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THE OLD TESTAMENT CONCEPT
OF POLYGAMY

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

A Statement of the Problem

Polygamy, which may be defined as "the union for life of a man with two or more women,"¹ has always been a problem for Christians, since it apparently is in contradiction to the Biblical concept of marriage. Was God's original plan for His people a marriage union of one male and one female as we hold today, or are we to follow the examples of polygamy which we find in the Old Testament?

Our Savior tells us, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife: and the twain shall be one flesh,"² and the most natural conclusion would seem to be that marriage involves two people, a man and his wife, and the twain, that is, the two of them, shall be one flesh. Yet in the pages of the Old Testament, we find such great men as Abraham and Jacob and others living with several wives, and there seems to be little rebuke for their actions.

The fact that polygamy existed in the Old Testament is not disputed; this does not necessarily mean, however,

¹Henry Charles Lea, Minor Historical Writings, edited by Arthur C. Howland (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, c.1942), p. 332.

²Matt. 19:5.

that it was in accordance with God's divine will. The problem, therefore, which we shall examine will be polygamy as it existed under the old covenant. We shall try to determine its true concept as found on the pages of Holy Writ, and in our study we shall attempt to reconcile the historical fact of polygamy with God's original institution. If God's plan for His creation was a multiplicity of wives, then our task will be easy; if the Old Testament concept was not so, then we shall have to explain its existence and either condemn or justify those who practiced it.

A Validation of the Study

Although the problem of polygamy is not a serious one in our country, since the mores of the people as well as governmental legislation stand opposed to it, yet as the church embarks on its missionary program and reaches into many foreign countries, this practice is found again and again, and some solution must be found if we are to continue a program of evangelism with these people. (As the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel upon the hearts of these people who practice polygamy, are we to insist upon a change in their marriage customs, or can we allow these people to continue living with their several wives?) To insist upon a monogamous marriage relationship means the disestablishment of already existing marriages. On the surface the simplest solution would seem to be a toleration of the

existing practice, since it finds a parallel in the customs of the Old Testament. But our first and primary concern is to determine God's will and let this be the basis for all our actions. In view of these facts, this study of polygamy is indeed a valid one, for by it we intend to discover, if possible, God's original institution of and plan for marriage.

The Limitation of the Scope of the Problem

In an examination of polygamy much time could be spent in studying its historical background and in determining the origin of this practice. This particular aspect shall not be of great concern to us in this thesis. There are several reasons for this.

Since historical data on this subject would have to date back to the period even before the flood, primary source material is scarce and not generally available. Most authors who have written on this subject offer only a conjecture, and there is a vast difference of opinion among the various scholars.

The Bible does not tell us the historical facts which led to the beginning of this practice. Since this is to be our primary source of information, we too must remain silent concerning the history of this practice.

It is not the history, but rather the concept of polygamy that forms the subject matter for this thesis; therefore its background is of only a secondary interest

for us and should not occupy a major portion of this presentation. Only the historical data which have a direct bearing on the subject and which can be authenticated will therefore be used.

A Brief Overview of the Organization of the Thesis

The particular subject of this thesis is difficult to organize, since the various factors which are involved fall into different periods of history and are not closely interlocked with each other. It seemed best to the author, therefore, to divide polygamy into the various types which were extant in Old Testament time. In the three following chapters we shall present the various manifestations of this practice. In the two concluding chapters a serious examination of the problem will be made and the author's conclusion in regard to the Old Testament concept of polygamy will be presented.

The Method Used in the Preparation of the Thesis

The author began his study of the problem with an examination of the passages in Scripture which refer directly to the practice of polygamy. When these had been gathered, they were separated according to the specific type of polygamy which they represented. The advantages and disadvantages of each case were noted, and an attempt was made to determine the motive behind the examples of polygamy in the Old Testament. When this information had been

gathered, source books were consulted, especially those of Jewish authors. The additional information offered in these books also was noted and sorted into its proper classification. The views of these authors were compared with each other and with the textual evidence they offered for their conclusions. A revised outline of the thesis was then written; basic thoughts for each part were noted, and the thesis was ready for its first draft. This was revised again to produce the form and style in which the thesis now appears. Because the reading of a research paper is often cumbersome and without real continuity when long quotations are interspersed in the pages of the text, the author has eliminated many of these quotations and, instead, has paraphrased the thoughts of the sources. Credit, however, is given to those authors whose material is used, and facts will not be presented without proper verification given in the footnotes.

A Summary of the Text

The background and practice of polygamy

The practice of polygamy can be traced back to the time of Lamech, fifth in descent from Cain. It is a practice tolerated in the Old Testament, and in view of this fact, the following arguments have been put forth as evidence of divine favor upon the practice:

(a) The frequency of polygamy among some leading Biblical personalities; (b) The Mosaic regulations seem to indicate

its acceptance and sanction ; (c) God bestowed great blessings upon those who lived in polygamy; (d) The multiple wifehood of the Old Testament could be interpreted as a multiple monogamy instead of polygamy.

Some of the underlying factors which led to polygamy were: (a) Lust; (b) A surplus of women; (c) A means to secure political alliances; (d) The value of women for labor; (e) Many wives as a sign of wealth; (f) The desire for an heir.

The Levirate marriage

Polygamy was also found in an ancient practice known as the Levirate. There was a law in Deuteronomy which established it and explained it. Essentially, these are the conditions of the Levirate. If brothers lived together or near one another and one of them died childless, the wife of the deceased brother was not to be married outside of the family unit. Instead her brother-in-law was to come to her and take her for his wife and beget children by her. The children of such a marriage were to be accounted as offspring of the deceased brother.

There were several reasons for this practice. Women were often considered a sign of wealth, and as a member of a family unit, it became the obligation of other members to use the value of the widow, especially for bearing children. Because it was a disgrace for a woman to be childless, the Levirate provided a means for her to have children

who would carry on her husband's name. In addition to this, the Levirate gave the deceased man an heir who would inherit his possessions some day. The Levirate also was a means for protecting and caring for widows.

If a brother could not take the widow as his wife, she could relieve him of this responsibility through a process known as the loosing of the shoe.

Concubinage

A man might also have additional wives in his household known as concubines. A concubine was different from a wife in two respects: she was not taken in a marriage ceremony, and she was not counted among the heirs of the man's estate. There were many different kinds of concubines in the Old Testament. The true concubine was a free woman who entered into an agreement with a man for sexual relations in return for support.

In addition to this type of concubine there were several other types, the captive-wife, the slave-wife and The Jewish slave-wife. These were not true concubines but bore the same two distinguishing marks as a free-woman concubine. For that reason they are considered concubines in this thesis.

Concubinage represents a very degenerate form of relationship between a man and a woman. It is a perversion of God's institution of marriage and a practice that can only be frowned upon.

Problems of polygamy

It is natural that under polygamy there would also be many problems, since the marriage relationship was at times so involved. There are four important problems which polygamy creates.

1. Polygamy fosters rivalry among women. Since in many cases a man loved one woman more than another, it is natural that there would be jealousy. This would be especially true if one woman brought forth children while the other did not. Hence there was often conflict in the household where there were several wives.

2. Polygamy brings about a neglect of the individual. Under polygamy the woman is often thought of only as man's property or as suitable only for satisfying the desires of the male and bringing forth children. Polygamy, therefore, degrades the individual, and the woman becomes only an instrument or tool for the male instead of an individual personality. OR WIFE
CENTRAL
Bib.
Sense

Polygamy also upsets the numerical equality of the sexes. Since the number of men and women is relatively equal, polygamy upsets this balance and often causes hardship for the left-over males.

Since many of the men who lived in polygamy took their wives from foreign nations, there also was the danger of idolatry creeping in and drawing the male away from God. This was especially true in the case of Solomon, who in his old age fell away from the true God.

Polygamy versus monogamy as the ideal

Before we consider drawing a conclusion in regard to polygamy, we must first go back to the institution of marriage to see what God's ideal for His people was.

We find that God instituted marriage and that He instituted it as monogamy. We also note that monogamy was God's ideal, since He so frequently used it to picture the relationship between Himself and His people.

Although polygamy was practiced by many well-known personalities in the Old Testament, there are also many who lived in monogamy, so that this argument does not carry much weight.

It must be said that polygamy was the result of a degeneration of marriage and originated among those people who had forsaken the true God. God has indeed punished it by inflicting upon those who lived in it numerous problems which made their marriage relationship unhappy. Polygamy, therefore, is not the ideal and should not be practiced. For those who insist upon living in polygamy, which is contrary to God's will, they must also suffer the consequences just as the personalities in the Old Testament often had to suffer for this practice.

CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND AND PRACTICE OF POLYGAMY

The Existence of Polygamy

As one pages through the books of the Old Testament, one cannot help but be impressed by the prevalence among Biblical characters of many wives. From the case of Jacob with his two wives, Rachel and Leah,¹ to King Solomon with his harem of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines,² we might well conclude that, "There seems to be no limit to the number of wives or concubines a man might have."³

The practice, however, was not limited to the cases which are mentioned in Scripture. Its acceptance among the majority of the people can be seen in a mathematical study based on the census reported in the Book of Numbers. It is recorded there that the male members of the people above the age of twenty numbered 603,550. Since the males under this age are not recorded, we will assume that the total male population was approximately one million; we can assume an equal number of females, which would make a total

¹Gen. 29:23,28.

²I Kings 11:3.

³J. F. McLaughlin, "Marriage--Biblical Data," The Jewish Encyclopedia, edited by Isidore Singer, et al. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, c.1904), VIII, 335.

population of approximately two million. Only 22,273 first-born males are recorded, and probably there was an equal number of females. If these figures are correct, then there were forty-five children for every first-born. That size of family is almost impossible except under conditions of polygamy.⁴

Polygamy, therefore, was definitely a part of the Hebrew culture. There can be two interpretations as to its origin. Was this tradition native with the Hebrews, or was it acquired during their history as the result of foreign influences?⁵ If it was so from the beginning, then polygamy must have divine approval; if it was acquired through the course of time, then we must determine what the original standard was.

The author feels that polygamy was the result of influence from foreign nations and agrees with Epstein

⁴Louis M. Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and in the Talmud (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, c.1942), p. 5. The following is a footnote offered by Epstein: "This proof is offered by Mosaisches Recht, II, pp. 163f., based on Num. 2:32 and 3:43. Its weakness lies in the fact that even in polygamous marriages, forty-five children for the average family is too many; also in the fact that the first-born in respect to holiness (except in the matter of inheritance) is the first-born of the mother who 'unloosens the womb' (3:12), and polygamy does not answer the difficulty. The answer to our difficulty may lie in the fact that only those first-born after the Exodus were consecrated, for it was in the Exodus event that the consecration of the first-born was proclaimed." Despite this difficulty, the author of this thesis feels that the figures do offer some evidence of the wide-spread practice of polygamy, or at least the common acceptance of bigamy, even among the average people.

⁵Ibid., p. 3.

when he states, "All that may be said is that polygamy gradually infiltrated Hebrew life from foreign sources, Canaanitish or Egyptian."⁶ Historical proof for this fact is difficult to obtain, but if it can be demonstrated from the Bible that polygamy was not the ideal, then we have a valid affirmation of the fact that its presence among the Jewish people was the result of foreign influence. A further discussion of this point will be made in the final chapters of this thesis, when we have thoroughly examined the entire Old Testament record of polygamy.

The Arguments Advanced in Favor of Polygamy

In all fairness to those who are in favor of polygamy as the divine ideal, we shall present here their arguments. It is the purpose of this thesis to refute these propositions, and an examination must be made of them before we consider the situations which they discuss. As the reader progresses in the study of this paper, these validations of the practice should be kept in mind.

Frequency among Biblical personalities

The first person of whom polygamy is mentioned in the Old Testament was Lamech, fifth in descent from Cain, whose two wives, Adah and Zillah, are mentioned. Although Lamech was a Cainite and not a part of God's chosen people,

⁶Ibid., p. 4.

there is no record in Scripture that this was irregular or unusual.⁷ There is in the text no "expression of reprobation"⁸ which would lead us to believe that this was frowned on, which we would certainly expect to find if the practice was not approved.

Even the patriarch Abraham is recorded as having two wives, Sarah and Hagar,⁹ and it was under this arrangement that he became the father of nations and received God's blessing. Abraham's brother, Nahor, is also recorded as living in polygamy.¹⁰

Both Esau and Jacob are recorded as having several wives. Esau seems to have contented himself with three of them, Judith, Bashemath and Mahalath.¹¹ The case of Jacob is well known, how he was tricked into marrying Leah and then worked an additional seven years for Rachel.¹²

Among the judges recorded in Scripture, we are told that Gideon had many wives.¹³

⁷Gen. 4:19-23.

⁸Henry Charles Lea, Minor Historical Writings, edited by Arthur C. Howland (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, c.1942), p. 332.

⁹Gen. 16:3-4.

¹⁰Gen. 22:20-24.

¹¹Gen. 25:34; 28:9; 36:2-3.

¹²Gen. 29:20-28; 30:4-9.

¹³Judges 8:30.

Even the kings mentioned in Scripture are found with many wives. David, we are told, had several wives, and we know definitely that he had at least ten concubines in his palace.¹⁴ Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines.¹⁵

Even the middle class shared in polygamy, for Elkanah, the father of Samuel and a member of the middle class, is said to have had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah.¹⁶

In addition to these leading Bible personalities there are many additional cases of polygamy recorded.¹⁷ But in all these cases it is recorded "without embarrassment to these great figures who adorn the sacred pages;"¹⁸ in fact, "The frequency of polygamous marriage among the leading personalities of the Bible without explicit protest, denotes the absence of any tradition against it."¹⁹

In view of all these facts, then, those who hold a favorable opinion of polygamy conclude that since it was acceptable in these cases, it must also have divine sanction.

¹⁴I Sam. 25:43,44; II Sam. 3:25; 5:13; 15:16; 20:3.

¹⁵I Kings 11:3.

¹⁶I Sam. 1:2.

¹⁷Cf. II Chron. 11:21; 13:21; 24:3; I Kings 11:3.

¹⁸David R. Mace, Hebrew Marriage (London: The Epworth Press, 1953), p. 121.

¹⁹Epstein, op. cit., p. 4.

Mosaic regulation indicates acceptance

In the Bible numerous regulations and laws can be found which deal directly with polygamy. From the evidence offered it appears that "polygamy was such a well established part of the social system, that Mosaic law is not even critical of it."²⁰ In fact, the law, in making provision for the number of problems that might arise under polygamy, nowhere indicates a regulation in regard to the number of wives. By making provision for these problems, "it provides further confirmation that such an arrangement was by no means exceptional."²¹ The conclusion of those who are favorable to this opinion can well be summed up in this quotation:

With this law before his eyes, what Christian can believe that the Almighty attached immorality or sin to the condition of polygamy, especially when one may look in vain through the Mosaic regulations of marriage in Leviticus eighteen for any limitation on the number of wives.²²

God blessed those who lived in polygamy

The blessings which God gave to those who lived in

²⁰Charles A. Rubenstein, "Polygamy," The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, edited by Isaac Landman, et al. (New York: The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., c.1942), VIII, 584.

²¹Race, op. cit., p. 121.

²²Lea, op. cit., p. 333.

polygamy would also seem to indicate that God did not object to it. It may be true that the descendents of men such as Cain and Esau do not offer proof for divine acceptance and might even be an argument against it, for they hardly walked with God, yet the fact cannot be denied that God did richly bless Esau's brother, Jacob, as well as others such as Abraham. In considering this factor, the case of Jacob is especially important. Jacob had two wives, Rachel and Leah, sisters, and in addition to polygamy, this arrangement stood in opposition to a later recorded law forbidding a marriage of two sisters to the same husband at the same time.²³ In addition both his wives gave him their handmaidens, Bilhah and Zilpah as consorts.²⁴

In the face of all this, it would seem that Jacob would not receive a great blessing from God. Yet we know how Jacob wrestled all night at Peniel and finally received a blessing. The person whom Jacob wrestled with is an open question, but it was either an angel or God Himself in the form of a man. The author of this thesis holds that it was God Himself, because we are told that Jacob had "power with God," and because he spoke of the incident as having "seen God face to face."²⁵ Would such an incident have occurred if Jacob, later called Israel, had not found favor

²³Lev. 18:18.

²⁴Gen. 30:1-10.

²⁵Gen. 32:24-30.

in God's sight? Again it would seem as if polygamy was tolerated as a marriage standard.

Polygamy as multiple monogamy

This final argument, in the opinion of the author, is rather dubious, but it will be offered for the consideration of the reader. It has been proposed that even if polygamy is wrong, the cases in Scripture fall more into the category of multiple monogamy. In a situation such as this, a man may have several wives, but since each marriage was entered individually and an individual relationship was established with each wife, therefore it is not polygamy but rather multiple monogamy.²⁶ Thus a man entered the relationship of having one wife several times. And, because in many cases each wife lived separately from the others, it could still fall into the pattern of monogamy, since each relationship is separate from the others. Such a theory, however, seems to fall into the category of theological hair-splitting, since regardless of when a man married his wives, as long as he had more than one at the same time, it would be polygamy. To the author's knowledge there is no case recorded in Scripture of a marriage to more than one woman in the same ceremony. Even in those

²⁶Bronislaw Malinowski, "Marriage," Encyclopedia Britannica, edited by Walter Yust, et al. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., c.1951), XIV, 949.

cases where several wives are mentioned at the same time, we have no assurance that their marriages were simultaneous.

The Reasons for Polygamy

Whether polygamy was an original part of Hebrew culture or a practice taken over from neighboring countries, there must have been valid reasons for the continuation of this practice. In the concluding sections of this chapter, we shall consider some of these probable reasons. In reality, both the Levirate marriage and concubinage were polygamous practices and had reason for their existence as well as causes for their continuation. Since both of these are modifications of polygamy, however, they shall be considered separately in the succeeding two chapters.

Lust

The most obvious cause for having more than one wife would be to fulfill the sexual desire of the male. Since there is a basic difference between the male and the female, the male desiring greater and more frequent satisfaction, it would be natural for him to turn to an additional woman when the circumstances seemed to warrant it. Such was certainly the case with David and Bathsheba. We are told that David, while walking upon the roof of his house, observed Bathsheba, noticing that "the woman was beautiful to look upon." After inquiring about her, even finding that she was the wife of another man, Uriah, he still took her

and lay with her. Because of him, she became pregnant.²⁷

It was only then that David's problems began, and he gave the orders for the death of Uriah. Nathan, in his condemnation of David, is not so severe in respect to David's desire as he is in respect to the fact that the woman was married to another.²⁸

This same situation also existed among other kings. Thus we have recorded in Esther that the king, in seeking the new queen, took each woman into his chambers for the evening, and in the morning she was released and sent away until the king called again. In this case, it would appear that sexual satisfaction became one of the criteria of the new queen.²⁹

King Ahasuerus' former queen, Vashti, undoubtedly earned her position in the same way.³⁰ A further discussion of this entire incident will be taken up in a later division of this chapter.

A surplus of women

A second factor which would obviously tend to bring about polygamy was a possible surplus of women. Under normal circumstances, the ratio between male and female would be about the same. In time of war, however, there

²⁷II Sam. 11:2-5.

²⁸II Sam. 12:1-4.

²⁹Esther 2:2,13,14.

³⁰Esther 1:10-12.

could be a large loss of men, with the consequence that more females would exist than males. In many cases the men who went to war and invaded other nations found for themselves additional wives among these women.³¹

It must also be remembered that any single woman in Jewish society was not held to be in high esteem. She would try by any means possible to become married. Such was the sad case of Tamar, who by trickery took Judah for her husband by playing the harlot.³²

Political alliances

Polygamy was also used as a means of securing strategic political alliances with neighboring rulers. The case for our consideration here is Gideon.

His polygamy was undoubtedly of the political type later practiced by David and Solomon. He consolidated his power by forming a numerous harem, in order to form links with the chief families of the communities whom he wished to conciliate.³³

The result of this practice can be seen in the ninth chapter of Judges, where the Shechemites rebelled.

Women as laborers

In a society where hunting and fishing are the chief means of earning a living, polygamy is almost unknown.

³¹Cf. Judges 3:5-7; Genesis 6:2; I Kings 16:31.

³²Gen. 38:1-30.

³³Mace, op. cit., p. 127.

But the Hebrew culture was such that they were mostly engaged in shepherding and agriculture. "When a man's wives can be employed in tending flocks, cultivating fields or exercising useful handicrafts, then a polygamous existence can be expected."³⁴ It was an inexpensive means for obtaining labor by just adding wives to a man's present family.

A Sign of wealth and prestige

Polygamy, although practiced to some extent by many, was primarily the special privilege of the powerful and wealthy people. The reason for this, of course, was that many men could not afford to have a multitude of wives. In a previous section of this chapter, we considered the wealthy as using women to form political alliances. Now we shall consider polygamy from the standpoint of wealth and prestige.

The type of marriage which is evident in Hebrew writings is the ba'al marriage, the regular word for husband being ba'al, and that for a married woman be'ulah, which means owned or possessed. Thus marriage represented acquisition or ownership, and very often a wife was counted among a man's possessions.³⁵

³⁴John A. Ryan, "Marriage--History Of," The Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Charles G. Herbermann, et al. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, c.1910), IX, 695.

³⁵Epstein, op. cit., p. 7.

Along with wealth also went social prestige. This was especially prevalent during the period of the monarchy. Solomon attained the acme of Biblical personalities with his harem of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. It can be understood that in a palace there would be a need for a great number of women both to serve the king and to maintain the building. It is possible that many of the women mentioned in connection with Solomon served just those purposes and did not only function as a wife for the king. Thus we are told that David went forth and left ten concubines behind to care for the house.³⁶

We are not told much in the Bible about conditions in the palace of the monarchs. But the account in the Book of Esther gives us some details. Although it was a Persian court, yet the situation described could well be similar to the courts of the Hebrew monarchs, since their palaces must have been patterned after those of other countries. We must remember that the monarchy was not God's plan, but rather the people's choice.³⁷ In view of this fact, it must have been the influence of the surrounding nations that brought the people of Israel to this decision. Undoubtedly the courts of Israel would also be patterned after foreign courts.

An excellent study of the condition of the palace has

³⁶II Sam. 15:16.

³⁷I Sam. 8:1-8.

been made by D. R. Mace in his book previously mentioned in this chapter, Hebrew Marriage. At this point the author of this thesis wishes to introduce the material presented by Mace, because it will shed light on the palace situation in Israel. The following sections, therefore, will be a condensation and paraphrase of the thoughts expressed by Mace in his book.³⁸

The polygamy of the rulers was a powerful factor in delaying the ascendancy of the monogamous ideal in Israel. These harems (such as that of Solomon) were set up in an attempt to ape pagan monarchs, and the droves of women which were gathered around the king are scarcely worthy of the name of wives, and they hardly fall into the category of marriage at all. A description of the palace of a pagan monarch can be found in the Book of Esther.

King Xerxes is described as receiving each night a fresh virgin which was provided for his pleasure. These girls were especially chosen for this purpose, probably because of their physical beauty. Thus Esther was among those recruited to be brought in to the king. The girls were prepared by an elaborate process of beautification which lasted a full year, and on the night of their presentation to the king, they had their choice of the resources of the harem. After the night with the king was over, the girl was taken to a separate section of the harem

³⁸Mace, op. cit., p. 133-141.

and was never brought forth again unless the king asked for her by name.

This was not, in a real sense, marriage. It was part of the immoral provision made for a pampered potentate. It was simply that girls' bodies, perfumed and jeweled were served to the king like so many pieces of candy. Even the choice of Esther as queen was not made on admiration of her character, but because of outstanding physical beauty. Although there were celebrations which suggested a wedding, yet the queen could not approach her husband, on pain of death, unless he summoned her. Her position, therefore, was abject, although she stood in a relationship that no other woman enjoyed. In a case such as this, there was really a monogamy, with one principal wife. Yet the king enjoyed the freedom of sexual promiscuity.

Thus we see in this account of Mace, the degeneration that can set in with a palace situation such as this. While many wives were a sign of prestige and wealth, it led to many evils. In the case of Solomon with his many wives, it is possible that an arrangement existed similar to that of Xerxes, except that each woman that went in to the king became his wife without benefit of ceremony.

The desire for an heir

Many of the previous reasons suggested as a cause for polygamy either did not find approval with the people

or were impractical for the majority of the Hebrew race. The previously enumerated factors cannot, therefore, be listed as primary reasons for the practice of polygamy. There can be no doubt that the principal reason for its practice among the average people was the desire for an heir. To the Hebrew this was the supreme end which marriage served. A family wanted an heir to inherit the possessions of the father and to carry on the name of the family itself. Wives, therefore, were regarded simply as a means for begetting children.

In certain cases, the desire for offspring arose from the promises given of the Savior and the tribe from which He would come.³⁹

The Jewish people also held the injunction of Scripture, "Be fruitful and multiply,"⁴⁰ in high esteem. Barrenness seemed to conflict with this command, and therefore a man had the choice of either divorce or a second marriage. It was a Jewish practice that sterility for ten years allowed divorce. Polygamy, however, seemed to be more humane, since, as we have seen before, a single woman had no place in Jewish society.⁴¹

A woman who could bear no children was looked upon

³⁹Cf. Gen. 17:19; 49:10; Nu. 24:17; Is. 9:7.

⁴⁰Gen. 1:22.

⁴¹E. O. James, Marriage and Society (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1952), p. 93.

as cursed by God, for "the Lord hath shut up her womb."⁴²
A woman's supreme desire in life was to bear a child,
 lest she be thought of as having a divine judgment placed
 upon her. In fact, her only claim to status in the house-
hold of her husband was based on her bearing of children.⁴³
 The Hebrews, therefore, because of the importance they
 placed on offspring, found themselves almost unavoidably
 committed to the practice of polygamy.

As an example of this cause for polygamy, we can
 turn to the account given of Elkanah and his two wives,
 Hannah and Peninnah. We are told that Peninnah had borne
 children for him, while Hannah was still barren. Yet
 Elkanah loved Hannah and while making sacrifice he gave
 her a larger portion. This was disagreeable to Peninnah,
 who then began to torment Hannah because of her barrenness.
 Hannah, in turn, went to the temple, prayed to herself,
 perhaps as she had done many times before, asking a child
 from God, and offering to return him to God's service.⁴⁴

Although we are not told this in the text, it is
 likely that Hannah was the first wife of Elkanah. The
 author assumes this because she is always mentioned first
 and because we are told that Elkanah loved Hannah, a
 statement that is not made concerning Peninnah.

⁴²I Sam. 1:5.

⁴³Epstein, op. cit., p. 129.

⁴⁴I Sam. 1:4-20.

Elkanah, after a period of time, probably took Peninnah to secure offspring and an heir.

Hannah's supreme desire was to bear a child and not be a disgrace to her husband. It was in keeping with this thought that she offered the child (we notice she prayed for a son) back to the Lord again. This would seem to indicate that she wanted primarily to bear a child and not so much to keep him. In her actions, then, we see an example of this desire on the part of a woman to have a child to please her husband and maintain her status in society.

These six causes for polygamy show us its background and the reasons for its practice. In the following chapters we shall consider its various modifications and their impact upon Jewish society.

CHAPTER III

THE LEVIRATE MARRIAGE

The Relationship of the Levirate Marriage to Polygamy

We observed in our previous chapter, that there were many reasons why polygamy existed among the Hebrew people. Yet, in most of these cases, a second marriage was not mandatory, and a man could content himself with one wife if he chose to do so. Very early in Hebrew history a type of marriage was developed which became obligatory upon certain groups of people and which at times made bigamy, if not polygamy in some instances, impossible to avoid. This practice was known as the Levirate marriage, usually referred to as the Levirate.

The Levirate is a Latin derivative from 'levir', which means husband's brother.¹ It was an ancient practice which arose with the patriarchy when family groups usually dwelt together as one social unit or family. It can be defined as follows: If two brothers lived together in a patriarchal unit, and one of them died childless, the wife of the deceased brother was not to be married outside of the family unit; instead, her brother-in-law was to come to her and take her

¹The Interpreter's Bible, edited by G. A. Buttrick, et al. (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, c.1953), II, 479.

for his wife and beget children by her.² Because there was Mosaic legislation as well as social pressure behind this practice, a man often found himself obliged to take his deceased brother's wife for his own. If he were already married, he would then have two wives and be living in polygamy. Thus this practice often brought about a sort of enforced polygamy.

The Essential Conditions of the Levirate

There are three references to this practice to be found in the Old Testament. Two of these are specific examples of the practice, the third is a reference in the Book of Deuteronomy which gives legislation in regard to this practice. From these three, we wish to determine the essential conditions of the Levirate. The reference in Deuteronomy twenty-five shall be our main source of information, since both Biblical accounts of this practice are modifications of the original Levirate code.

The Levirate only applies when the brothers dwell together. This is undoubtedly a reference to the conditions of the patriarchy, when the family lived together or near each other. Such was the condition during the nomadic period of Israelite history. The family lived as one unit, tended their flocks together, moved from place to place

²C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, translated from the German by James Martin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.), III, 422.

together and formed their own clan.³ An example of the family unit can be found in the case of Jacob's sons. During the time of famine, he sent ten of them to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, whom Jacob thought to be dead.⁴ We may well presume that these sons were married, for we are told of their families at the time they moved to Egypt.⁵ It should be noted that if brothers lived apart from each other, they were not bound by the Levirate. Under later agricultural conditions, such was the case, and the Levirate fell into disuse. In this case the surviving widow would usually return to her own family, or a brother of the deceased might of his own free will take her to live with his family.⁶

The second requirement was that "the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger."⁷ The reasons for this shall be discussed later; in brief, two reasons may be given for this: (a) It would mean the disestablishment of the clan or family unit: (b) It would involve a problem in regard to the property rights of the deceased brother.

The brother who was to perform the duty of levir was

³Louis M. Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and in the Talmud (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, c.1942), p. 83.

⁴Gen. 42:3.

⁵Cf. Gen. 46:8-27.

⁶Epstein, op. cit., p. 84.

⁷Deut. 25:5.

"to take her to him to wife and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her."⁸ We note here that the marriage act was required and that the brother was to perform the duty of marriage: namely, the bringing forth of children.

The final condition of the Levirate dealt with the offspring of this marriage. They were to be accounted as children of the deceased brother and bear his name instead of that brother who performed the Levirate.⁹ Thus the name of the deceased brother would be carried by this child instead of his branch of the family tree becoming extinct.

Reasons for the Levirate

Several of the reasons which were mentioned in the preceding chapter for the growth of polygamy apply also to the Levirate. We shall consider again four of these reasons which apply to the Levirate situation.

The woman as family property

We recall that polygamy was often considered a sign of wealth and women were accounted among a man's possessions. This was especially true in the patriarchal family, where a woman became a member of the whole clan through her marriage to one of its members. The purpose of marriage was not to

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

fulfill an individual romantic desire, but to create a new family in the clan.¹⁰ A woman through marriage, therefore, was owned not only by her husband but also by his family. Therefore, when her husband died, she was a widow, but not free to leave the family of which she had become a member.¹¹

As family property, she had value and usefulness, and as such, she could not be allowed to lie fallow. She was capable of wifehood and childbearing, and despite the death of her husband, she should still be put to use as a member of the family and a part of its possessions. Therefore, another member of this family unit was to take her and enable her to fulfill her functions as wife and mother. In most cases it was a brother, although if this was not possible, another member of the clan might fulfill this obligation. In the case of Judah and Tamar, it involved the father-in-law,¹² and Boaz, only a relative of Ruth, took her to be his wife; thus they fulfilled the obligation of the Levirate.¹³ We note that in both these cases it was in contradiction to the Mosaic legislation, which specifically designated the brother. It must be remembered that the Levirate was in use long before the legislation

¹⁰The Interpreter's Bible, p. 479.

¹¹Epstein, op. cit., p. 78.

¹²Cf. Gen. 38.

¹³Ruth 3:2.

in Deuteronomy came into being.

The desire for an heir

We observed in the preceding chapter that polygamy found its most important justification in the desire of a man for an heir. In line with that thought, many men took a second wife for themselves in the hope of bearing offspring by her. This reason also influenced the Levirate and is one of the primary reasons for its existence. What was to be done in a case where a man dies childless? There would be no opportunity for his name to be carried on, and he would go down in Hebrew records as childless. Each family wanted its name to be carried on, and the first and primary purpose which marriage served was the begetting of children, according to Hebrew thinking.

If the man were to die before he had offspring, some solution would have to be found whereby children could be secured for him who would carry on the family name. As we observed before, the patriarchal family was a closely knit unit, and therefore they regarded it as a solemn obligation to provide means for bearing children for the deceased man. The brethren of the deceased man were chosen for this task, and their obligation was to perform the duty of the deceased brother toward the widow. We note that it is spoken of in the Old Testament as a duty, and from this we can judge its importance. The widow was to be taken by another, that by this man she might bear a child for her

dead husband. The first-born child by such a relationship "should succeed in the name of the brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel."¹⁴ By this means the brother's name would be carried on. Only the first-born child was to be accounted to the dead brother, however; the remaining children by such a marriage were to be named among the children of the man performing the duty of the Levirate.

The importance of carrying on a man's name can be seen even in the promises given to Abraham and his seed. Because the blessing of God upon His chosen people was carried through the generations, a child was important; it was the only means of continuing his line and the blessing that God might give to it. Such was the promise given to David, when God spoke to him through the prophet Nathan, saying, "When thy days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish his kingdom."¹⁵

The Levirate could also solve another problem. If a man were to marry and find his wife unable to bear a child for him, he might take a second wife. If the man himself proved to be sterile, then the only opportunity for his name to continue was through the Levirate after his death. The possibility of this, however, must have been limited

¹⁴Deut. 25:6.

¹⁵II Sam. 7:12.

and practical only in those cases where a man died young and left a wife still capable of child-bearing. This thought, however, is in line with the Levirate, for it, too, has as its purpose the bearing of children, which would only be possible in those cases where the widow was still fruitful.

In cases where a woman was beyond the age of child-bearing, it was the usual practice for her to return to her own family. Such was the case with Naomi.¹⁶

In this connection, the case of Judah and Tamar might also be considered. Judah's eldest son, Er had died and left his widow, Tamar, without a child. Onan, the second son of Judah is to fulfill the duty of Levirate towards her, but he fails in this, that even though there was intercourse, he prevented Tamar from conceiving. Onan knew that the first-born child would not be his, and desiring a better place in the family for himself, he kept Tamar from bearing a child. His punishment was death. Since Judah refused to give his one remaining son to Tamar, she played the harlot by disguising herself and became pregnant by Judah himself. Thereby she bore a child for her deceased husband.¹⁷

We can see from these examples that in Hebrew thinking a widow was performing her duty by securing an heir for her deceased husband. Even if the method was not in

¹⁶Ruth 1:12.

¹⁷Gen. 38:1-27.

accordance with the Levirate law, she felt the obligation to provide an heir for her dead husband.¹⁸

Thus the Levirate offered not only a partial solution to the problem of a descendant, but also furthered the cause of polygamy if the brother who was to act as levir had already been married.

The problem of inheritance

The laws of Hebrew inheritance, as we would expect, decreed that the son was the first heir to the father's property. Next in succession are daughters, brothers of the deceased, and after that his father and his brothers.¹⁹ Therefore, if a man died without issue, his estate would no longer remain in his name, but would go to another member of the family or clan. The Levirate, by providing an offspring where possible, also solved this problem. It is interesting to note that the brother acting as levir obtained little out of this arrangement. The first child was not his, and the land of the deceased brother went to the child that was born of the Levirate. It was purely an obligation upon the part of the living brothers. The important thing was to keep the land within the family, so that it remained with the Hebrew people.

¹⁸David R. Mace, Hebrew Marriage (London: The Epworth Press, 1953), p. 102.

¹⁹Num. 27:8-11.

The Hebrew people regarded Canaan as a gift from God, and each family was responsible for a certain portion of that land. According to the Levirate, then, it was the sacred duty of the brother to safeguard the land of the deceased, that it remain with the family.²⁰

The Levirate expressed itself under several modifications. One of these arose in connection with the land problem. It was possible that for one reason or another the land might fall into the hands of others. In such a case it was the duty of the next of kin to redeem the land and bring it back into the family. This was known as *ge'ullah*, and the one who redeemed the land was known as the *goel*, or redeemer.²¹

Most of our information in regard to this practice comes from the Book of Ruth. Elimelech, Naomi's husband, has died, and there are no direct heirs. Naomi is left in charge of the estate, and since there are no prospects for remarriage under the Levirate for her two daughters-in-law, she sends them back to their homes. Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi and remains on the Elimelech estate. Ruth finds Boaz, who is willing to marry her, and after obtaining permission from the one who was nearer of kin, the transaction is completed. Boaz takes the land, marries Ruth and assumes the responsibility for Naomi too. Thus

²⁰Mace, op. cit., p. 106.

²¹Ibid.

he acts as goel, or redeemer of the land and keeps it in the same family.

The protection of widowhood

This practice was also a modification of the original Levirate. It also falls under the modification of the Levirate known as ge'ullah. The widow went with the property, and thus if a man wished to redeem the land, he was also obliged to take the widow along with it. It was possible for the widow to return to her own family,²² hence this reason for the Levirate must be considered as only incidental.²³

The Loosing of the Shoe

Although the Levirate was a duty to be performed, and in most cases obligatory, there was a way for a man to refuse his brother's wife if he found it undesirable to accept her into his household. Such might be the case if he were unable to support her or if it might cause conflict in his own family. This was done by a process known as the loosing of the shoe.

When a man refused to assume the position of levir, the wife of the deceased brother was to go to the elders of the city and tell them that her brother-in-law had

²²Lev. 22:13; Ruth 1:8.

²³Epstein, op. cit., p. 86f.

refused to perform the duty of a brother. The elders of the city then called the brother and examined him in this matter. If such was his intent, then the widow was to come and take his shoe off and spit in his face and say to him, "So shall it be done to that man who will not build up his brother's house." From that time on, his name in Israel was to be known as "the house of him that hath his shoe loosed."²⁴

The taking off of the shoe was an ancient transaction in Israel and arose from the fact that whenever a person took possession of property, he did so by walking on it and claiming his right of possession by standing on it. In this way, the taking off of the shoe became a sign that a man renounced his position and the property involved. With the Levirate, this meant the widow.²⁵

It was a disgrace to the man, since he refused to take his position, and it was made even worse by the fact that his sister-in-law spat in his face, a sign of contempt.

We have an example of this in the Book of Ruth; however the spitting in the face apparently has been eliminated.²⁶ Since this account is a modification of the original Levirate, it might well be that this practice was eliminated because of the fact that ge'ullah, or redemption,

²⁴Deut. 25:7-10.

²⁵Keil and Delitzsch, op. cit., p. 433.

²⁶Ruth 4:7-9.

was not required by law and was simply a service performed by the brother or relative of the deceased.

Problems of the Levirate

The Levirate was an old institution and, in the course of time, underwent many modifications. When this is considered along with the fact that there are so few references to the practice, many problems arise for us today when we consider the Levirate.

According to the Levirate, the widow was to marry her brother-in-law. Yet we are told that, "If a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing; he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness."²⁷ This is apparently in conflict with the Levirate situation, and the Levirate must have been a divinely ordained exception to this law.

According to the Levirate, the first-born was to be accounted the child of the deceased brother. But in the genealogy found in Matthew, the children of both Tamar and Ruth are reckoned according to their Levirate father.²⁸

In the Book of Numbers, provision is made for the division of a man's property after his death, and no mention is made of the Levirate.²⁹

In the account of Ruth, Naomi is pictured as having

²⁷Lev. 18:16.

²⁸Tamar and Judah: Matt. 1:3; Ruth and Boaz: Matt. 1:5.

²⁹Num. 27:8-11.

possession of the land belonging to her deceased husband. The Levirate makes no allowances for women possessing property.

We are also told that after the death of a widow's husband, she may return to her father's house.³⁰ Perhaps a widow had the option of staying with her husband's brethren or returning to her father's house, especially in cases where the woman was beyond the age of child-bearing and unable to bring forth offspring for her deceased husband, even by the Levirate.

These problems have little bearing on our subject and therefore will be left unanswered in this thesis. Our task is to show that the Levirate, under certain circumstances could bring about a situation of enforced polygamy. This the author has attempted to show by presenting the Levirate situation in that relationship and by elaborating on it for the benefit of the reader.

It was an ancient practice that underwent many changes and modifications in the course of time, and a study of it in full detail would be too involved as well as too far afield for presentation in this thesis.

³⁰Lev. 22:13.

CHAPTER IV

CONCUBINAGE

The History of Concubinage

In our discussion so far, we have considered wives taken by a man through process of legitimate marriage. In review, these fall into two types: (a) The wife of a man's choice, either the head wife who was usually taken first and held higher than others by the male, or secondary wives taken for procreation of children and heirs; (b) The wife obtained by marriage in fulfillment of the Levirate.

In addition to these two types taken in legitimate marriage, a man might have additional women in his household known as concubines. The concubine can be distinguished from these two previous types by two basic differences: (a) They occupied a position of inferiority in the household and usually shared in neither the possessions nor inheritance of the male to whom they were attached; (b) They were not taken through a marriage ceremony. A woman entering into an agreement with a man for sexual companionship was called a concubine; women taken as captives during wars, female slaves or women taken in satisfaction of debts might also be called concubines.¹ This would be true

¹Note: The Hebrew has two words used in reference to the concubine relationship, pilegsh, usually translated as "concubine," and amah, meaning "maid-servant."

if any of them were chosen by the male as suitable sexual companions.

The exact position of a woman in the household is at times confused, but in order of their importance, the women with whom a male established relationships might be classified as follows: (a) The queen-wife, usually head of the household and favorite of the master;² (b) The lawful wife, sharing the same privileges as the queen-wife and legally of the same status but lacking the esteem of the queen-wife;³ (c) The concubine, a free woman who willingly entered into a sexual relationship with a male on a permanent basis; (d) The captive-wife concubine, usually chosen by the male after a battle and brought back to his household; (e) The slave-wife, also known as a concubine, who was either taken in slavery or else the daughter of a slave.⁴

Pilegesh seems to imply a free woman who chose to become a concubine (Jdgs. 19:1), while amah refers to a woman bought or owned either by the husband or wife (Ex. 21:7-8; Gen. 30:3). Strictly speaking a distinction should be made between the pilegesh and the amah. Since their relationship to the male is similar, however, we shall consider the amah as well as the pilegesh as concubines in our discussion in this chapter. We shall use the term concubine as describing all the modifications of the legitimate marriage where a definite and permanent sexual relationship can be established between the male and the female.

²Cf. Hannah, I Sam. 1:5.

³Cf. Peninnah, I Sam. 1:5-6.

⁴The order of this classification has been essentially taken from Louis M. Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and in the Talmud (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, c.1942), p. 35.

The Levirate wife is separate from these and not listed among them, since her position was different from these women who were actually chosen by the male.

In addition to the previously mentioned types of female companions, a man occasionally had a Hebrew woman in his household who had been taken in payment for a debt. Her exact position in relationship to the other women is not known; a further discussion of this case can be found in a later section of this chapter.

The exact origin on concubinage as we have outlined it and as it existed in Biblical times is difficult to determine. The Bible contains few laws regulating concubinage, and the concubine is usually mentioned in narrative portions of the Old Testament. The first reference to concubinage that is found is recorded in the account of Abraham who came to Canaan with a concubine as well as a wife.⁵ It is likely that he found this institution established in the Babylonian country and that he took its practice from those people.⁶

It does, however, form an important part of the polygamous marriage conditions which existed in Old Testament times, and we shall therefore turn our attention to the various manifestations of concubinage as types of the polygamous relationship.

⁵Gen. 22:24.

⁶Epstein, op. cit., p. 35.

The Free-Woman Concubine

The distinguishing feature of this type of concubine is that she is a free woman and not bound by ties of slavery or bondage to the male. There seems to be little evidence to show why this situation existed. Logic would seem to indicate the inadequacy of such a situation. If a woman were free, it would seem most natural that her desire would be for a husband and a legitimate marriage. If the woman were such that she played the harlot, again it would seem that in such a case she would not desire a permanent relationship with one man, but would prefer her freedom. If the woman needed a position in a family for the sake of her support or other bodily needs or to avoid reproach in the community, the most reasonable answer would seem to lie in service to a family as a bondwoman or as a slave, with services given in return for support.

Although there is little material to show us the exact position of this type of concubine, in view of the remarks in the previous paragraph, the author feels that this particular relationship was little more than legalized prostitution. It would seem that such a situation could only come about under the following circumstances or circumstances reasonably similar. A man would find a woman who appeared attractive to him and whose feelings were similar to his. Marriage would be possible under such circumstances, but marriage might present problems for

the male, since it might cause conflict with his previous wife or wives and also complicate the matter of inheritance. The woman involved might possibly be from a lower social status, in which case a marriage between the two would be objectionable to the male's relatives. It must be remembered that polygamy was usually a practice of the rich, and concubinage is also found only among those who can afford the additional expense of extra women. If such were the circumstances, then concubinage might have been the answer. In concubinage the male would escape the responsibilities of an additional legitimate wife and conflict at home; the difference in social position would be acceptable to other members of the family or clan; and the problem of inheritance would be solved, for, since in most instances the concubine was not counted among the heirs, there would be no problem to begin with.

For the female there would also be advantages. She would have the opportunity to obtain for herself a position in life where material goods might be greater and living conditions easier. Since concubinage was a relationship as permanent as marriage itself, the woman would have gained for her entire life. Even if the male were to die, she could either return to her home or stay on the estate as part of the man's possessions. Even a slave wife was entitled to this, as we shall see later.

Therefore, an agreement was established, where the

two parties agreed to sexual companionship and satisfaction and continued support for the female for the rest of her life. It involved the privileges of marriage without all of its responsibilities. Since some agreement must have been established, however, the concubine was a sort of wife, but on a lower or inferior level. The entire arrangement is hardly a step above actual prostitution, except that the male supported the woman involved and kept her as a part of his estate.

The fact that concubinage was a type of inferior marriage and the woman involved actually a wife but of lower degree, can be seen from some of the legislation recorded concerning concubinage.

The offspring of concubines were counted as children in the family, but inferior to offspring of the male by a legitimate wife.⁷

If there were no legitimate children, then the children of the concubine became the heirs. This can be seen in the lament of Abraham over the childlessness of Sarah and the possibility of another one born in his house becoming heir.⁸

It was also customary to give the offspring of concubines a small part of the estate in the form of a gift. Thus Abraham sent away the children of his concubines

⁷I Chron. 2:46,48.

⁸Gen. 25:6.

with a gift,⁹ and Jephthah, the son of Gilead was cast out by his brothers so that he would not claim a part of the estate.¹⁰

Even when a concubine was not taken over by the son of the male involved, at his death, yet she was kept and cared for. Such was the case with Ishboshet, who cared for the concubines of Saul.¹¹

Since she was considered a part of an inferior marriage, adultery with her brought about penalties similar to those for a legitimate wife. When a concubine was violated by another man, she was to be set aside. Such was the case with the concubines of David,¹² and when Reuben lay with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine,¹³ it was spoken of as defiling his father's bed.¹⁴ Levitical law also required an investigation when a man lay with a female slave.¹⁵ If she had not been freed, only a small sacrifice must be given for the offense. If she had been freed, then "she is a concubine and contact with her constitutes adultery".¹⁶

⁹Gen. 25:6.

¹⁰Judg. 11:2.

¹¹II Sam. 3:7.

¹²II Sam. 20:3.

¹³Gen. 35:22.

¹⁴Gen. 49:4.

¹⁵Lev. 19:20.

¹⁶Epstein, op. cit., p. 51.

The penalty for lying with a betrothed or married woman was death.¹⁷ Yet both Reuben and Absalom lay with their father's concubines without a death penalty.¹⁸

The cases of Reuben and Absalom reflect the older law, when the concubine after her husband's death went over to the harem of his son, who succeeded to the headship of the family. In cases of rebellion, the son showed his conquest by taking over the concubines of his father. Reuben and Absalom were both pretenders to headship of the family in their fathers' lifetimes. It was rebellion. Victory would have given them the right to the concubines in the same manner as would natural succession.¹⁹

Thus we see that these were the exceptions, and the events took place in a period of Jewish history when such a practice was not frowned upon.

In summary, the concubine can be considered as a wife of lesser degree, taken by agreement instead of by marriage contract.

The Captive-Wife Concubine

In actuality, the free-woman concubine is the concubine in the true sense of the word, and the Hebrew language has a special term for her.²⁰ Several other types of relationships existed among the Hebrews, however, which bore the same identifying marks as the concubine, namely

¹⁷Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24.

¹⁸Reuben: Gen. 35:22; Absalom: II Sam. 16:22.

¹⁹Epstein, op. cit., p. 51.

²⁰Supra, p. 42, footnote "1".

the lack of a marriage contract and exclusion from all rights of inheritance. These were the captive-wife and the slave wife. Since they fit into the general pattern of concubinage, they shall be considered here. Essentially the difference between these two modifications and a full concubine lies only in this, that the captive-wife and the slave-wife were not free women, but bondwomen or maidservants, and they had little to say when they were chosen by the master to serve him as concubines. Their relationship to the male is also more distant than the full free-woman concubine, and it is not equated with marriage, even in an inferior degree, since they were not free but under bond.

The Bible speaks of the captive-wife only once, in the following verses:

When thou goest forth to battle against thine enemy, and the Lord thy God hath delivered them into thine hands and thou hast taken them captive, and seest among the captives a beautiful woman and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldst have her to thy wife; then thou shalt bring her home to thine house, and she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her and be her husband and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will, but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her.²¹

It is difficult to determine from this single passage the exact status of the captive wife in comparison to the free concubine and the slave-wife concubine. The text

²¹Deut. 21:10-14.

speaks of putting off "the raiment of her captivity," which would in effect make her a free woman and of the same status as the free-woman concubine.

On the other hand, the text speaks of letting her go if her husband is not delighted with her, and he is not to make merchandise of her. This would seem to imply that in certain cases it was possible to sell a woman as merchandise; namely, if the woman were a slave. Since the text distinctly refers to this, it would also be logical to conclude that the captive-wife's status bore a similarity to that of a slave-wife. A slave, however, could not be sold to a foreign nation if she had been defiled or humbled by a male;²² but there seems to be no regulation in regard to selling her to one of your own race or people.

Thus we see the conflict. If she were of the same status as a free-woman concubine, there would be no need to speak of making merchandise of her. If she were a slave, then what is meant by putting off the "raiment of her captivity"? From all indications, therefore, her position seems to lie between a free-woman concubine and slave-wife concubine, and her status bore similarities to both.

It is possible that "She was conceived by law as only imprisoned and not enslaved."²³ There is also evidence that in Assyrian law, the captive was superior to the slave-wife

²²Ex. 21:8.

²³Epstein, op. cit., p. 54.

or maidservant,²⁴ so it would therefore seem logical to conjecture that the position of the slave-wife concubine was lower than the captive-wife concubine, and the free-woman concubine ranked higher than the captive-wife, with the captive-wife occupying a position between these two, bearing similarities to both, but not identical to either. Little more than this can be said about this unusual case recorded in Deuteronomy.

The Slave-Wife Concubine

The slave-wife was perhaps the most common type of concubine that can be found, since there are many references to her in the Bible and since she would probably be the easiest to obtain. To obtain the status of a slave-wife, a woman would naturally have to first be a slave and, in consideration of this fact, we find that two types of slave-wives are to be found in the Old Testament. The one is the slave taken or bought by the male to serve him; the other is the slave owned by the female and given to the male; an example of this can be found in the case of Abraham and Sarah. Sarah was childless and gave her maidservant to serve Abraham in bearing a child.²⁵ Both types of slave-wives occupy a legal position that is identical, except in the case of inheritance. This particular instance

²⁴Ibid., p. 56.

²⁵Gen. 16:1-6.

will be considered later. The Hebrew language, however, does have two separate terms which loosely show the distinction between these two types of slave-women.²⁶

We shall consider each type separately.

The slave owned by the male

It would seem logical that if a male found one among his slaves who appeared desirable to him, he could take her for himself and make her a slave-wife. Yet there are no such cases recorded in the Old Testament. The only reference to any event similar to this is the case of Sheshan.²⁷ Sheshan had only daughters, and he gave one of these to Jarha, his servant. This event, however, is of little importance for us, since it is not a male taking a female slave, but a female given to a male slave. There is one possible reason for the lack of such cases in the Old Testament; namely, that a male apparently had the right of intercourse with any of the female slaves that were

²⁶Note: The Hebrew has two terms to describe the female slave, shifchah and amah. Shifchah was usually employed to denote the slave that belonged to the wife and not given to the male, or a female slave that had no agreement with the male head for sexual relations (Gen. 29:29). This second description is difficult to maintain, however, since apparently the male had the right of intercourse with any of the female slaves. Amah, as we observed in note "1" of this chapter, refers to a woman either bought by the husband to serve as slave-wife or one given by the wife to serve the purpose of begetting children (Gen. 30:3). This cannot be stretched too far, however; there are as many exceptions to the rule as there are examples of it.

²⁷1 Chron. 2:34-35.

a part of the household.²⁸ There was, therefore, no need to elevate one of them to a position of slave-wife. It would seem, therefore, that a slave-wife concubine received her position by being bought by the male for that specific purpose. She is referred to as being sold or bought,²⁹ and there is no mention of a marriage for her. In fact, she was regarded as a possession and not a wife. This can be seen from the penalty laid down in regard to lying with an already attached slave-girl. It was not death, but rather a minor sacrificial offering.³⁰ The slave-wife is often referred to as a wife, however, although this is hardly a correct technical usage of the term.

There is also no divorce for a slave-girl. She is either redeemed by someone or set free.³¹

In the case of children, such offspring claimed little right of inheritance. If there were no legitimate children and no children by a concubine belonging to a man's wife, there might be a chance for inheritance, but otherwise they were not considered a part of family succession. That they would obtain some inheritance if there were no other offspring can be seen in the case of Abraham. He was afraid that Eliezer would inherit his possessions

²⁸Epstein, op. cit., p. 57.

²⁹Ex. 21:7-8.

³⁰Lev. 19:20.

³¹Ex. 21:7; Lev. 19:20.

and property, since he had no other offspring.³²

The slave owned by the female

The status of the slave owned by the female and given to the male is similar to the type previously mentioned. Usually, however, her purpose was to fulfill the function of child-bearing for the wife and thus produce offspring. Sarah, who gave Hagar to Abraham to bear children for her, is an example of this.³³ Children born out of such a relationship usually held a higher position than those born of a slave-wife of the male's own choosing, since the slave given by the female to her husband was her property and was serving her in procreation of children. A child born under such conditions was in a relationship similar to the Levirate. In the Levirate, the offspring had a natural mother and a father who functioned in its conception but who was not counted the child's real father. The dead brother of the father, first husband of the woman, held that honor, and his name was given to the child.³⁴ In the case of the slave owned by the female and given to the male as slave-wife, the offspring had a natural father, and a mother who functioned in its conception but who was not counted the child's real mother. The wife of the male

³²Gen. 15:2-3.

³³Gen. 16:2.

³⁴Cf. p. 31.

was "his fictitious mother."³⁵ This can also be seen in the words of Sarah when she gave Hagar to Abraham, "I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her."³⁶ Rachel, wife of Jacob was also barren, and gave her maid Bilhah to Jacob, telling him, "Behold my maid Bilhah; go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her."³⁷

There is also another difference between the slave-wife taken by the male and the one given him by the female. The slave-wife, according to Jewish law, was entitled to maintenance and marital companionship from the man, and these were not to be diminished, even if the male were to take another wife.³⁸ Yet, Hagar was cast out of the household. There is the possibility that in those cases where the slave-wife and the offspring endangered the status of the legitimate wife or would cause conflict in regard to inheritance, she would be cast out. The slave owned by the female was in greater danger of this, since as we have previously observed, her offspring were nearer in line of inheritance than those of the slave owned by the male. Therefore her position was the less stable of the two, and there was a greater possibility of her being cast out

³⁵Epstein, op. cit., p. 60.

³⁶Gen. 16:2.

³⁷Gen. 30:3.

³⁸Ex. 21:10.

than for the slave of the male.

The Jewish-Slave Concubine

The sentiment of the Jewish people was against taking a member of their own race as a slave of any kind. This was especially true at the time when the patriarchal unit or clan was in existence. Each woman was a part of a clan, and all members assumed responsibility for each other. There was, therefore, no opportunity for a Hebrew woman to become a slave. In addition to this, there is a law recorded in Leviticus against taking a Jewish woman as a maid or slave.³⁹

As the patriarchal unit broke down and as more people settled in cities, it developed that each individual assumed his or her own responsibility, and there was no more clan to protect them. Even in this period of time there is little reference to women serving as slaves. The possibility of a family selling one of their daughters into slavery for the purchase price did exist, however, but it must be assumed that such instances would be rare. The Old Testament recognizes women thus disposed of only as slave-wives, and not common slaves.⁴⁰ Since the woman involved was Jewish, it would seem more likely that she would be used to raise money through

³⁹Lev. 25:44-46.

⁴⁰Ex. 21:7.

legitimate marriage with its full dowry. There are only a few cases of Jewish women serving as common slaves, and these must have been exceptional.

Except for the Jewish woman who was sold for a slave-wife, there was little possibility for her to fall into the category of concubine. In those cases where she did become a slave-wife, no doubt the pattern of her life was the same as for any other woman in that position.

There are also two laws in the Bible which speak out against bondage of Jewish people. In Deuteronomy a restriction is placed on the length of time a Jewish person could be held in bondage.⁴² That period of time was six years. A later law is also recorded, in which the Jubilee year is established. This was celebrated every fifty years and also granted freedom to Jewish slaves.⁴³ It should also be noted that Jewish slaves were to be regarded as "hired servants" and not as bondmen or bondmaids.⁴⁴

The Importance of Concubinage

In respect to polygamy, concubinage forms an important part of this practice. It was a process whereby a man might have many women around him, although there was no actual

⁴¹Deut. 15:12, 17; cf. Lev. 25:44-46.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Lev. 25:40.

⁴⁴Ibid.

legitimate marriage relationship between the male and these women. It was a degenerate form of marriage and one that possessed many evils. Above all, it was certainly not in accord with God's pattern for marriage, and there is nothing that can be said to justify its practice.

In the Old Testament, there are several laws which relate to the subject of polygamy. It would also seem natural that these laws should be considered in this chapter. It is true that the Bible does not mention the word "polygamy" in this chapter. However, the laws which relate to the subject of polygamy are found in the book of Deuteronomy.

Laws Relating to Polygamy

Perhaps the greatest danger of polygamy is that it is a form of idolatry. The Bible often speaks of the various wives of a man. As we discussed in our previous chapter, the Bible does not speak of equal wives in the same way. While there are some cases where a man has several wives, the Bible does not seem to regard these as equal. In the other relationships, other differences arise from the fact that the Bible does not seem to regard these as equal. There would be rivalry over children, especially if one of the wives were privileged, as if the children of one of these wives were favored over the children of others. In fact, in many cases recorded in Scripture, there was a favorite wife who was favored and regarded as superior to the other wives of the same man. This was especially true in the case of Jacob and Leah. Leah was the favorite wife of Jacob, and she was regarded as superior to the other wives of Jacob.

CHAPTER V

THE PROBLEMS OF POLYGAMY

When we consider the complex situation that existed in the Old Testament, where a man could have many wives and wives of various types, it would also seem natural that under such circumstances there would be problems. It is these which we shall consider in this chapter. Essentially there were four of them, and we shall consider them in the order of their importance.

Rivalry Among Women

Perhaps the greatest problem brought about by polygamy was the rivalry that often existed among the various wives of a man. As we observed in our previous chapter, the women did not always occupy an equal position in the household.¹ While their status might be equal in name, in the actual relationship, often differences arose from the fact that a man might love one wife more than another. Or there could be rivalry over children, especially if one of the wives were childless, or if the children of one of them found greater favor than the children of others. In fact, in many cases recorded in Scripture, there was a favorite wife who with her children occupied a position in the household of the harem that was superior to that of the

¹Supra, p. 43.

other wives.² In other words, rivalry or jealousy might exist between the lesser-loved and the greater-loved wife in a household.

In addition to the several cases of this which we shall consider as examples, Deuteronomic legislation would seem to bring out the seriousness of this problem, for there is a law recorded dealing with this specific matter.

If a man have two wives, one beloved and another hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated, and if the first-born son be hers that was hated, then shall it be when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he shall not make the son of the beloved first-born before the son of the hated, which is indeed the first-born.³

Thus we can see that such a situation did actually exist under the practice of polygamy and that its consequence at times could even express itself in the relationship towards the children of the greater loved or less loved wife.

One example of this situation can be found in the case of Jacob, although the particular circumstances surrounding this incident are slightly unusual. Although Jacob had two wives, he had not taken them of his own accord, for he had been tricked into accepting Leah by local custom, which demanded marriage of the older before the younger.⁴

²Erwin L. Lueker, editor, "Polygamy," Lutheran Cyclopedia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 827.

³Deut. 21:15-17.

⁴Gen. 29:26.

After serving seven more years, Jacob also took Rachel for his wife, and he loved her more than Leah.⁵

One method of obtaining favor in the eyes of the male was to bear children by him. It was at this point that the Lord intervened and "opened the womb of Leah."⁶ Thus she conceived and brought forth four children for Jacob.

These were not all the children of Leah, but after the fourth one, we find the first reference to envy on the part of Rachel. This was so great that she told Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die."⁷ The problem can be seen again in a later statement of Rachel, after her concubine had brought forth two children. The second child was named Naphtali because, "With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed."⁸

In the case of Rachel and Leah, the jealousy was also found among the children as well. In time the Lord also opened the womb of Rachel, and her first-born was Joseph, who was loved deeply by Jacob.⁹

The jealousy and rivalry that existed between these two was perhaps intensified by the fact that they were sisters. That such could be the case can be seen from an additional

⁵Gen. 29:30.

⁶Gen. 29:31.

⁷Gen. 30:1.

⁸Gen. 30:8.

⁹Gen. 30:23; 37:34-35.

law regarding marriage: "Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her."¹⁰ In fact, the strife between these two sisters became so great that Leah told Rachel, "Is it a small thing that thou hast taken away my husband?"¹¹

In the conflict between a man's various wives, it seems as if the bringing forth of children did much to elevate a woman in the eyes of her husband. This was probably due to the fact that with the birth of an heir, the family name could be carried on, and the inheritance could be given to him. In the case of Rachel and Leah, children seemed to be of utmost importance in securing the favor of Jacob. In the case of Hannah and Peninnah, the one who bore the children was not the one most loved by Elkanah, their husband. Peninnah had brought forth several children, and the Lord had closed the womb of Hannah. Yet, Elkanah loved Hannah more than Peninnah.¹²

Nevertheless the result was the same, and the rivalry did exist between these two wives. We are told of Hannah that, "Her adversary (Peninnah) also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb."¹³ Peninnah is even spoken of here as her "adversary," which would indicate the intensity of the rivalry that

¹⁰Lev. 18:18.

¹¹Gen. 30:15.

¹²I Sam. 1:5.

¹³I Sam. 1:6.

existed between the two. So great was the bitterness of Hannah, that she "prayed unto the Lord and wept sore."¹⁴ She regarded her childlessness as an affliction and asked God to give her a son.

This rivalry did not only exist among wives, but even among a wife and concubine. This we find in the example of Sarah and Hagar, her concubine. Sarah, being childless, had given Hagar to Abraham that he might bear a child by her. And after Hagar had conceived, "Her mistress was despised in her eyes."¹⁵ Sarah herself realized her mistake and later complained to Abraham, "I have given my maid into thy bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes."¹⁶

Thus we see the greatest problem that polygamy presented, for with many wives also came the jealousy between them. The state of the women involved in a polygamous relationship was indeed not a pleasant one, and even in those cases where the family was religious, such as Abraham, Elkanah and Jacob, there was no way to resolve this conflict.

Neglect of the Individual

Polygamy also tended to degrade womanhood, inasmuch as she often was not thought of as an individual personality,

¹⁴I Sam. 1:10.

¹⁵Gen. 16:4.

¹⁶Gen. 16:5.

but rather as a man's property. The original concept of the woman as a helpmeet for the man is entirely lost when several women live together and share the same man. Under such circumstances, there can be little of that feeling of unity that should exist between husband and wife. When women are taken, merely to satisfy the desire of the male, or (simply) to produce children, how can there be any regard for a woman as an individual personality? It was only after polygamy had ceased to become the accepted practice of the people that the dignity of women was recognized. Under polygamy, the woman became merely an instrument or tool in the hands of the male, symbolizing wealth or labor, or fulfilling the self-centered sexual desire of the male.

The Upset of Numerical Equality

According to God's creation, there exists a relative equality of numbers between the two sexes. If polygamy were practiced throughout a community, there would naturally have to be an upset in the ratio between men and women. This seems to indicate that polygamy could not be practiced without conflicting with the original equality of creation.

This upset which polygamy could cause is brought about by two ways. Additional women could be taken into a community from other areas, and such was undoubtedly the case when women from foreign nations were taken by the Hebrews. Such an arrangement may enable one community to live in a polygamous relationship, but the area from which the women

were taken would have to suffer the upset of its numerical equality. The argument that in war many men died and thus women were available seems to have little evidence behind it. In such a case, losses would probably be heavy on both sides, and a surplus of women would exist in the conquering country as well as in that which was conquered, and it would not be necessary to invade other nations for additional women. If women from other countries were taken, the females who were in surplus at home would either have to remain unmarried, which would be an evil in itself in a society where an unmarried woman had little status, or else a man would have to take wives from his own people in addition to those taken in battle, which would not only be a financial burden, but also increase conflict by the addition of these wives, especially if they were taken from both Hebrew and foreign sources.

If in a community a small and wealthy group of men were to take a large number of additional wives, there would naturally be a surplus of single males. If it were impossible for them to obtain wives, it could well be said that a polygamous community could also lead to enforced celibacy.

Perhaps the worst feature of the system in its extreme form is that some of the men, for whom no women are available, are obliged to become eunuchs in order to act as the guardians of the droves of women who have become the exclusive property of their fellows.¹⁷

¹⁷David R. Mace, Hebrew Marriage (London: The Epworth Press, 1953), p. 55.

The Influx of Idolatry

Since many of the women who were involved in a polygamous relationship were taken from foreign nations, there was danger among the Hebrews that they would bring with them their worship of false gods. We have two outstanding cases of this in the Old Testament.

The first deals with Rachel and Leah. Although Jacob had taken the daughters of Laban, they were from a foreign country, and when Jacob left, Rachel took with her the images and false gods of Laban.¹⁸ Fortunately in this case Jacob remained loyal to the Lord and purged his house of its idols.¹⁹ Yet, in any situation where a man takes his wives from a foreign nation, there is the danger of false gods being brought with them.

This point is well emphasized by Solomon. He established a harem which consisted of about one thousand members. Many of these women were foreigners, people from whom God had told Israel not to take wives. God had even warned the people, saying, "Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods."²⁰ Yet Solomon did not heed the warning of the Lord and still sought after

¹⁸Gen. 31:19.

¹⁹Gen. 35:2.

²⁰I Kings 11:2.

these women, and in his old age, his wives turned away his heart from the Lord to follow after other gods. He even built places of worship for them and offered sacrifices to them.²¹

The result of Solomon's sin was that the Lord's wrath was turned against him, and the Lord decreed that the kingdom should be divided.²²

All this points to the danger of polygamy. For in taking many wives, there can be nothing else but rivalry among them. Their status as individuals is endangered, and the numerical equality of the two sexes is disturbed. And, if they are taken from foreign nations, they can even turn a man's heart away from the true God. All these shall be considered again in our concluding chapter, when we examine polygamy in contrast to monogamy to find what God's divine plan and ideal is.

²¹I Kings 11:7-8.

²²I Kings 11:11.

CHAPTER VI

POLYGAMY VERSUS MONOGAMY AS THE IDEAL

The Institution of Marriage was Monogamous

Throughout this thesis, we have considered some of the causes which led to polygamy as well as the many forms in which it could be found in Old Testament times. In seeking to determine which of the two choices, monogamy or polygamy, is the ideal, it is necessary not only to look at the situation as it existed in the Old Testament but also to examine the institution of marriage. When we as Christians speak of the ideal, we can only mean one thing, God's ideal, for what He has determined in His divine wisdom to be good or ideal can remain nothing else than that for us.

It would be possible, on the basis of the examples of polygamy which we find, to say that even if it did not hold the position of ideal, at least it must have been tolerated by God, for there is no criticism of it. This was one of the arguments suggested by those who advocate its practice, and since our purpose in this chapter is to examine the arguments of those who maintain its right, which were presented in chapter one of this thesis, we shall begin with this proposition, that polygamy was tolerated by God, simply because there is no criticism of it.

If we wish to be objective in our study, we shall have

to consider the beginning and institution of marriage as well as its practice in Old Testament times. The dirty water of the Mississippi river might lead us to conclude that is is acceptable for drinking, if we had never seen other bodies of water, or the source of this river itself. We would agree that such a conclusion would not be correct, since all of us know that the color of the Mississippi is not the true color of water, but rather water which has been polluted by mud and refuse that has seeped into it along its path. If we were to examine it at its source, we would find none of these impurities, and the water would be clear.

This illustration serves well to bring out the necessity of examining the beginning and institution of marriage in order to determine its true concept. The excesses of Solomon and others in their matrimonial affairs is hardly a fair justification of polygamy, since these cases represent marriage as it existed after a lapse of time, time in which there was opportunity for much pollution to discolor the original concept of marriage. We must go back to its original source and institution to determine its real concept.

God Himself instituted marriage in the very beginning when He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him an helpmeet for him."¹ And God created the woman from the man to serve him in this manner.

¹Gen. 2:18.

God also ordained that, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh."² We notice two things in this account of the institution of marriage.

It was God who chose to make an help-meet for the man; or in other words, it was God Who instituted marriage and formed the first woman from the man, Adam.

We also notice that only one woman was created. There were not several help-meets, nor did God think it necessary that a man have many women to fulfill this function. And the man should cleave unto this woman, even leaving his father and mother behind, and they shall be one flesh.

Therefore, God instituted marriage as a monogamous union of one male with one female, despite all examples of polygamy which can be found in the Old Testament. Monogamy was the original institution even from the very beginning, and no mention at all is made of more than one wife.

It is also interesting to note that monogamy received silent approval again at the time of the flood. For it was Noah and his wife and his sons and their wives that God chose to save, and all these people were monogamous. Thereby God indicated His approval of this type of marriage again, and if people would have followed the examples of Adam and Noah, polygamy never would have existed. It is

²Gen. 2:24.

the "muddy water" of the stream and not the crystal clear water that flowed from its source.

God's Ideal is Monogamy

Not only did God institute marriage as the union of one man and one woman, but monogamy is His ideal. The entire Song of Solomon pictures a monogamous marriage. The entire book of Proverbs also depicts a monogamous marriage situation, especially in the last chapter. If these instances are not sufficient, one needs only to turn to the New Testament, where Christ reaffirmed monogamy as the divine ideal.³

There is only one instance where a relationship with God is described as anything but monogamous, and that is in Ezekiel, where two wives, Aholah and Aholibah are mentioned.⁴ But this must be considered the exception, since in this instance the prophet wanted to extend his indictment over Samaria as well as Jerusalem, and the only way to do this was to give two wives to God in a marriage relationship.

Frequency of Monogamy Among Biblical Personalities

Those who advocate polygamy like to point to many instances of it among well known figures in the Bible. It is true that men such as Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon did live in polygamy, but there were also many others,

³Matt. 19:3-9.

⁴Ezek. 23.

equally as well known, who lived in monogamy. We have mentioned Adam and Noah and his sons. Lot, Abraham's nephew, was a monogamist, also Isaac and Joseph. Job likewise apparently had only one wife. Also the prophets, Isaiah and Hosea, are pictured as having only one wife. Little needs to be said in regard to these great figures. There is no indication that their marriages were complicated by the many problems that confronted those who lived in polygamy.

Polygamy, the Result of Degeneration

In this thesis we have attempted to trace polygamy from its very beginning in the Old Testament. As we examine its problems as well as its conflict with the divine ideal, we can reach some basic conclusions.

Polygamy was not a part of God's plan. It came about when men left the true God and His ideals. Such was the case with Lamech, a member of the Cainite division of the human race, of whom polygamy is first recorded.

Polygamy sprang from several motives, none of which were a part of God's intention. When women are taken to fulfill the selfish, lustful desires of a male, when they become simply signs of wealth or luxury, or even when they are taken with the desire for an heir, this is hardly the divine ideal. In the first two instances, it is degrading to the individual, as we have seen. In the last instance, it is an attempt to beget children by additional wives

instead of relying on God, Who alone "openeth the womb." It was God Who gave Abraham a child by Sarah, who seemed to be barren; it was God Who answered the prayers of Hannah and gave her a child. It indicates nothing else but a weakness of faith, and even the best known Biblical characters were guilty of this.

Concubinage is the expression of polygamy at its worst, and it hardly ranks above prostitution. There can be no excuse for this practice, and no justification can be given for it.

It might well be asked, "Why didn't God punish those who lived in polygamy?" At times God does not punish directly, but lets our actions be a punishment in themselves. God's punishment for polygamy can be found in the troubles and heartaches encountered by those who practiced it. In almost every case of polygamy that we have considered, there had been trouble and strife, and a disturbed home is punishment enough for those who wish to depart from God's ideal. This can be a lesson for all of us. God's ways may not always seem best to us, but they are best for us. If we do not wish to follow them, then we must also be willing to suffer the consequences, just as those who lived in polygamy had to suffer.

If there are still some who are persuaded that polygamy is acceptable, just because it was practiced by some of the great men in the Old Testament, they are welcome to that conclusion and also its consequences. If they follow the

example of Abraham, they are welcome to the quarreling of a Sarah and a Hagar. If they follow the example of Elkanah, they are welcome to the bitter tears of a Hannah. If they follow the example of David, they are welcome to the rebellion of a son, Absalom, and to the bitter cry of anguish, "Would God that I had died for thee, Absalom, my son." If they follow the example of Solomon, they are welcome to the many youthful wives, who may turn their hearts from God to seeking after idols.

The wise Christian will follow God's ideal, leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the twain shall be one flesh. For time will always show which of the two is God's plan and ideal, and time will show that God's ideal should be our ideal also, for it is not only our Lord's ideal, but also His institution, whereby we all must live.

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