of Sarah, but since she was not his original wife, she could also be termed his *pīlegeš* "concubine."

**Jacob's Polygamy/Concubinage.** Perhaps the most extended biblical narrative dealing with polygamous relationships is that of Jacob. Several studies on polygamy in the Bible have claimed that this narrative not only provides valuable insight into life in a polygamous marriage, but also reveals that polygamy was fully acceptable to God.<sup>28</sup>

However, a close reading of the Jacob cycle of narratives leads to a clearly different conclusion.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that Jacob's original intention was to follow his father's counsel given before he left home (Gen 28:2), and marry only one wife, taken from his relatives at Padan-aram. This original choice was Rachel, the beautiful daughter of Laban, with whom he had fallen in love (Gen 29:18-25). It is also clear that after being tricked by Laban into marrying his elder daughter Leah instead of Rachel, Jacob agreed to enter into a polygamous relationship, taking both Leah and Rachel as wives, in harmony with the local marriage customs (Gen 29:26-28). Later, since both of his wives were infertile, he was persuaded by them to cohabit with the wives' maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah, in order to bring them children. Bilhah (and also presumably Zilpah) is called both Jacob's "concubine" (Gen 35:22) and one of his "wives" (Gen 37:2); she (along with Zilpah) seem to have been given the same rights in the household as the legitimate wives, and both Bilhah and Zilpah's children were given the same status as legal heirs as were the children of the legitimate wives.<sup>30</sup> From Jacob's polygamous sexual relationships with his four wives, twelve sons and at least one daughter were born.

The Jacob narratives bristle with details of the disastrous consequences of polygamy in Jacob's family. The strife and discord between Rachel and Leah are meticulously documented (Gen 30:1-16). The dispositions of jealousy, revenge, short temper, and lack of self-control on the part of Jacob's children seems to mirror the dysfunctional nature of the polygamous home life (Gen 34:13-31; 37:2-34). Jacob himself also experienced the negative effects of the polygamous relationship. The record simply states that Jacob "loved Rachel more than Leah" (Gen 29:30); even stronger, "Leah was unloved [literally, 'hated' *ṣenû'â*]" (Gen 29:31).

That the narrator is not presenting polygamy in a favorable light is apparent from the depiction of the tensions within the family just mentioned. God's disapproval is shouting at us, as it were, from every detail of the disastrous results of the polygamous union. But the narrator goes further than this. Careful attention to the radical shift in terminology and characterization following Jacob's life-changing divine encounter at the River Jabbok yields some surprising results. After wrestling all night with

the divine being (Gen 32:30), Jacob (meaning “supplanter”) had his name changed to Israel (“one who prevails with God”), signifying a change of moral character (Gen 32:26-29).<sup>31</sup>

What is remarkable about the Jacob narrative is the abrupt shift in crucial terminology and characterization describing Jacob's relationship with Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah after the River Jabbok experience. Before the Jabbok River wrestling, there is repeated mention of Jacob's sexual relationship with all four wives, but after this event the only conjugal relations mentioned are with his wife Rachel (Gen 35:16-19). During the next decade of Jacob's life in Canaan, only Rachel gives birth to a child (Gen 35:18). Whereas before Jacob's name (character) change at the Jabbok, he had called both Rachel and Leah “my wives” (Gen 30:26; 31:50), after the Jabbok experience he called only Rachel “my wife” (Gen 44:27). Jacob's use of terminology at the end of his life may point in this same direction. In discussing with his own sons his future burial in the cave of Machpelah, he uses the term “wife” for both Sarah and Rebekah who were buried there, but simply adds “and there I buried Leah” without using the term “wife” with reference to her (Gen 49:31). Most telling of all, in the genealogy of Genesis 46, the narrator mentions Leah, Zilpah, and Bilhah as women who “bore to Jacob” children, but only Rachel is classified as his “wife” – “Jacob's wife Rachel” (Gen 46:15, 18, 19, 25).

Just one or two of these clues might be merely circumstantial, but their cumulative effect seems to point toward the possibility that after Jacob's conversion experience at the Jabbok, he continued to care for Leah, Zilpah, and Bilhah, but no longer considered them his wives, and returned to a monogamous relationship with the wife of his original intention, Rachel.<sup>32</sup> Such hints, if indeed indicating Jacob's forsaking of polygamous relationships after Jabbok, make significant the timing of the divine call for Jacob to return to Bethel to build an altar. God's renewal of the covenant with Jacob (Gen 35:11, 12) came *after* he had repented from his former lifestyle of deceit and polygamy.

But even if Jacob did not return to monogamy, the narrator's negative depiction of the polygamous relationship, and his genealogical indicator which identifies only Rachel as Jacob's wife, eloquently express

the divine disapproval and rejection of polygamy as a distortion of God's creation ordinance for marriage.

**Esau's Polygamy and His Son's Concubinage.** Of Esau, Jacob's brother, the record states: "When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Berri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite" (Gen 26:34; also apparently called Adah, Gen 36:2). The narrator then adds: "They were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah" (vs. 35). Rebekah's own words are reported: "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth" (Gen 27:46). No doubt this anguish was in large part because of their pagan (Hittite) ways – i.e., because of Esau's inter-faith marriage<sup>33</sup> – but possibly also involved a concern for the polygamous situation.

When Esau saw that "the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac" he proceeded to marry still another wife, this time from the line of Abraham and Ishmael (Gen 28:8-9). From a comparison with the genealogical record in Gen 36:2, 3, it appears that Esau had a total of four wives. Significantly, each of the wives mentioned in the genealogy is specifically stated to be "Esau's wife," in stark contrast to the genealogy of Jacob in which only Rachel is called his wife. This seems to indicate that Esau, unlike what has been tentatively suggested with regard to Jacob, remained a polygamist all his life. From the overall Old Testament record of Esau's life story, coupled with the New Testament confirmation of his "profane" or "irreligious" (Greek *bebēlos*) ways (Heb 12:16), Esau's polygamy is not surprising, and certainly provides no hint of divine approval for the practice. Following in his father's footsteps, Esau's son Eliphaz took a concubine (Timna) in addition to his wife (Gen 36:12). The baleful results of disregarding the divine ideal are recorded by the narrator in the lives of the descendants.

**Moses, a Bigamist?** Some commentators suggest that Moses' Midianite wife Zipporah (Exod 2:21; 4:25; 18:2) and the "Cushite woman whom he had married" (Num 12:1) are two different women, with the implication that Moses was a bigamist.<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, it is suggested that the "Cushite woman" was a wife taken by Moses after Zipporah died.<sup>35</sup>

However, there is no biblical mention of the death of Zipporah prior to the incident recorded in Numbers 12:1, and there does not seem to be sufficient evidence to substantiate the claim that Zipporah and the "Cushite woman" were two different individuals.

It is not unlikely that "Midianite" and "Cushite" are synonymous geographical designations. The Pentateuch contains other examples of a geographical location being given two names (see, e.g., Mt. Horeb and Mt. Sinai). Several commentators point out that geographical evidence is not an obstacle to identifying Zipporah with the Cushite woman of Numbers 12:1. John Rea notes: "It is possible that Zipporah, a Midianite, was also designated a Cushite, for Midian included part of NW Arabia where some Cushite tribes lived. Furthermore, she may have been called a Cushite because her complexion may have been darker than that of most Israelites."<sup>36</sup> Identification of Midian with Cushan also has biblical support. R. K. Harrison elaborates: "Favoring the [Cushite] woman's identification with Zipporah is the use in Hab. 3:7 of Cushan and Midian in synonymous parallelism. If the color of skin and shape of facial features was a factor, the term 'Cushite' could also have been applied equally well to the Midianites, who were tanned nomads from northwest Arabia."<sup>37</sup> James Hoffmeier also points to the synonymous parallelism between "Cushan" and "Midian" in Habakkuk 3:7, and suggests that "the 'Cushite' woman of Nu. [2]:1f. could well have been the Midianite Zipporah."<sup>38</sup> Gerhard Jasper aptly concludes that the view identifying Cush and Midian (and thus Zipporah and the Cushite woman) "is geographically the more probable interpretation."<sup>39</sup> Thus, we concur with the conclusion of the many ancient Jewish and Christian commentators (including Augustine, the Talmud, Targum Neophyti, and Ibn Ezra), as well as noted recent Old Testament scholars who equate Cush with Midian, and thus Zipporah with the Cushite woman.<sup>40</sup>

Reference to Moses' wife under two different appellations (Zipporah and "the Cushite woman") is also not unusual for the Pentateuchal narratives, nor for extra-biblical ancient near eastern literature of the time.<sup>41</sup> In fact, Zipporah's own father is referred to by two different names in the Pentateuch: Jethro (Exod 3:1; 4:18; 18:1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12) and Reuel (Exod 2:18; 2:14; 10:29).

Following the narrative clues with regard to Zipporah, it seems apparent that although she started out with Moses to return to Egypt (Exod 4:20), after the "bridegroom of blood" incident (4:24-26), she did not continue to Egypt with Moses but returned to her father Jethro's house (Exod 4:27-31; 18:2), and rejoined her husband when Jethro came to visit Moses at Mt. Sinai (Exod 18:1-6). Here Miriam became acquainted with Zipporah, was stirred to jealousy against her (perhaps because of Zipporah's influence on her husband that left Miriam out of Moses' counsel more than before; cf. Num 12:2), and began to treat her with contempt, employing a racial slur to punctuate her dissatisfaction (Num 12:1).<sup>42</sup> The reference to Moses' wife here as "the Cushite woman" provides a narrative clue which pinpoints the tactic utilized by Miriam to demean and depersonalize Zipporah, and bring accusation upon Moses for marrying someone outside the Hebrew nation.

Thus the marital form of Moses evidently does not include a situation of bigamy, but does constitute an example of exogamy or mixed marriage.<sup>43</sup>

### Pentateuchal Legislation

Moving from the narratives of the Pentateuch, we encounter several specimens of legislation that according to some scholars assume, allow for, and even approve the practice of polygamy. To these alleged affirmations of polygamy in Mosaic legislation we now turn our attention.

**Legislation Concerning the Female Slave: Exodus 21:7-11.** One of the case laws in the "judgments" (*mišpatîm*) of the "Book of the Covenant" (Exod 19-24) concerns treatment of a female slave. The law reads (as commonly translated):

(Exod 21:7) And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. (8) If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. he shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. (9) And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of

daughters. (10) If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. (11) And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money.

Does this law support the practice of polygamy, as is often claimed? A fundamental point to be recognized is that this is a *case law*, describing what should follow if a certain action is taken. Case laws do not legitimize the activity of the case described, but only prescribe what should be done in such cases. Thus this case law no more legitimates polygamy than the case law in Exodus 22:1 ("If a man steals an ox or a sheep. . .") legitimates theft. The existence of such casuistic legislation does acknowledge the possibility of such circumstances occurring, but does not necessarily express approval of those circumstances.

Furthermore, there are several textual, linguistic, and translational problems in this passage that call for special attention. First, most English versions follow the Greek Septuagint translation of verse 8, which calls for substituting the prepositional phrase *lô* "for himself" for the Hebrew negative particle *l'ô* "not." Actual textual evidence for such substitution is not strong,<sup>44</sup> and thus we concur with Walter Kaiser and others that the reading of the original Hebrew text should be retained.<sup>45</sup> If the Hebrew text is followed, then the man does *not* take the slave girl as his wife in verse 8.

Verses 9-10 then describe two other possible circumstances that might follow with regard to the slave girl. One is that the man gives her to his son (vs. 9). This contingency is straightforward and its meaning not controverted. The other possibility is that the man "takes to himself another [*aheret*] wife." Translators have commonly assumed that this refers to another wife *in addition to* the slave girl mentioned in verse 8. But since the actual Hebrew text of verse 8 explicitly states that he does *not* take the slave girl as his wife, then the "another" *'aheret* in verse 10 has the meaning "another instead of, different" rather than "another in addition to," a meaning well attested for this word in the massoretic text of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>46</sup> The contingency clause of verse 10 thus details the treatment that should be given to the slave girl if her master takes another

wife instead of (not in addition to) her. In other words, since verse 8 makes clear that the man does *not* marry the slave girl, verse 10 can *not* refer to her (sexual) marital rights.

What is that treatment that she deserves? Most modern versions, building on the assumption that verse 8 indicates a marriage between master and slave girl and verse 10 indicates polygamy, translate the three things<sup>47</sup> that he is to continue to provide thus: "her food, her clothing, and her conjugal rights [*wé'ônâṭāh*]." The Hebrew noun *'ônâ* is understood by the ancient versions to mean "conjugal rights,"<sup>48</sup> but this meaning has questionable linguistic support, and is regarded in some important recent studies "to be the least probable of the various alternative suggestions" for translating the occurrence of this unique word, this *hapax legomenon*.<sup>49</sup> The most likely meaning of this term – accepted by a number of ancient and modern scholars – is "habitation, dwelling," based upon the Hebrew root *'wn*, and etymologically related to the Hebrew nouns *mā'ôn*, *mē'ônâ* "habitation, dwelling."<sup>50</sup> The basic necessities to be supplied the slave girl are then "normal food, clothing, and quarters [lodging, shelter]."<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, we conclude that this law does not even deal with polygamy, let alone support or legitimize it. It deals with three contingency situations that might arise with a slave girl: (1) if the master rejects her as a wife, she is to be freed by being redeemed (bought back); (2) if the master's son marries her, she is to be treated as the master's daughter; and (3) if the master married a different woman than her, she is to be assured of her basic necessities: food, clothes, and lodging.<sup>52</sup>

**Legislation Against Marrying "a woman to her sister:"**  
**Leviticus 18:18.** Leviticus 18:18 reads literally: "You shall not take a woman to her sister [*wé'iššâ 'el-'ahṭāh*] as a rival [*lišrôr*], to uncover her nakedness, while the other is alive." Many modern versions translate this verse with explicit reference to polygamy. For example, the New International Version: "Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living." The implication of this translation is that although a certain (incestuous) polygamous relationship is forbidden – to two consanguine sisters while both are living, technically called sororal polygyny – polygamy in general is acceptable

within the law. Thus this law is seen to be in harmony with other ancient near eastern law codes, where sororate marriage after death of one of the sisters is deemed acceptable, but forbidden when both sisters are alive.<sup>53</sup>

A close reading of Leviticus 18:18, in its larger context, however, places this translation of the passage in serious doubt. The crucial phrase is "a woman to her sister [*iššā 'el-'ahāh*]." Does the word "sister" in this passage refer to blood relatives, and thus in this context forbid a specific kind of incestuous polygamous relationship, or does "sister" have a broader reference to a female citizen in general, any additional wife, and thus in this context forbid any kind of polygamy? The following eight considerations – involving semantic, syntactical, literary, contextual, and theological evidence – lead to the conclusion that the latter interpretation is to be preferred.<sup>54</sup>

First, the phrase "a woman to her sister" (*iššā 'el-'ahāh*) in its eight occurrences elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible *always* is used idiomatically in the distributive sense of "one in addition to another," and *nowhere* else refers to literal sisters.<sup>55</sup> The masculine equivalent of this phrase, *š 'el-'āhīw* "a man to his brother," appears 12 times in the Hebrew Bible, and is *always* used in a similar idiomatic manner with a distributive meaning of "one to another" or "to one another."<sup>56</sup> It would thus not be appropriate to translate this idiomatic expression literally unless the context demands such a departure from the consistent and invariable idiomatic usage elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>57</sup>

Second, if the intention of Leviticus 18:18 was to describe two women who were literal (consanguine) sisters, this could have easily been done in such a way as to avoid any ambiguity by the use of the conjunction "and" (*wā*) rather than the preposition "to" (*lē*), thus reading "a woman *and* her sister." This expression would have been precisely analogous to the phrase "a woman and her daughter" used in the *immediately* preceding verse (and also Lev 20:14), where a literal (consanguine) mother-daughter relationship is described. The fact that this available expression for literal relationship within the nuclear family was not employed, lends further contextual support for retaining the distributive sense of the expression *iššā 'el-'ahāh* as is found everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible.

Third, it has been argued that the word *'ahôt* "sister" in Leviticus 18:18 must refer to a literal sister, because elsewhere in Leviticus 18 it has this meaning (see, e.g., vss. 12, 13).<sup>58</sup> However, such argument overlooks the fact that, as Tosato states, "Elsewhere in Leviticus 18 we find *'ahôt*, and not as in v. 18 *'iššâ* ' . . . *'ahôtâh*. A simple equation between these two philologically different expressions seems to be false."<sup>59</sup> One cannot responsibly confuse the specific idiomatic expression with straightforward references to literal sisters in earlier verses of Leviticus 18.

Fourth, a number of scholars have suggested that the immediate context of Leviticus 18 demands a literal translation referring to female siblings: it is proposed that the context is literal kinship ties, and prohibition of cases of incest (vss. 6-17). However, this suggestion fails to take seriously the implications from the literary structure of Leviticus 18. The literary analysis of Angelo Tosato demonstrates that there is a major literary break between verse 17 and verse 18. Leviticus 18:18 is *not* to be included with the anti-incest laws of verses 6-17, but is part of the general prohibitions against various kinds of illicit sexual relationships in verses 18-23.<sup>60</sup> Tosato shows how this is evident from the consistent sentence structure and content of the laws in the two sections. In verses 7-17, every verse begins with the identical noun *'erwat* "nakedness of," and culminates in the negative particle plus the imperfect *l'ô tégallâh* "you shall not uncover." By contrast verses 18-23 each consistently begins with the *waw* conjunctive and some other word besides *'erwat* "nakedness of," and concludes with a negative particle *l'ô* plus the imperfect of some other verb than *tégallâh* "uncover." In other words, the first series of laws (vss. 6-17) are clearly a unit, composed of laws forbidding relationships on the basis of bonds of kinship, while the second series of laws (vss. 18-23), are another distinct unit, covering a broad range of forbidden sexual relationships *not* based on bonds of kinship.

Fifth, additional evidence that verse 18 belongs to a separate structural unit than verses 6-17 comes from the fact that all but one of the anti-incest laws of verses 6-17 conclude with a nominal clause providing justification for the prohibition based upon the identity of the forbidden individual (vss. 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17; the exception is vs. 9). Verse 18 (along with the succeeding vss. 19-23) does not have this explanatory

clause, which one would expect if it were to be classified with the other laws prohibiting incest.

Sixth, that verse 18 is not part of the laws dealing with incest (vss. 6-17) is also apparent from the fact that this law contains a time limitation, unlike the permanent nature of the laws in verses 6-17. The prohibition against taking *'iššā 'el-'ahātāh* applies only while the first one is alive. This is in stark contrast to the laws dealing with nearness of kin, which have no such temporary limitation.<sup>61</sup>

Seventh, the laws of Leviticus 18 dealing with kinship relationships have specific defining delimitations of the literal "sister": "the daughter of your father, or the daughter of your mother" (vs. 9), "your father's wife's daughter" (vs. 11), "your father's sister" (vs. 12), and "your mother's sister" (vs. 13). In stark contrast, the law of verse 18 has no such qualifying delimitation.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, the theological justification for the legislation given in verse 18 – "to be a rival to her" – does not emphasize the intrinsic wrongfulness, but describes a general situation applicable to any bigamous marriage. Tosato states insightfully: "The harm which the law wants avoided is such (rivalry, enmity) that any woman (and not necessarily a sister of the first wife) is capable of causing it, once taken as a second wife. . ."<sup>63</sup> This latter point seems confirmed by comparing the use of the Hebrew root *šrr* "to be a rival" found here in Leviticus 18:18 with the only other Old Testament passage utilizing this Hebrew root to describe an additional wife. This passage is I Samuel 1:6, which depicts Peninnah as the "rival" wife of Hannah; there is no evidence to suggest that these wives of Elkanah were consanguine sisters. Gordon Hugenberger aptly comments: "Accordingly, if the motive for this prohibition was to avoid vexation to one's wife, there is little reason for limiting its prohibition to a literal sister; both the Bible and anthropology provide ample testimony to the unpleasant reality of contention among co-wives, whether sisters or not."<sup>64</sup>

All of these considerations lead one to the conclusion that the phrase *'iššā 'el-'ahātāh* appears in a context of laws dealing with general non-kinship relationships. This non-kinship context strongly favors the translation of this phrase which retains the consistent general idiomatic

meaning found in the rest of Scripture: "one [woman/wife] in addition to another." This phrase refers to any two women, not just two consanguine sisters. The law of Leviticus 18:18 is thus not prohibiting only sororal polygyny (polygamy involving two consanguine sisters), but also the taking of "two women [fellow citizens] in general."<sup>65</sup> In other words, this legislation prohibits *all* polygamy.

This law prohibits a man from taking another woman in addition to his first wife, to be a rival wife (*lišrôr*, literally "vexor") as long as the first wife is alive. By implication, this law allows for remarriage after the death of the first wife. Thus the monogamous norm of Genesis is upheld in this Mosaic legislation.

Paul Hugenberger points out that one should not reject this interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 because of its "impossible idealism," i.e., its lack of criminal sanctions (there is no mention of any punishment for transgressing this law in the list of Lev 20 or elsewhere in the Torah). There are many other such cases of "idealistic" stipulations in the so-called Holiness Code (e.g., the prohibition against hatred, Lev 19:17-18), and the very lack of criminal sanction may emphasize the nature of these laws as ethical and not just legal norms. Hugenberger suggests that Leviticus 18:18 is an example of a *lex imperfecta*: "a law which prohibits something without thereby rendering it invalid (reflecting a society which would have lacked the requisite means of enforcement in any case)."<sup>66</sup> The fact that there is no punishment mentioned in Leviticus 20 corresponding to this prohibition of Leviticus 18:18 may be regarded as another indicator that Leviticus 18:18 is prohibiting polygamy and not another form of incest.<sup>67</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Qumran community interpreted Leviticus 18:18 as a law prohibiting polygamy in general.<sup>68</sup> As Tosato aptly concludes, this Qumran interpretation is "more faithful to the original sense than the interpretation commonly given today."<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 (including the proscription of polygamy) are set forth as universal law, applicable for all time and for all nations.<sup>70</sup> The legislation prohibiting plural marriages, like the other prohibitions of Leviticus 18, is ultimately rooted in creation, as it upholds the divine order of monogamous marriage (Gen 2:24).

**Legislation Regarding the Marital Status of the King: Deuteronomy 17:17.** In the section of Deuteronomic laws amplifying the fifth commandment (regarding authority, Deut 16:18 – 18:22),<sup>71</sup> there is legislation governing the activities of a king in Israel, should such an institution arise by popular demand to be like the other nations. Amidst these laws is a prohibition that has often been interpreted as condoning a moderate amount of polygamy on the part of the king. Deuteronomy 17:17 reads: "Neither shall he [the king] multiply [*yarbeh, hip'il of rābā*] wives for himself, lest his heart turn away." It has been argued that the verb *rābā* "increase, multiply" implies acquiring an excessive number of wives, thus abusing the practice of polygamy, but not prohibiting it altogether.<sup>72</sup> Others suggest that the law is specifically directed against the king marrying many *foreign, idol-worshiping* wives, so that they not turn his heart away from worshiping the true God, and not against royal polygamy per se.<sup>73</sup>

Does this law allow for at least limited royal polygamy? The key term is the Hebrew verb *rābā* in the causative *hip'il*, "to multiply." This verb is found also in the two laws that surround this legislation. In Deuteronomy 17:16 Moses specifies that the king "shall not multiply [*yarbeh, hip'il of rābā*] horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply [*harbôt, hip'il of rābā*] horses, for the Lord has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.'" In verse 17b, the prohibition concerns the accumulation of wealth: "neither shall he greatly multiply to himself [*yarbeh-lô me'ōd*] silver and gold." The verb *rābā* in the *hip'il* literally means "to cause to increase," with the context determining the extent of this increase.<sup>74</sup>

Hugenberger insightfully points out that although the expression "he [the king] shall not increase wives for himself" appears to be "less than precise," this expression "was chosen not to facilitate some more modest level of polygyny, but to achieve an artful parallelism between the three characteristic sins of Canaanite (and Israelite) kingship." Hugenberger diagrams this parallelism of the three expressions in verses 16-17:<sup>75</sup>

... *l'ō yarbeh lô* ... (vs. 16)

... *l'ō yarbeh lô* ... (vs. 17)

... *l'ō yarbeh lô* ... (vs. 17)

An important clue to the meaning of *rābā* in the context of Deuteronomy 17:16-17 is the contrast between the first two laws on one hand – which use *rābā* by itself with no adverbial modifier – and the third law on the other hand, which modifies *rābā* with the intensifying adverb *mēōd*, meaning “greatly multiply.” By juxtaposing these three laws, the first two with the unqualified prohibition to “increase,” and the third with a qualification against excessive “increase,” it is reasonable to conclude that there is to be no increase of horses or wives, in contrast to no excessive increase of wealth.<sup>76</sup> In other words, the divine will is that the king have no multiplication of horses (i.e., no chariotry), no multiplication of wives (i.e., no harem), and no amassing of excessive wealth.<sup>77</sup>

The instruction prohibiting multiplication of horses comports well with other biblical statements warning Israel not to trust in horses. So Isaiah 31:1: “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord!”

Again, Psalm 33:17: “A horse is a vain hope for safety; Neither shall it deliver any by its great strength.” God wished Israel to put their full confidence in him to bring supernatural deliverance in battle, not in the false security that horses could bring. It seems that the use of the royal mule – not the horse – for the coronation ceremonies of the kings, was at least implicit recognition of this regulation (see 2 Sam 18:29; 18:9; 1 Kgs 1:33, 38, 44), and the multitude of imported Egyptian horses and chariots amassed by King Solomon was in flagrant violation of this command (1 Kgs 4:26; 10:26-29).

Likewise, the regulation prohibiting multiplication of wives comported with the Edenic divine plan of monogamy and with the legislation prohibiting polygamy that has been just examined (Lev 18:18). Hugenberger points out that “the prohibition against ‘increasing’ wives is not so much concerned with the legality of polygyny in the abstract, but with the inevitable result of *royal* polygyny in apostasy and accommodation to the gods of one’s wives: as the text explicitly states, ‘lest his heart turn away’ (cf. 1 Kgs. 11:1ff.; 16:31-33). . . . [T]his danger can attend diplomatic polygyny practiced to any degree.”<sup>78</sup> Solomon’s polygamy was in flagrant

violation of this command (1 Kgs 11:1-13), with the predicted result of turning away his heart from God. The narrator of Solomon's reign also clearly indicates that Solomon flagrantly violated the command forbidding the excessive amassing of wealth by the king (1 Kgs 10:14-25).

It must be acknowledged that from the "less than precise" language of Deuteronomy 17:17 taken in isolation, there is not strong enough evidence to say categorically that the law prohibits all royal polygamy. However, *in the very next verses* (Deut 17:18-20) the king is instructed to write for himself a copy of the book of the Torah, so that "he may be careful to do observe all the words of this law and these statutes" (vs. 19) just as his fellow citizens. The king is not above the law! This would mean that he was also not above the law of Leviticus 18:18 that was analyzed above. If Leviticus 18:18 forbids all polygamy, this would also apply to the king, who is also subject to the commands and prohibitions of Torah.

Recent studies dealing with the instruction regarding the future king of Israel show how the king's behavior was to be a model for all of Israel.<sup>79</sup> The same responsibility placed upon the king to study Torah that he may fear the Lord and obey his law (Deut 17:19) is also placed upon every individual Israelite (Deut 6:7; 8:1; 11:1). The same warning given to the king "that his heart may not be lifted up" (Deut 17:20) is given to all Israel (Deut 8:14); the same caution against turning aside from the commandment is given to both the king and corporate Israel (Deut 17:20; cf. 5:32; 11:28; 28:14).

Based upon the immediate context of Leviticus 18:18 (especially vss. 18-20) and the intertextual connections, it becomes clear that the king in all his behavior – including his monogamous marital status – was to be an example for his subjects to follow. Thus the law prohibiting royal polygamy here in Deuteronomy 17:17 serves to uphold and further emphasize the similar prohibition given to all Israel in Leviticus 18:18. The Zadokites and the Qumran community were not misguided when they interpreted this passage as requiring monogamy on the part of the king.<sup>80</sup>

**Other Legislation Purportedly Presupposing Polygamy.** Several other passages in the Pentateuchal legislation have been viewed as

giving tacit support to the practice of polygamy. Deuteronomy 21:15-17 deals with the rights of the firstborn son. It reads:

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

Interpreters who argue that this law tacitly assumes polygamy must posit that the man has two wives *simultaneously*. But such is nowhere stated in the legislation. The phrase "if a man has two wives" *kî-tîhyênâ lê'îš šatê nâšîm* does not at all necessitate an implication of polygamy. Walter Kaiser rightly points out: "It definitely is wrong to insist that both wives are living, for that would be asking the imperfect verb form (future or continuous action of the verb) to bear a load it was not meant to carry."<sup>81</sup> It has already been shown that the Mosaic legislation recognizes a situation in which a man might lawfully marry two wives: he may marry again after the death of the first wife (Lev 18:18). This legislation might have in view a situation in which one of these wives (either the one now dead or the one a man married after the death of the first) was more highly regarded than the other, and thus the man is tempted to give preferential treatment to the offspring of that more-highly-favored wife.

At the same time one cannot rule out the possibility that this case law mentions (or includes as possibilities) situations that are not in harmony with God's will (such as polygamy, or divorce [as in Deut 24:1-4]),<sup>82</sup> indicating the rights of the first-born in such cases, without sanctioning the practice of polygamy or divorce. As support for this interpretation, one may observe possible allusions in this case law to the Jacob narrative, where the first wife (Leah) is unloved and the second wife (Rachel) is loved; and where the birthright is ultimately withheld from Reuben (the first-born son of Leah) and given to Joseph (the first-born son

of Rachel). This case law would then be seen as a tacit criticism of Jacob's behavior.<sup>83</sup> Even if such is the interpretation, however, this case law, dealing with the rights of the first-born, cannot be used to legitimize polygamy, any more than can, for example, Deuteronomy 32:18 be used to legitimize prostitution because it prohibits the use of prostitute wages for the payment of vows.

The Pentateuch has two laws dealing with sexual relationships with an unbetrothed woman (Exod 22:16-17; Deut 22:28-29).<sup>84</sup> Some have alleged that this legislation allows for, and even forces, polygamy in certain situations. However, both of these laws are referring to a case of sexual seduction and not forcible rape (although one may emphasize more the psychological and the other more the physical pressure); thus the Deuteronomy passage is a repetition or extension of the Exodus legislation. The Exodus passage clearly indicates that the father had the right to refuse to let his daughter who had been seduced marry the man who seduced her, and this seems to be assumed also in the Deuteronomy passage. The Exodus passage indicates that in such cases the dowry must still be paid, and the complementary Deuteronomical legislation indicates the exact amount of that dowry (fifty shekels of silver). Thus this legislation leaves a way out of the situation where the seducer is already married, in that he would be required to pay the dowry of fifty shekels of silver, but would not be required to marry the woman. The point is that the father has the first right of refusal, regardless of the marital status of the seducer (whether married or single). The monogamous pattern set in Eden is not broken by these laws.

A final piece of Mosaic legislation purportedly presupposing polygamy is the levirate marriage law (Deut 25:5-10).<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, often overlooked in the discussion of the levirate marriage regulations, is the opening dependent clause: "When brothers live together" (*kî yǎšbû 'ahîm yahdaw*). This introductory statement specifies that it was only when two brothers lived together that the levirate law described in this verse was to be in operation. Commenting on this dependent clause, Anthony Phillips notes: "Until a younger brother married and had children of his own, he would have remained in his father's or elder brother's house."<sup>86</sup> Herbert Leupold draws the implication of this legislation with regard to

polygamy: "The brother of the deceased, *if unmarried*, would take the widow to wife."<sup>87</sup> Detailed analysis of this passage leads one to concur with these and other scholars that the brother-in-law who would carry out the levirate marriage law is presumed to be unmarried.<sup>88</sup> Extra-biblical support for this interpretation also comes by analogy from ancient near eastern comparative evidence and explicit reference in the Targum to Ruth. The levirate law also has a broader application to other near-of-kin if there is no qualified (unmarried, mature) brother to perform the duty of the levir, as in the case of Ruth.

### **Polygamy in the Rest of the Old Testament**

Beyond the Pentateuch there are several accounts of polygamy and concubinage. Judges 8:30 records the case of Gideon, who "had many wives." The context of this passage makes clear that Gideon's polygamy came in the setting of his apostasy later in life, in which he not only became polygamous, but idolatrous (vss. 24-28). Thus there is no divine approval for his polygamous relationships. Several other of the judges may have been polygamous, due to their numerous offspring: Jair (Judg 10:3, 4), Ibzan (Judg 12:8, 9), and Abdon (Judg 12:13).

The concluding narrative of Judges (chaps. 19-21) is a "text of terror"<sup>89</sup> that all too vividly portrays the explosive nature and destructive capacity of decadent sexuality. The story features a Levite and his concubine. As with the Gideon narrative, this account is clearly not written to express approval for concubinage. To the contrary, the account appears to be deliberately placed at the end of the book of Judges to reveal the depths of degradation to which the people went when without the acknowledged kingship of God "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 21:25). The perspective of the author/editor of Judges was one which condemned the sexual decay of the times; the portrayal of the gruesome details and the disastrous results of unlawful sexual activities leads the reader to reject such departures from the divine ideal.

The writers/editors of Samuel-Kings and Chronicles also reveal a society that has strayed far from God's ideal. Those who fall prey to the prevailing customs of bigamy, polygamy or concubinage include even the

pious ones, such as Elkanah<sup>90</sup> (1 Sam 1-2), and the political leaders of the united monarchy, Saul (1 Sam 14:50; 2 Sam 3:7), David (1 Sam 21:4; 2 Sam 5:13; 1 Chr 3:1-9; 14:3), and Solomon (1 Kgs 3:1; 7:8; 11:1-7). Six of the twenty Judean kings of the divided monarchy are mentioned as having more than one wife: Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:18-21); Abijah (2 Chr 13:4, 21); Jehoram (2 Chr 21:14-17); Joash (2 Chr 24:3); Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 24:15); and Zedekiah (Jer 38:23). In the northern kingdom only the polygamy of Ahab is recorded (1 Kgs 20:3-7), although others may have followed this practice. The record of Chronicles also mentions other polygamists: Jerahmeel (1 Chr 2:25-28); Caleb (1 Chr 2:46-48); Ashhur (1 Chr 4:5); Izrahiah, and his sons, Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah (1 Chr 7:3, 4); and Manasseh (1 Chr 7:14). The biblical narrators faithfully record the anguish and disharmony involved in having a "rival wife" (1 Sam 1:6 and the rest of Hannah's story) in disregard of the Leviticus 18:18 legislation<sup>91</sup> and the disastrous personal and national results of kings "multiplying wives" to themselves in blatant disobedience to the divine prohibition in Deuteronomy 17:17.<sup>92</sup>

All of these incidences of plural marriage are placed in a context of disobedience and unfaithfulness to God, with two alleged exceptions. Two historical references during the time of the monarchy are frequently cited as giving tacit approval of polygamy. First is the experience of David; it is suggested that God approved of David's polygamy and even called him "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam 13:14) while he was in the polygamous state. However, Ron du Preez makes a strong biblical case for the conclusions that (1) this statement of divine approval did not apply to David while a polygamist; (2) the narrator reveals the negative divine assessment of David's polygamous relationships; (3) Nathan's message to David in 2 Samuel 12:7-8 does not indicate that God sanctioned and supported David's practice of polygamy; and (4) toward the end of his life David returned to a monogamous state (with Bathsheba).<sup>93</sup>

A brief look at the biblical evidence adduced for du Preez' conclusions may be helpful. First, it seems clear that it was while David was not yet a polygamist that God called David "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam 13:14); the context of this statement (Saul's presumptuous

offering of sacrifice) points to a time when David was probably still unmarried.<sup>94</sup>

Further, du Preez points out the cyclical pattern of David's life, involving several repetitions of a cycle of five successive steps in the narrative: servitude (1 Sam 17; 22:21-23:1; 30:1-5), supplication (1 Sam 17:46; 23:2-4; 30:6-8), salvation (1 Sam 17:50-54; 23:14; 30:16:25), silence (in his relationship with God, 1 Sam 19:12-20:42; 25:21-22; 2 Sam 2:8-3:1), and sin (1 Sam 20:1-21:15; 25:39-43; 2 Sam 3:2-16). The references to David's polygamy are consistently recorded by the narrator after a period of silence, in the final step of the cycle, i.e., sin, and each of these references is a statement in the context of some calamity, threat, or judgment (1 Sam 30:1-5; 2 Sam 3:22-37; 5:17; 12:1-14).<sup>95</sup> Thus the narrator gives a negative assessment of David's polygamous relationships.<sup>96</sup> John Kessler's close reading of the David narratives in the books of Samuel, comes to a similar conclusion as du Preez that in these accounts the narrator intends to disclose with disapproval the "progressive descent" of David into polygamy, and here, as in Deuteronomy, polygamy is viewed as "inherently inimical to Yahweh's ultimate will for life and detrimental to those involved."<sup>97</sup>

Again, Nathan's judgment parable in 2 Samuel 12 does not support the contention that God sanctions polygamy. The divine statement delivered by Nathan to David in verses 7-8, at first glance, may give the appearance of such divine approval:

Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. And I gave [*wā'etnā*] you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping [*bāhēqekā*], and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!"

But notice that only three verses later (vs. 11) God indicates that he will take David's wives and give (*nātan*) them to one close to him (which turned out to be his son Absalom), who would lie with them. Absalom's defiling of David's wives and concubines, involved not only adultery, but also incest (called an abomination in Leviticus 18:8), and certainly God's "giving" (*nātan*) of David's wives to Absalom does not imply divine

approval of Absalom's abominable acts. This is clearly a case of divine accommodation in use of language, to describe God's permissive will, in which God is said to do what he allows.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, in 2 Samuel 12:7-8 it is not at all clear that God's "giving" of Saul's wives to David implies that he married them. If the biblical record is complete regarding the marriage status of Saul, he had one wife (Ahinoam, daughter of Ahimaaz and the mother of Michal; 1 Sam 14:50), along with one concubine (Rizpah; 2 Sam 3:7; 21:8). Walter Kaiser insightfully points out that if "gave" meant that David took Ahinoam as wife, then "David was authorized, on this supposition, to marry his wife's mother – a form of incest already condemned in the Levitical law, carrying the sanction of being burnt alive (Lev. 18:17)."<sup>99</sup> It is more likely that the phrase "into your keeping" (*bāhēqekā*, literally, 'into your bosom'), which applies to Saul's "house" as well as his women/wives, does not speak of marriage, but simply indicates that all of Saul's estate/possessions came under David's care and keeping.<sup>100</sup>

Within Nathan's judgment parable itself may be an implicit indication that monogamy was God's divine plan: the poor man in the parable had only "one little ewe lamb," not many (2 Sam 12:3), obviously alluding to the monogamous relationship of Uriah with Bathsheba. As G. N. Vollebregt puts it: "In his parable of the rich man with the flocks and herds and the poor man with the one ewe lamb Nathan clearly indicated his approval of monogamous marriage and at the same time implicitly criticized David's harem."<sup>101</sup>

Finally, du Preez analyzes the episode involving the rebellion of Absalom, when David fled the palace, leaving behind his ten *nāšim pīlagšim* "wives-concubines" (2 Sam 15:16).<sup>102</sup> In light of the earlier divine prediction in 2 Samuel 12:11 that David's wives (not just his concubines) would be violated, and in light of my previous discussion of the word *pīlegeš* "concubine" in connection with the Abraham narrative, where it was noted that the term can refer to both concubines and wives (other than the original first wife), it is probable that this expression refers to both David's wives and concubines, and not just his concubines.

The biblical record mentions exactly ten wives and concubines of David (besides Michal, who apparently was already set aside by this time

[2 Sam 6:20-23], and Bathsheba [who appears later in the narrator apparently still as his wife].<sup>103</sup> It is likely that these were the ten women violated by Absalom (2 Sam 16:21-22). The narrator records that David, upon his return to Jerusalem after the death of Absalom, took his ten wives/concubines "and put them in seclusion and supported them, but did not go in to them" (2 Sam 20:3). In other words, it appears probable that David, as part of his attitude of repentance toward God during Absalom's rebellion (see 2 Sam 15:30), apparently recognizing the fulfillment of God's judgment upon him announced by Nathan, now returns to a monogamous state (with Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon)<sup>104</sup> for the rest of his life. As Walter Brueggemann remarks, "David moves visibly away from the royal ideology [of polygamy] in the direction of the old requirements of covenant [as located in Deut 17:14-20]."<sup>105</sup>

Later in the narrative, the narrator seems to go out of his way to underscore David's monogamous status during these later years, by emphasizing that he did not have sexual relations with Abishag the Shunammite, who took care of him in his old age (1 Kgs 1:1-4). Thus, according to du Preez' analysis, in the account of David's life the practice of polygamy is in no way given divine sanction; to the contrary, the narrative is replete with clues that this practice was not according to the divine will.<sup>106</sup>

A second alleged exception to the general negative assessment of polygamy during the time of the monarchy is the case of the bigamy of Joash (2 Chr 24:2-3), where many English translations make it appear that the bigamy was included in the divine approval: "Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoida the priest. And Jehoida took for him two wives, and he had sons and daughters" (NKJV; cf. NASB, NIV, etc.). However, several commentators have recognized that these verses from Chronicles, which give a summary introduction to the kingship of Joash,<sup>107</sup> are interpreting the parallel account in 2 Kings 11:21-12:3, and actually follow the same basic structure as the Kings narrative.<sup>108</sup> Note the following comparison:

2 Kings 11:21 – 12:3

Jehoash [= Joash] was seven years old when he became king.

In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba.

Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

But [*raq*] the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

2 Chronicles 24:1-3

Joash [= Jehoash] was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba.

Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.

And [*vav* consecutive] Jehoiada took for him two wives, and he had sons and daughters.

The Chronicles account closely parallels that of Kings, except that where Kings explicitly indicates the negative aspect of Jehoash's (= Joash's) reign in not removing the high places (by use of the term *raq* "only, except"), the Chronicles account states in the same parallel location that Jehoiada took for him two wives. It seems likely from this comparison that one should understand the co-ordinating conjunction *vav* as having the force of "but" or "except" rather than "and" in 2 Chronicles 24:3 – implying divine disapproval for the arranged polygamy: "Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. But [or except] Jehoiada took for him two wives."<sup>109</sup>

Some interpreters have suggested that the allegory of Ezekiel 23 implies divine approval of polygamy, inasmuch as in the allegory God Himself is represented as having two wives (Ezek 23:1-4).<sup>110</sup> However, it must be recognized that this is an allegory, adapted to the historical situation of the divided kingdom of Judah and Israel, and one must concentrate on the point of the allegory – emphasizing Israel's failure and infidelity – and not try to make the allegory "stand on all fours." Robert Hitchens rightly points out that this image of Yahweh's marriage to two

sisters in fact "only applies the symbolism of the marriage relationship which was begun before the division of the kingdom. All Jews [Israelites] were still God's chosen and regarded as one people, though divided into two kingdoms."<sup>11</sup> The same Ezekiel who recorded the allegory of two sisters in Ezekiel 23, documented the command of the Lord in Ezekiel 37 to reunite the two "sticks" of Israel and Judah into one stick: "and they will be one in My hand. . . . they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again" (vss. 19, 22). God's relation with Israel is a "monogamous" one, according to His consistent plan, even though their apostasy temporarily separated the nation into two parts and called forth an allegorical message to fit the situation. There is no support for bigamous or polygamous marriage in the message of God through Ezekiel.

During and after the Babylonian captivity, the problem of polygamy does not appear to be an issue among God's people,<sup>12</sup> although two of the heathen kings under whose captivity they lived are mentioned as polygamous in Scripture: Belshazzar the Babylonian (Dan 5:2,3) and Ahasuerus the Persian (Esth 2). It seems the people of Judah recognized that the Babylonian exile had come upon them because of their sins, in particular their idolatry (cf. Daniel's prayer in Dan 9), and a return to vigorous monotheism (faithfulness to only one true God) was accompanied by a general return to monogamy (faithfulness to only one wife).

In the wisdom/hymnic literature of the Writings human sexuality in marriage is assumed to be monogamous, a duality of husband and wife. The importance of this point is strikingly revealed in Proverbs by the deafening silence concerning polygamous situations: "In Proverbs the union of one man with one woman is clearly shown to be the norm, both by the absence of any allusion to the discords of polygamy (though we meet other domestic troubles from unfaithfulness to nagging) and by the fully personal bond taken to exist between husband and wife."<sup>13</sup> The wise man in Proverbs calls for faithfulness between a husband and his one wife (not wives):

Drink water from your own cistern,  
flowing water from your own well. . . .

Let your fountain be blessed,  
and rejoice in the wife of your youth. (Prov 5:15, 18)

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon in his old age, after turning from the following of a dissolute and profligate life, records for later generations the account of his wasted years and the lessons he has learned.<sup>114</sup> He reveals his own vain attempt at finding happiness and meaning in life through hedonistic pursuits (2:1): "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will make a test of pleasure, enjoy yourself.' But behold, this also was vanity." This experiment apparently included the amassing of a harem of concubines (2:8) although the Hebrew here is not certain.<sup>115</sup> A comparison with 1 Kings confirms the reality of the "experiment" with polygamous licentiousness:

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God. (1 Kgs 11:1-4)

No doubt Solomon tasted the bitter and deadly results of a life of immorality he himself had warned against in the book of Proverbs. His own disappointing and devastating sexual encounters with his 1000 wives and concubines seem be at least part of what lies behind his personal confession:

And I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters; he who pleases God escapes here, but the sinner is taken by her. Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum, which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all of these I have not found. (Eccl 7:26-28)

But despite this bitter personal experience with the way of sexual folly in licentiousness, Solomon was not disillusioned with sexuality per se.

Rather, Ecclesiastes has a high view of sexuality and women (even here in these verses!).

### Summary

In the Old Testament there are some thirty-three reasonably clear historical cases of polygamy out of approximately 3000 men mentioned in the scriptural record. Most of these examples involved the wealthy patriarchs or Israel's monarchs (the only clear case of a "commoner" having more than one wife is Elkanah, and this likely from a motive of Hannah's infertility). In the narratives involving the actual practice of polygamy or concubinage, invariably the divinely-inspired narrators place their tacit condemnation of these practices. Contrary to other ancient near eastern legislation, Mosaic legislation condemns all polygamy, both for the people and (at least implicitly for) the king. Unlike in the other ancient near eastern law codes and practice, there is no exception for cases of infertility or illness on the part of the wife, nor exception for royal diplomatic alliances. None of the Pentateuchal legislation involving marital forms commands or condones polygamous relationships, although remarriage after a man's first wife died is allowed.

The prohibitions in Leviticus 18 – including polygamy – are presented as universal law, applicable to all humanity (transcultural) for all time (trans-temporal), upholding the order of creation. Thus the Old Testament shows, on one hand, the departure from the Edenic model of sexuality in actual practice; while, on the other hand this departure is not approved by God, with both narrative and legislation condemning practices that violate the monogamous Edenic norm.<sup>116</sup>

### Endnotes

1. This chapter on polygamy in the Old Testament, is the result of years of research by Dr. Richard Davidson, chair of the Old Testament Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Michigan, USA. He has kindly permitted me to use this chapter in its pre-edited version, which is part of a much larger work on the theology of sexuality; see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2007, forthcoming). In this book, *Pathology*

of Polygamy, I have slightly edited this chapter, as necessitated for space and content, without undermining the careful biblical research of Davidson.

2. See below for discussion and affirmation of the monogamy of Moses.
3. For further examples of Pentateuchal legislation that presuppose monogamy as the normal or ideal marriage form, see Exodus 21:5; Leviticus 18:8, 16, 18; 20:10; 21:13; Numbers 5:12; Deuteronomy 5:21; and 22:22.
4. For further examples of assumption of monogamy in the wisdom literature, see Proverbs 12:4; 18:22; 19:13; 31:10-31.
5. The votive inscriptions containing the law reforms of King Uru-inimgina of Lagash are translated in Samuel N. Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 317-323. The law regarding polygamy reads thus: "The women of former days used to take two husbands, (but) the women of today (if they attempted this) were stoned with stones (upon which was inscribed their evil) intent;" (*ibid.*, 322).
6. See "The Laws of Lipit-Ishtar," translated by Martha Roth (COS 2.154:412-413; cf. ANET, 160). LI §24: "If the second wife whom he marries bears him a child, the dowry which she bought from her paternal home shall belong only to her children; the children of the first-ranking wife and the children of the second wife shall divide the property of their father equally." LI §25: "If a man marries a wife and she bears him a child and the child lives, and a slave woman also bears a child to her master, the father shall free the slave woman and her children; the children of the slave woman will not divide the estate with the children of the master." LI §27: "If a man's wife does not bear him a child but a prostitute from the street does bear him a child, he shall provide grain, oil, and clothing rations for the prostitute, and the child whom the prostitute bore him shall be his heir; as long as his wife is alive, the prostitute will not reside in the house with his first-ranking wife." LI §28: "If a man's first-ranking wife loses her attractiveness or becomes a paralytic, she will not be evicted from the house; however, her husband may marry a healthy wife, and the second wife shall support the first-ranking wife."
7. "Laws of Hammurabi," translated by Martha Roth (COS 2.131:344-345; cf. ANET, 172). CH §148: "If a man marries a woman, and later *la'bum* disease seizes her and he decides to marry another woman, he may marry; he will not divorce his wife whom *la'bum* disease seized; she shall reside in quarters he constructs and he shall continue to support her as long as she lives." CH §145 deals with a special case of a priestess who was forbidden to have children: "If a man marries a *nadĕu*, and she does not supply him with children, and that man then decides to marry a *šugĕu*, that man may marry the *šugĕu* and bring her into his house; that *šugĕu* should not aspire to equal status with the *nadĕu*." Numerous ancient near eastern marriage contracts show that this law applied more generally and reflects actual practice. CH §141: "If the wife of a man who is residing in the man's house should decide to leave, and she appropriates goods, squanders her household possessions, or disparages her husband, they shall charge and convict her; and if her

husband should declare his intention to divorce her, then he shall divorce her; neither her travel expenses, nor her divorce settlement, nor anything else shall be given to her. If her husband should declare his intention to not divorce her, then her husband may marry another woman and that (first) woman shall reside in her husband's house as a slave woman." For references of relevant marriage contracts and further discussion, see Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (VTSup 52; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 108-110, n.100.

8. "The Middle Assyrian Laws," translated by Martha Roth (COS 2.132.357-358; cf. ANET, 183). MAL A §40: "Wives of a man, or [widows], or [any Assyrian] women who go out into the main thoroughfare [shall not have] their heads [bear] . . ." MAL A §41: "If a man intends to veil his concubine, he shall assemble five or six of his comrades, and he shall veil her in their presence, he shall declare, 'She is my *aššutu*-wife'; she is his *aššutu*-wife. A concubine who is not veiled in the presence of people, whose husband did not declare, 'She is my *aššutu*-wife,' she is not an *aššutu*-wife, she is indeed a concubine." Despite the lack of legal restrictions, in actual practice, according to many scholars' assessment of the evidence, marriage in ancient Mesopotamia was largely monogamous. See Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 110, n. 101, for bibliography.

9. See Schafik Allam, *Some Pages from Everyday Life in Ancient Egypt* (Prism Archaeology Series 1; Guizeh, Egypt: Prism, 1985), 27; Alan R. Schulman, "Diplomatic Marriage in the Egyptian New Kingdom," *JNES* 38 (1979): 179-180. With only a couple of exceptions, the evidence for polygamy in the history of ancient Egypt is limited to the royal family. (For an exception, Pierre Montet, *Everyday Life in Egypt in the Days of Ramesses the Great* [London: Edward Arnold, 1958], 54-55, refers to a tomb robber who had four wives.) William A. Ward points out that harems and concubines did not exist even among the royal class during the Old and Middle Kingdoms; only with New Kingdom and the empire's internationalization did the practice of royal polygyny (not concubinage) become a reality ("Reflections on Some Egyptian Terms Presumed to Mean 'Harem, Harem-Woman, Concubine,'" *Berytus* 31 [1983]:67-68, 74).

10. "Hittite Laws," translated by Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. (COS 2.19:118; cf. ANET, 196). HL §191: "If a man sleeps with free sisters who have the same mother and their mother – one in one country and one in another, it is not an offence. But if it happens in the same location, and he knows (the relationship, the women are related), it is an unpermitted sexual pairing." HL §194: "If a man sleeps with the slave women who have the same mother and their mother, it is not an offence. . . ." While these texts refer specifically to sexual intercourse with multiple partners (in the context of permitted and unpermitted sexual pairing, one may probably infer that multiple wives are also permissible. For further discussion, see Matitiahu Tsevat, "The Husband Veils a Wife (Hittite Laws 197-198)," *JCS* 27 (1975): 235-240.

11. See A. van Selms, *Marriage and Family Life in Ugaritic Literature* (Pretoria Oriental Series 1; London: Luzac, 1954), 20. Van Selms analyzes UT 119, and based upon reasonable reconstruction of the text, there is a list of twenty households, and four of these are

mentioned as having two wives, with one having three wives. This would suggest a 25% rate of polygyny, although the exact nature of this list is uncertain and additional Ugaritic texts have a much smaller percentage of polygyny. See the summary discussion in Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Contract*, 106, n. 95.

12. In the discussion of polygamy in this chapter, I am particularly indebted to my former student (now colleague) Ronald A. G. du Preez, whose D.Min. project dissertation I directed to completion in 1993; his thesis is now published in slightly revised form under the title *Polygamy in the Bible*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, MI: ATS Publications, 1993).

13. O. Palmer Robertson rightly points out that in narrative theology "theological truth is imbedded in a historical narrative rather than in generalized prepositions;" (*The Genesis of Sex: Sexual Relationships in the First Book of the Bible* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002], 90). For an introduction to narrative theology, see esp. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Pamela Tamarkin Reis (*Reading the Lines: A Fresh Look at the Hebrew Bible* [Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 2002], 69) states well the narrator's technique of disapproval: "The narrator rarely censures or approves explicitly; rather, the author guides the reader toward correct moral judgment by inference."

14. See Jöran Friberg, "Numbers and Counting," *ABD* 4:1145.

15. For an overview of the arguments for the various interpretations, see e.g., Willem A. Van Gemeren, "The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4: An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?" *WTJ* 43 (1981): 320-348.

16. See esp. Adam Co, "The Probable Identity of the 'Sons of God' in the Literary Context of Genesis 6:1-4" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA, 17 November 1999), 1-20. Cf. Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 79-80; Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch: Three Volumes in One* (trans. James Martin; vol. 1 of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 1:131-138; Gerhard Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific, 1980), 151-152; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942), 249-254; John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 243-249.

17. David J. A. Clines, "The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6:1-4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History' (Genesis 1-11)," *JSOT* 13 (1979): 36. See also David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1990), 131: "Here the 'sons of God' take as many as they choose."

18. Emil Kraeling, "The Significance and the Origin of Genesis 6:1-4," *JNES* 6 (1947): 197.

19. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 183. Of course, as Genesis 6:3-13 makes clear, there were many other aspects of the antediluvian wickedness besides polygamy that called for divine judgment at the time of the Flood.

20. M. J. Selman, "Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman, ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 137. Selman refers to similar situations in the Code of Hammurabi (§§144, 163) and texts from Nuzi and Nimrud.
21. It also becomes apparent that God never recognized Abraham's divorce, as being a "divorce" – because in the divine perspective he had never been married to her. Cf. Reis, *Reading the Lines*, 28, 57: "In the story of Sarai, Abram, and Hagar, the words 'husband' and 'wife' are emphasized, highlighting the marital relationships and establishing that, though Hagar becomes Abram's wife, Abram is truly husband only to Sarai. . . . [C]ontrary to prevailing analysis, Hagar does not become a true wife of Abraham."
22. This intertextual linkage was first suggested to me by Ray McAllister, one of my Ph.D. students at Andrews University, who, despite a handicap of blindness, has memorized the entire book of Genesis in Hebrew, and thus is particularly sensitive to intertextual echoes. For scholarly treatment of the intertextual relationships between Genesis 16 and Genesis 2-3, see esp. André Wénin, "Sarai, Hagar et Abram: Une Approche Narrative et Contextuelle de Gn 16,1-6." *Revue théologique de Louvain* 32 (2001): 24-54.
23. Note that the only other place where this clause occurs in the Abraham cycle of Genesis is in Genesis 22:20, immediately after the Mt. Moriah test, and it introduces the divine message to Abraham dealing with his brother's polygamous sexual activity (Gen 22:20-24). This narrative frame of polygamous relationships surrounding the Mt. Moriah test seems to highlight the connection. For further discussion of these narrative clues, see Jo Ann Davidson, "Abraham, Akedah, and Atonement," in *Creation, Life, and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan*, Jiří Moskala, ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2000), 49-72.
24. See esp. Chaim Rabin, "The Origin of the Hebrew Word *Pileges*," *JJS* 25 (1974): 353-364.
25. See, e.g., references to Nahor's wife (Milcah) and his concubine (Reumah) in Genesis 22:24; Gideon's wives (Judg 8:30) and a concubine (Judg 8:31); David's "concubines and wives" (2 Sam 5:13); Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs 11:3); and his son Rehoboam's wives and concubines (2 Chr 11:21).
26. For the literature on ancient near eastern practice, see Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 107, n. 96.
27. See, e.g., besides the example under discussion of Abraham's relationship with Hagar and Keturah (Gen 16:3; 25:1, 6; 1 Chr 1:32), Bilhah, who is called both Jacob's "concubine" (Gen 35:22) and one of his "wives" (Gen 37:2). Again, the prediction that someone would lie with David's "wives" in broad daylight (2 Sam 12:11) is fulfilled with Absalom going in to his father's "concubines" (2 Sam 16:22).
28. See, e.g., John S. Mbiti, *Love and Marriage in Africa* (Essex, England: Longman, 1973), 190; Clifton R. Maberly, "The Polygamous Variant: The Policy and Practice of a Church"

- (unpublished paper; Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1975), 12.
29. See esp. the detailed narrative analysis in du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*, 164-172.
  30. See Genesis 46, 49; Exodus 1; Deuteronomy 33.
  31. The divine being also "struck" [*wayyigga*] the "socket of his hip," literally, "the hand of his thigh" [*kap-yārākō*]. In light of the usage of *yārāk* elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to refer to the genital area (e.g., and Gen 46:26; Exod 1:5; Num 5:21-29), it has been suggested that the "hand of the thigh" is a euphemism for Jacob's penis, and that God struck his organ of regeneration as an implicit rebuke to his polygamous relationships. (See Stanley Gevirtz, "Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford," *HUCA* 46 [1975]: 52, 53; S. H. Smith, "'Heel' and 'Thigh': The Concept of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Narratives," *VT* 40 (1990): 463-473). However, in light of Genesis 32:32 – which correlates the anatomical part of animals subsequently not eaten by the people of Israel with the part of Jacob's body touched by the divine being – it seems more likely that the *kap hayyārāk* refers to the "broad part of the thigh" or perhaps the general area of the "groin" on both the animal and Jacob. The narrator also indicates that Jacob's encounter at the Jabbok leaves him "limping upon his thigh" *'šā'ā' 'al-yārākō*, which seems to be a clear reference to an anatomical part other than the genitals. Even if the term does not specifically refer to Jacob's genitals, the intentional ambiguity in use of terminology seems to indicate at least a possible intended play on words with this sexual euphemism, and the disabling blow to Jacob's thigh may possibly allude to a divine disapproval of Jacob's polygamous relationship.
  32. Zvi Jagendorf insightfully points out why Jacob would retain Rachel as his original wife and not Leah: "In the dark Jacob knows Leah sexually, but he knows her *as Rachel*, for the image in his mind prevails over the presence of the woman at his side;" ("In the Morning, Behold, It was Leah': Genesis and the Reversal of Sexual Knowledge," in *Biblical Patterns in Modern Literature* [ed. David H. Hirsch and Nehama Aschkenasy; BJS 77; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984], 53; repr. from *Proof* 4 [1984]).
  33. Inter-faith marriages in the Old Testament are discussed in chapter 7 of Davidson's *Flame of Yahweh*.
  34. So, e.g., Jacqueline Williams, "And She Became "Snow White": Numbers 12:1-16," *OTE* 15 (2002): 259-268.
  35. So, e.g., Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976-1992), 2:797-798.
  36. John Rea, "Zipporah," *WBE* 2:1848-1849.
  37. R. K. Harrison, *Numbers* (WEC; Chicago: Moody, 1990), 194.
  38. James K. Hoffmeier, "Zipporah," *ISBE* 4:1201. See also John Joseph Owens, *Numbers* (BBC 1; Nashville: Broadman, 1970), 118; N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (NCB; London: Nelson, 1967), 234. Even though the parallel between "Cush" and "Midian" in

Habakkuk is later than the time of the Exodus purported by the canonical text of Numbers 12, Habakkuk may well reflect a usage already apparent some centuries earlier.

39. Gerhard Jasper, "Polygyny in the Old Testament," *Africa Theological Journal* 2 (February 1969): 36. Cf. Frank M. Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 45, 46, 51; and Sten Hidal, "The Land of Cush in the Old Testament," *SEA* 41-42 (1976-1977): 102.

40. For major proponents of this view, see the listings in Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 36-37; James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 512-513; and the scholars cited above.

41. See Harrison, *Numbers*, 177. For Ugaritic and Egyptian examples of paired names, see esp., C. H. Gordon, *Before the Bible: The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilisations* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 236-238; and Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1966), 121-125.

42. Note that the grammar of Numbers 12:1 mentions Miriam and Aaron as subjects of the complaint against Moses' marriage to the Cushite woman, but the verb 'amar "to speak" is in the feminine singular. Thus one should read: "Then Miriam and Aaron, she spoke against Moses. . . !" Miriam was the ringleader of the dissatisfaction, and Aaron passively went along.

43. The matter of mixed marriages is examined in chapter 7 of Davidson's *Flame of Yahweh*.

44. It appears in the Septuagint (LXX), Targum, Vulgate, and the Qere, but such seem to be based upon translational considerations and not actual manuscript evidence.

45. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 184; cf. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*, 66.

46. For the meaning of "different" or "distinct from," see Numbers 14:24; Deuteronomy 29:28; Judges 11:2; Isaiah 28:11; Jeremiah 22:26; 36:28, 32. See also BDB, 29.

47. Verse 10 does contain a list of three things; hence I refer to the "three things." But actually, recent studies of the literary structure of this passage have indicated that the "these three things" of verse 11 do not refer back to this list of three in verse 10, but rather refer to the three preceding apodoses in verses 8b, 9b, and 10b. The structure of Exodus 21:2-11 describes two main cases (vss. 2 and 7), each with three subsidiary cases (vss. 3a, 3b, 4; and vss. 8, 9, 10) and a concluding exception case (vss. 5-6 and vs. 11). See Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 320-321, who points out that this is also the view of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Rashbam. Cf. the foundational literary analysis by Yair Zakovitch, "For Three . . . and for Four": *The Pattern for the Numerical Sequence Three – Four in the Bible* (Hebrew; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Makor, 1979), 2:452; summarized in Gregory C. Chirichigno, "Debt Slavery in the Ancient Near East and Israel: An Examination of the Biblical Manumission Laws in Exod 21:6, 7-11; Deut 15:12-18; Lev 25:39-54" (Ph.D. diss., Council for National Academic Awards, 1989), 226-227.

48. See LXX, Syriac, and Targums. For a modern defense of this view, see esp. Robert North, "Flesh, Covering, a Response, Ex. xxi 10," *VT* 5 (1955): 204-206. This translation supposes a connection with the Hebrew root 'nh III "to ravish, oppress, do violence to, humiliate" (although Ibn Ezra relates the term to 'at "time," presuming a reference to "times of sexual relations"). Such connections are questionable, and have not met with as widespread acceptance by phonologists in recent studies.
49. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 320, summarizing the view of other recent studies (see the next footnote). Shalom Paul ("Exod. 21:10: A Threefold Maintenance Clause," *JNES* 28 [1969]: 48-53) suggests that the term 'anā should be translated "oil," based upon Sumerian and Akkadian texts that speak of "food, clothing and oil" as the basic necessities of life, but this view also does not appear to have strong linguistic support, since the meaning "oil" for 'anā is elsewhere unattested in Hebrew, and there is no linguistic relationship between the Akkadian and Sumerian terms for "oil" and the one used in Exodus 21:10. Thus the etymology of 'anā is left unexplained.
50. See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 269, who translates as "conditions of her abode," and adds: "This appears to be the real meaning of the word 'anāh, and not as later tradition interpreted it: times of cohabitation." Nahum H. Sarna, *Exodus* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 121, points to medieval Jewish exegetes (such as Rashbam and Bekhor Shor) who came to this same conclusion. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 321, also favors this view. Cf. Wolfram von Soden, "Zum hebräischen Wörterbuch," *UF* 13 (1981): 159-160.
51. Cassuto, *Exodus*, 269.
52. For alternative interpretations of the meaning of this passage that also do not involve the assumption of a polygamist relationship, see Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 320-322.
53. MAL A §31 (COS 2.132:356-357; cf. ANET, 182): "If a man presents the bridal gift to his father-in-law's house, and although his wife is dead there are other daughters of his father-in-law, if he so pleases, he shall marry a daughter of his father-in-law in lieu of his deceased wife." HL §192 (COS 2.19:118; cf. ANET, 196): "If a man's wife dies, [he may take her] sister [as his wife.] It is not an offence." These laws reveal the approval of sororate marriage (after death) among the Assyrians and Hittites. HL § 194 (COS 2.19:118; cf. ANET, 196; translated above under ancient near eastern background section) implies that this type of marriage is forbidden while both sisters are alive.
54. For a detailed examination of this passage, see esp. Angelo Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," *CBQ* 46 (1984): 199-214; cf. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 115-118; and John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 250-256.

55. Exodus 26:3 (2x), 5, 6, 17; Ezekiel 1:9, 23; 3:13. This is true whether or not persons are in view. The references in Exodus 26 refer to the coupling of curtains and clasps and boards (all feminine words) "one [in addition] to the other," literally "a woman to her sister." The passages in Ezekiel refer to the wings (feminine) of the cherubim touching "one [in addition] to the other," literally "a woman to her sister." A similar expression, *'iššā re'ūtāh* literally, "a woman with her friend/neighbor," is used to describe the gathering of birds, "each with her mate" (Isa 34:15, 16), and of women teaching "one [to] another" (Jer 9:20).
56. Genesis 37:19; 42:21, 28; Exodus 16:15; 25:20; 37:9; Numbers 14:4; 2 Kings 7:6; Jeremiah 13:14; 25:26; Ezekiel 24:23; 33:30.
57. Milgrom (*Leviticus 17-22*, 1548) claims that taking this expression as referring to two literal (consanguine) sisters is "the plain meaning of the words," but does following the "plain meaning" ignore a consistent idiomatic distributive use of a given expression throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible? Furthermore, this expression "a woman/wife to her sister," even taken "literally" (i.e., not idiomatically in the distributive sense) is far from "plain"; it is a very awkward way to describe two consanguine sisters, esp. when another direct way to describe a close blood relationship is used by the writer in the previous verse (see the next point below).
58. So, e.g., Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1549.
59. Tosato, "Leviticus 18:18," 202, n. 8.
60. *Ibid.*, 202-208. Cf. Doug C. Mohrmann, "Making Sense of Sex: A Study of Leviticus 18," *JOT* 29 (2004): 71, who recognizes "a clear shift in the redaction of the sexual laws at v. 18," and argues that the laws mentioned in verse 18 and following "have moved beyond the unit of the family into the larger society" (although unfortunately, he does not see the implication for applying this verse to polygyny in general and not only sororal polygyny).
61. Davidson further notes: "At the same time, I do not find convincing the argument advanced by some that verse 18 is placed in literary affinity with the verses 19-20 only because these verses, unlike verses 6-17, deal with conditions that can end. It is difficult to understand how the incestuous relationships of verses 6-17 are any more or less permanent than the adulterous relationship of a man with another man's wife (vs. 20). Thus verse 18 does not appear to be in a Janus relationship looking backward to the permanent incest laws and forward to the time-limited legislation that follows, as has been argued.
62. The alleged parallel between Leviticus 18:18-19 and Leviticus 20:17-18 – the latter passage of which contains an unambiguous prohibition of marriage to a literal sister (20:17) followed by reference to sex with a menstruating woman (20:18, like 18:19) – does not hold any weight in indicating that Leviticus 18:18 refers to a literal sister, since in Leviticus 20:17 the literal sister that is mentioned has the specific defining limitations attached ("his father's daughter" or "his mother's daughter") and refers back to Leviticus 18:9, not to Leviticus 18:18, which has no defining limitation. As can be seen in detail in chapter 10 of Davidson's *Flame of Yahweh*, the principle of organization for the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 is entirely

different from that of Leviticus 20: Leviticus 18 is ordered by family relationships from the closest to the farthest, while Leviticus 20 is arranged according to punishments based on the crime's severity, from the most severe to the least – thus alleged parallels of placement between the two chapters are not helpful in determining the referent of the term "sister" in Leviticus 18:18.

63. Ibid., 207.

64. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 117. It appears to me like special pleading to argue, as some have done, that the general reference to "rival" is worded in this way so that the law can be expanded by logical extension to refer to any other woman. It does not make sense that the "rival" in this law is allowed to be extended to refer to any other woman, while the term "sister" is not allowed such extension, esp. when it is a part of the idiomatic phrase "a woman to her sister" which everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible is extended to include all other women.

65. Ibid., 203.

66. Ibid., 118.

67. I acknowledge that there is one case of incest mentioned in Leviticus 18 – sex with a granddaughter, verse 17a – which also does not find a corresponding punishment mentioned in Leviticus 20, and so Leviticus 18:18 could theoretically be another example of such omission for incest. But in light of all the other lines of evidence cited above, it seems preferable to conclude that Leviticus 18:18 is not referred to in the list of punishments of Leviticus 20 because indeed it does not deal with incest at all, but rather with polygamy, which is condemned by God as immoral although it goes unpunished within the Israelite legal system.

68. See *Damascus Document* (4QD<sup>a</sup>) 4:20-21, and the discussion in Tosato, "Leviticus 18:18," 202-204, 208-214; *Temple Scroll* (11QT<sup>a</sup>) 57:17-19, and the discussion in Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll: The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect* (New York: Random House, 1985), 200; Yigael Yadin, ed., *The Temple Scroll* (3 vols; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983), 2:258; and David Instone-Brewer, "Nomological Exegesis in Qumran 'Divorce' Texts," *RevQ* 18 (1998): 561-579.

69. Tosato, "Leviticus 18:18," 208.

70. This point is argued in the discussion of homosexual practice and bestiality (in chapter 4), and in subsequent chapters (7, 8, and 10) of Davidson's *Flame of Yahweh*, where he deals with other sexually-related prohibitions.

71. See analysis of Steven A. Kaufman, "The Structure of the Deuteronomomic Law," *Maarav* 1-2 (1978-1979): 105-158, discussed in chapter 3 of Davidson's *Flame of Yahweh*. Kaufman discusses the Deuteronomomic summary of laws amplifying the fifth commandment on pp. 125, 133-134. Cf. Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 78-87.

72. See, e.g., Jean-Jacques Bouit, "A Christian Consideration of Polygamy" (D.Min. project report, Andrews University, 1981), 79-80.
73. So, e.g., Eugene Hillman, *Polygamy Reconsidered: African Plural Marriage and the Christian Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), 145.
74. BDB 916; cf. HALOT, 1177. See the NIV translation of "increase" or "add" for several passages of *rābā* in the *hip'il*; e.g., Deut 1:10 ("increased your numbers"); Lev 26:9 ("increase your numbers [of people]"); Jer 30:19 ("add to their numbers").
75. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 119.
76. I acknowledge the possibility that one could also interpret this juxtapositioning as a contrast between "a lot of" (horses and wives) and "a very lot of" (wealth). The immediate context must be the final determiner: see discussion below for such context.
77. One might ask why, if the intent of the prohibition was to forbid all polygyny, did not the narrator simply say regarding the king, "He shall not take more than one wife" or some such statement. But, as Hugenberger notes, such statement would not take into account "the undeniable right to marry following divorce or the death of a spouse;" (*Marriage as a Covenant*, 120, n. 137). Furthermore, such statement would break the literary flow of the parallelism among the three prohibitions, as noted above.
78. *Ibid.*, 120.
79. See esp. Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (IBC; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 148-149: "Deuteronomy's primary concern was that the king be *the model Israelite*" (emphasis original).
80. See *Temple Scroll* (11QT<sup>a</sup>) 57:17-19: "And he [the king] shall not take in addition to her another wife, for she alone shall be with him all days of her life; but if she dies, then he can take to himself another. . . ."; cf. "Fragments of a Zadokite Sect," 7:4, in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, R. H. Charles, ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2:810; Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 120; and Instone-Brewer, "Nomological Exegesis," 566-568.
81. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 187.
82. See chapter 9 of Davidson's *Flame of Yahweh* for more on this issue.
83. See, e.g., Calum M. Carmichael, *Women, Law, and the Genesis Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 31-32.
84. This is dealt with in detail in chapter 8 of Davidson's *Flame of Yahweh*.
85. Davidson examines this law in more detail in connection with the issue of procreation in chapter 11 of his *Flame of Yahweh*.
86. Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy* (CBC; Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 168.
87. Leupold, *Genesis*, 980 (*italics added*).
88. This is contra Raymond Westbrook's fascinating, but misguided thesis.

89. See Phyllis Trible's literary feminist study of the narrative in *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 65-92.
90. The motivation for Elkanah's bigamy may well have been Hannah's infertility, as in the case of Abram and Hagar, and as attested in ancient near eastern law and practice in Mesopotamia.
91. See esp. 1 Samuel 1:7, where the incident of the previous verse (in which the rival wife "provoked her severely") happened "year by year." Every year "she provoked her" and this called forth from Hannah severe anguish: "she wept and did not eat." She was "in bitterness of soul . . . and wept in anguish" (vs. 10); she was "a woman of sorrowful spirit" (vs. 15) who experienced "affliction" (vs. 11). Note that the word for "rival wife" used in the story of Elkanah, comes from the verbal root *šrr*, echoing the usage of the same root in Leviticus 18:18, where God prohibits taking a second wife "to rival" the first. This intertextual echo employed by the narrator implicitly condemns Elkanah's practice.
92. The refusal to obey the Pentateuchal command against royal polygamy appears to have been largely responsible for the general apostasy of Israel. See, esp. 1 Kings 11:1-7, where the wording echoes Deuteronomy 17:17, signaling the narrator's intent to emphasize that Solomon's actions were in violation of the Mosaic law.
93. Du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*, 183-204.
94. One should also recognize that Kings and Chronicles also often give generalized eulogizing statements when assessing the overall trend of a king's life, without denying specific, and often very grievous, moral lapses. For example, 1 Kings 15:5 reports that "David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." Again, 1 Kings 14:8 gives a divine eulogy of "My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only what was right in my eyes." These statements must be seen in the larger context of the divine condemnation of idolatry, marking the contrast of David (who did not disloyally worship other gods) with the idolatrous kings of the divided monarchy who succeeded him (see 1 Kgs 12:26-33; 14:9; 15:3).
95. Du Preez, *ibid.*, 192-197, argues that the judgment pronounced upon David by Nathan included an explicit condemnation of David's polygamy when Nathan accuses him: "You have taken his [Uriah's] wife to be your wife" (2 Sam 12:9). As punishment for his sin of polygamy, Nathan announces the divine predictive sentence that the (other) wives of David (besides Bathsheba) will be defiled by one close to David (2 Sam 12:11). While this interpretation is plausible, it is also possible to see the emphasis upon the adultery of David with Bathsheba (and its aftermath) and not directly addressing his polygamy.
96. *Ibid.*, 185-186.
97. John Kessler, "Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 409-423 (citation 423 [*italics original*], 421).

98. See the parallel in the "hardening of Pharaoh's heart" where the narrative indicates that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exod 4:21; 7:3; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8) but that is God's permissive will, since Pharaoh is said to have free choice and harden his own heart (Exod 8:15, 32; 9:34).

99. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 188.

100. Kaiser (*ibid.*) suggests translating *nāsīm* as "women" and not "wives," and identifying these with Saul's female domestics and courtesans, and not his wives. However, in verse 11 David's *nāsīm* are clearly his "wives" and it seems inconsistent and unwarranted by the context to suggest that Saul's *nāsīm* have another meaning. It should be noted that *bəḥēqēā* "into his bosom" intertextually echoes the usage of the term in Nathan's parable (verse 3), where the poor man's ewe lamb "lay in his bosom (*bəḥēqō*)," and does not appear to have sexual connotations in this context.

101. G. N. Vollebregt, *The Bible on Marriage* (trans. R. A. Downie; London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 23.

102. *Ibid.*, 197-203.

103. 2 Samuel 3:2-5 mentions six wives (Ahinoam the Jezreelitess [not to be confused with Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz, Saul's wife, 1 Sam 14:50], Abigail, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah) and 2 Samuel 5:13 indicates two more wives and two more concubines, making a total of ten.

104. That Bathsheba was not among the ten women placed in seclusion, but is still David's wife, is evident from the fact that she is mentioned several times in this part of the narrative (1 Kgs 1:11, 15, 16, 28, 31) as having ready access to the king's bedchamber.

105. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (IBC; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 304.

106. I do not insist that du Preez' analysis provides a completely watertight case for David's return to monogamy at the end of his life. There is intriguing evidence to support this position. But even if David didn't turn from his polygyny, there are enough clues of discord and dysfunctionality in the marriages of David to conclude that God worked with David *in spite* of his failings; He in no wise countenanced these failings on the part of David to live up to the divine ideal.

107. That these first three verses of 2 Chronicles 24 are a summary statement, is apparent from the fact that each of these verses begins with a *vav* consecutive plus the imperfect, but verse 4 definitely starts a new section with the more complex statement: "Now it came to pass after this. . ." The verses that follow clearly indicate that Jehoida is still alive, and directing the Temple repairs (vss. 4-14).

108. See, e.g., Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary* (TOTC 10b; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 450-452; J. Barton Payne, "1, 2 Chronicles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976-1992), 4:513-514.

109. That a *vav* consecutive plus the imperfect can have the force of antithesis or contrast ("but" or "and yet"), see GKC §111d-e; and Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 550 (§33.2.1d). One must recognize that the Chronicler does not use the more forceful term *raq* ("except") in 2 Chronicles 24:3, as is so frequent in the Book of Kings' negative assessment of Joash and many other kings during the period of the monarchy (1 Kgs 3:3; 15:5; 2 Kgs 3:2-3; 10:29; 12:4; 14:3-4; 15:4, 35; 17:2; etc.); the Chronicler employs this term more sparingly for this purpose (e.g., 2 Chr 25:2, 14; 27:2). At the same time, his placement of the reference to bigamy in the same structural position as where the parallel Kings' narrative records the negative assessment of Jehoash's reign, seems implicitly to censure Joash's plural marriage. For commentators who recognize that Joash's bigamy was censurable, being opposed to the Pentateuchal legislation of Deuteronomy 17:17, see, e.g., Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles* (AB 13; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 137, and Payne, "1, 2 Chronicles," 514. For further discussion, see du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*, 213-216.

110. See, e.g., Robert Holst, "Polygamy and the Bible," *International Review of Missions* 56 (1967): 205-213 (cited in Hugenerger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 111); Payne, "1, 2 Chronicles," 4:513-514; and Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 450-452.

111. Robert J. Hitchens, *Multiple Marriage: A Study of Polygamy in Light of the Bible* (Elkton, MD: Doulos Publishers, 1987), 137, fn. 11 (emphasis original).

112. There is not a single case of polygamy among the Jewish people mentioned in the biblical record during the postexilic period (with the exception of Esther). Note also that the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. Elephantine community rejected polygamy as did later sectarian Judaism (Reuven Yaron, *Introduction to the Law of Aramaic Papyri* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1961], 60). Some scholars, however, find in Malachi 2:10-16 what they see is an assumption of polygamy. See, e.g., Adam S. van der Woude, "Malachi's Struggle for a Pure Community: Reflections on Malachi 2:10-16," in *Tradition and Re-interpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Jürgen C. H. Lebram* (ed. J. W. Van Henten et al.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 65-71. For a detailed rebuttal of this position, see Hugenerger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 54-57, 94-95, 121. Hugenerger, 121, concludes: "With respect to the post-exilic period, although Mal. 2:10-16 has been supposed by some scholars to assume . . . or even to commend polygyny . . . , it is far more likely that monogamy was seen as the marital ideal in this period and that actual marital practice was monogamous with few, if any, exceptions." See also the summary statement by Markus Zehnder ("A Fresh Look at Malachi II 13-16," *VT* 53 [2003]: 247) regarding the Edenic monogamous ideal underlying the thinking and practice in the postexilic period: "By the same token, the verse [Mal 2:15] provides an argument against a possible polygamous solution of the problem: The desire for another woman cannot . . . be satisfied by engaging in a marriage with a second woman, because such an act would violate the creational unity and exclusiveness of the marriage relationship between one man and one woman." See also, Davidson's discussion of Malachi 2:10-16 in chapter 9 of *Flame of Yahweh*.

113. Derek Kidner, *Proverbs* (TOTC 15; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1964), 49.
114. The Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes is questioned by many modern scholars, but the autobiographical statements of the book and inter-textual evidence seem to favor the traditional equation of Qoheleth ("the Preacher") with Solomon. In this canonical (final-form) theology of the Old Testament, the internal biblical indicators must be taken seriously. For a summary of this internal (as well as external) evidence, see Gleason L. Archer, Jr, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. and expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 528-537. For defense of an early (preexilic) date for Ecclesiastes based upon linguistic features, see esp. Daniel C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language: Re-evaluating Its Nature and Date* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1988).
115. In favor of *šiddā wēšiddōth* referring to the "ladies in a harem," see, e.g., Franz Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 238-241, and most modern versions.
116. Davidson notes: "While the Old Testament consistently condemns plural marriage, either explicitly or implicitly, at the same time divine grace is also consistently extended to the polygamist! God shows his disapproval of a polygamous marital form, and at the same time does not immediately abandon His children who have fallen into this sinful practice. The antediluvian world was given 120 years in which God's spirit strove with humankind, and through Noah, the 'preacher of righteousness' (2 Pet 2:5), called them to repentance from their rebellion against God and from practices that were not according to His will (including, no doubt, their plural marriages). The canonical history of the patriarchs shows God's condescension to work with Abraham and Jacob as practicing polygamists, while at the same time (it seems likely) prompting and assisting them to come back to the Edenic standard of morality. The tenderness with which God cared for the victims in a polygamous situation is wonderfully displayed in His treatment of Hagar. Striking evidence of God's amazing grace is that the twelve sons of Jacob, products of a polygamous relationship, become the foundation of the twelve tribes of Israel, God's covenant people! The fact that there is no explicit legal sanction attached to the prohibition of polygamy in Leviticus 18:18 reveals a God of grace, expressing his disapproval of polygamous relationships, and at the same time condescending to meet His people where they were. The same divine grace is evident in the canonical history of Elkanah, David, Solomon, and other polygamists during the time of the Judges and the monarchy. God does not condone the sin, but also does not turn away from the sinner, as long as there is any hope of repentant response! As Kessler remarks regarding David, 'Judgment, though, is not the last word. Yahweh forgave David's sin, gave him a reprieve from death, and granted him the possibility of continued existence. This aspect of David's experience suggests the possibility of hope in divine clemency resulting in the attenuation of merited judgment;' (Kessler, 'Sexuality and Politics,' 423). While God cannot bless in fullness the work of those who are disobedient to His revealed will concerning the monogamous marital form, yet He continues to reach out to His people, in grace offering forgiveness and healing, ever seeking to bring them back to His Edenic ideal."