

Marriage in the Bible

Have you ever been reading through your Bible and wondered about passages such as Genesis 4:19; *Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah?* Or how about this passage in Deuteronomy 21:15-16; *If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn?* Encountering such references to men with two (or more) wives and instruction from God concerning such marriages seems a little unusual and even out of place in the contemporary Christian culture. What comes as more of a surprise to some is that we even find God giving particular instruction concerning the woman a man may take in addition to a current wife. In Leviticus 18:17-18 we read; *You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, nor shall you take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness. They are near of kin to her. It is wickedness. Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive.* So we see that on top of the other restrictions which God gave in Leviticus 18:6-16 and which concern the relationship of the man to the woman, the restrictions in v:17-18 specifically concern the relationship of women to one another.

In the Bible we find accounts of men having more than one wife and there is no indication that God regards this as sin or any sort of wrongdoing. For example, in 2 Chronicles 24:2-3 we read, *Joash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest. And Jehoiada took two wives for him, and he had sons and daughters.* Jehoiada was a godly priest who knew and understood the scriptures and he took two wives for Joash. There are many such men recorded by name in the Bible with multiple wives and many of those men had more than two wives. The earliest recorded plural marriage in the Bible was Lamech whose wives were Adah and Zillah (Genesis 4:19). Even though Lamech is the only man identified with more than one wife before the Flood, there is no reason to believe that he was necessarily the first or the only one in a plural marriage. (A case in point; the first mention of sandals being worn by anyone in the Bible is in reference to Moses in Exodus 3:5. However, it's highly unlikely he was the first and only person to wear sandals up to that point in history.) The post-flood patriarchs continued to have a plurality of wives: Terah (Gen. 11:26; 20:12), Nahor (Gen. 22:20-24) and Abraham (Gen. 16:1-3; 25:1-6) all had more than one wife. While Isaac had only one wife, his two sons had several; Esau had five wives (Gen 26:34; 28:9; 36:2-3) and Jacob had four (Gen 29:23-28; 30:4, 9). And Eliphaz, the son of Esau, had two wives (Gen 36:11-12). In the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews, among those great heroes of the faith,

there are a number of men known to have had multiple wives: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, and David. These men stand beside other heroes such as Noah and Isaac, two men known to have had one wife, but all are given to us as examples of those who *obtained a good testimony through faith* (Heb. 11:39).

Some attempt to establish the legitimacy of a man having only one wife by using the creation account in Genesis, Chapters 1 & 2. They suggest that since God created Adam and gave him only one wife, this sets the standard or God's "creation ideal" for all subsequent marriages. But such logic is faulty, a naturalistic fallacy. It proceeds from the particular to the universal; from what is to what ought, without consideration of God's specific instructions concerning marriage, and can be dangerous leading to cultic beliefs and practises. For example, using that same line of reasoning from Genesis 1 & 2, it could just as easily result in the condemnation of any who don't follow a strict vegetarian diet since God told Adam; "*See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food*" (Gen. 1:29). Or it could be argued that all men are to be horticulturists because that is God's "creation ideal" for work (cf. Gen. 2:15). Indeed, so-called Christian naturists use this very same erroneous logic to argue against wearing clothes since God created Adam and Eve; *And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed* (Gen. 2:25). Such faulty reasoning speaks for itself. God doesn't require every man to be married monogamously, be a vegetarian, a horticulturist, or a nudist, having set these practises up as some sort of creation ideal. We only need look at the example of Jesus Christ who wasn't married monogamously, wasn't a vegetarian, nor an horticulturist, or nudist! To suggest He failed to live up to God's creation ideal is blasphemous. While it is quite true God established marriage in the Creation Week, as we read through the Bible we learn that He never says it's His creation ideal but rather, He allows some to remain unmarried, some to be polygynous, and others to be monogamous in their relationships. He doesn't condemn any of these relationships and each has its place and purpose in His kingdom.

While some might argue that David sinned in taking more than one wife, his sin was in fact adultery; taking another man's wife for himself (cf. Lev. 18:20; 20:10; 2 Sam. 11:3-4). When Nathan rebuked David for having taken Bathsheba, who was the wife of Uriah at the time, Nathan said to David; "*You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!*" (2 Sam. 12:7-8). David's sin was in taking the wife of another man to himself, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, not for already having the wives God had given him. At the time of his sin of adultery, David was already married to at least seven known-named wives (1 Sam. 18:27; 25:42-43; 2 Sam. 3:2-5). This failure by David is clearly spelt out in 1 Kings 15:5; *because David did what was right in the*

eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

It is also suggested by some that Solomon sinned in taking multiple wives, and this was in disobedience to the command in Deuteronomy 17:17; *Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away.* Solomon's wives did indeed turn his heart away from God but it was specifically the pagan women he took as wives, and not his Israelite wives that caused him to sin. In regard to Solomon's sin we read in Neh. 13:26; *Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin.* It must be noted that the Hebrew word used in regard to multiplying wives in Deuteronomy 17:17 is used for multiplying horses in Deuteronomy 17:16; the Strong's number for the word *multiply* in v:16 & v:17 being #7235, *rah-vah*. No one today argues that a Christian is sinning for having two or more horses, however some argue that having two or more wives today is forbidden by implication of the command in Deuteronomy 17:17; a contradictory and fallacious argument.

From the beginning of creation the relationship of the wife to the husband is said to be that of the woman being a suitable helper to the man; God creating the woman for that reason. In Genesis 2:18, we read; *And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."* The prophet Malachi wrote similarly of the marriage relationship saying; *"Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant"* (Mal. 2:14). God established the relationship of the husband and wife as one where the woman is a companion-helper to the man. When Jesus answered the Pharisees' questions about divorce, Jesus said, *"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate"* (Matt. 19:4-6). Marriage is a union which God created for companionship and it is He who unites the man and the woman, joining them *together*. No man is to *separate*; that is, no one is to divide, part, put asunder this union which God has *joined together*. It is quite clear as we read through the Bible that marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman united by God.

But the Bible also teaches a man may have (not must have) simultaneous marriages, which is something our Bible-rejecting society ignores or rejects outright with many professing Christians even calling it adultery. However, if having more than one wife were in fact practising adultery, those who are polygynists; men like Abraham, Jacob, David, etc., could never be in the kingdom of God since it is written; *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers,will inherit the kingdom of God* (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Polygyny therefore cannot be adultery; God never refers to it as adultery nor as any form of sexual immorality, but Bible-rejecting people do. Thus, they set their traditions and opinions up as a higher authority than

the Word of God and they condemn others by those standards; condemning those God never condemns.

Before we progress, a question that one might therefore ask is; how are a man and woman married or, what constitutes the relationship where *God has joined together* (Matt. 19:6) the man and woman in marriage? Although Adam had but one possibility for a wife; Eve, and it was God who created her and *brought her to the man* (Gen. 2:22), how is a man or woman married to a particular person out of the many who they have association with in their lives today? As the eternal creator, God has authority over everything, including marriage, but He has given the father of the woman the right to either approve or forbid a potential marriage. We read in Exodus 22:16-17; *If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.* We see this principle borne out in some of the marriages recorded in the Bible. For example, when Abraham sent his servant to take a wife for Isaac from among Abraham's relatives in Mesopotamia (Gen. 24:1-67), the servant obtained approval from Bethuel, Rebekah's father, for the marriage. We read in Gen. 24:50-51; *Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you either bad or good. Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master's son's wife, as the Lord has spoken."* The only question for Rebekah was; when would she leave? (cf. v:58). Rebekah therefore went with the servant to be Isaac's wife. When she arrived, Isaac took her into his tent as his wife and consummated the relationship (v:67).

In Gen. 29:15-30, the elements are the same in Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel, although the marriage to Leah involved deceit on the part of Laban, her father. Each of the young women was given by their father to Jacob and Jacob in turn consummated the marriage relationships. The only difference being, Laban put on a feast for each of his daughters, which isn't indicated in Isaac's marriage to Rebekah. Jacob was free to take each woman to be his wife, and God blessed each union.

Marriage according to the Bible is therefore not a union created or established by any human government or religious organisation but by God Himself which only the father of the intended bride has any God-given authority to approve of or to oppose. It is important we understand this because some governments and religious organisations have usurped that authority, passing laws and redefining marriage contrary to what God says in His word. And although we are to submit to the civil and church authorities (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; Heb. 13:17), that submission doesn't extend into matters beyond the authority God has given them. Search the scriptures and you will see that in neither the Old nor the New Testament has God ever instructed prophets, priests, church ministers, or government officials to officiate in or authorise a man and woman being united in marriage.

In the Bible, marriage is only between a man and a woman and it is a relationship *by covenant* (cf. Mal. 2:14). This word *covenant* is crucial in understanding how God unites a man and woman so they are joined together to become one flesh (cf. Gen. 2:24). The Strong's number for the word *covenant* is #1285, *ber-eeth*. The possible

meanings are given as: "covenant, treaty, compact, agreement, an association between two parties with various responsibilities, benefits, and penalties." The marriage covenant entered into is an agreement or promise between the man and woman and one which God intends to be an unbreakable agreement (cf. Matt. 19:4-6).

The Old Testament has no single word for marriage. For example, in Numbers 12:1 we read; *Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married* (Strong's number: #3947, *law-kakh*; to take, lay hold of, acquire for one's self) *an Ethiopian woman*. The same Hebrew word is used in Deuteronomy 24:1, and is translated *takes*, but a completely different Hebrew word is used for *marries*. Deuteronomy 24:1 says, "*When a man takes* (Strong's number: #3947, *law-kakh*; to take, lay hold of, acquire for one's self) *a wife and marries* (Strong's number: #1166, *baw-ał*; to have dominion, rule over; to possess; hence own, possess as a wife) *her*... . This concept of the husband taking a wife as a possession to himself is carried over into the New Testament. We see this with the use of the reflexive pronoun denoting possession in a passage such as 1 Cor. 7:2, where the English words *his own* are used by translators to indicate this idea. In the uniting of the man to the woman, the man covenants or promises to take the woman as his own; to possess her as his wife, being her husband, and the woman covenants to be his wife.

In the book of Leviticus; in Leviticus 18:6-18, God gave the Israelites certain restrictions as to who may marry whom. The ungodly nations violated these laws and were defiled because of it. These are therefore the relationships God forbids and which are sexually immoral relations (to *uncover the nakedness of* is a euphemism for sexual relations).

- A man may not uncover the nakedness of any close relative (Leviticus 18:6).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his mother (Leviticus 18:7).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his father's wife (Leviticus 18:8).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his sister (Leviticus 18:9).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his half-sister (Leviticus 18:9).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his son's daughter [granddaughter] (Leviticus 18:10).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his daughter's daughter [granddaughter] (Leviticus 18:10).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his father's wife's daughter by his father [half-sister by father] (Leviticus 18:11).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his father's sister [aunt] (Leviticus 18:12).

- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his mother's sister [aunt] (Leviticus 18:13).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his father's brother's wife [aunt] (Leviticus 18:14).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his son's wife [daughter-in-law] (Leviticus 18:15).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of his brother's wife [sister-in-law] (Leviticus 18:16).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter [step-daughter] (Leviticus 18:17).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her son's daughter [step-granddaughter] (Leviticus 18:17).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter's daughter [step-granddaughter] (Leviticus 18:17).
- A man may not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her sister as a rival while the woman is still living (Leviticus 18:18).

A point to consider regarding Leviticus 18:17-18; if a man taking more than one wife was a relationship outside of God's will and therefore a sin; that is, a relationship like homosexuality or beastiality mentioned just a few verses later (cf. Lev. 18:22-23), why then did God specifically give these restrictions for relationships? Look at v:18; if a man having more than one wife is wrong, marriage to two sisters would be condemned anyway, so why is it mentioned here separately? Why didn't God just forbid taking another woman to be a wife the same as He forbids homosexuality and beastiality? After all, both homosexuality and beastiality were a part of the pagan culture of that time (cf. Lev. 18:24-30) and God simply commanded against His people being involved in those activities.

We find some of the restrictions given in Leviticus 18:6-18 even being applied to non-Jews in the New Testament period, so it is clear they have not been replaced or superseded. For example, when John the Baptist challenged Herod over taking Herodias as a wife, he said to Herod, "*It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife*" (Mark 6:18). John the Baptist appealed to the law; a reference to Leviticus 18:16, and made application to Herod's situation saying it was *not lawful*; it was not allowed according to God's law. Another example is Paul the apostle who referred to the situation at Corinth where *a man has his father's wife*, as being *sexual immorality* (1 Cor. 5:1). Since it is the law which reveals sin (cf. Rom. 3:20), we understand Paul to be referring to the restrictions given in Leviticus 18:8 or 20:11 on which to base this denunciation of a man involved in the sexually immoral activity with his father's wife. Also in 1 Cor. 6:9 Paul denounces sexual relations between two men (*homosexuals and sodomites*; i.e. both the effeminate and masculine activity) as

unrighteous and those involved *will not inherit the kingdom of God*. Sexual relations between men are forbidden in Lev. 18:22 and in 20:13. If something violates God's law it is a sin but if it doesn't violate God's law it is not a sin.

There are however, New Testament passages which refer to a man and his wife in the singular. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 each reference is to the man and his wife, or to the woman and her husband. In this passage Paul is responding to a letter he had received from the church at Corinth and is answering questions about the marriage relationship. Paul writes; *Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband* (1 Cor. 7:1-2). Sexual immorality isn't defined by governments, the media, or by apostate religions but by God's Law (cf. Rom. 3:20). Any variation on marriage between the man and the woman as God ordains, is condemned in the Bible. If we look again at the restrictions God placed on relationships in Leviticus 18, we see this plainly stated:

- A man may not have sexual relations with a close relative of his father or his mother (Leviticus 18:7).
- A man may not have sexual relations with another man's wife (Leviticus 18:20).
- A man may not have sexual relations with another male (Leviticus 18:22).
- A man may not have sexual relations with an animal (Leviticus 18:23).
- A woman may not have sexual relations with an animal (Leviticus 18:23).

In 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, God's answer to *sexual immorality* is marriage and marriage has always been between a man and woman.

But what about plural marriages, you ask? What about a man taking one woman as his wife and then taking another? Keep in mind as you read through the Bible that God never refers to such unions as sin but instead He even blesses them with children. When a man marries more than one woman, each marriage is the man to one woman. The women are not married to one another but each one separately and individually to the man; a union blessed by God - provided the man is not entering into one of those relationships forbidden by God (cf. Lev. 18:6-18; 20:10-21).

But do the words in 1 Corinthians 7:2; *let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband* redefine marriage for Christians and therefore forbid a man from having more than one wife? Although not seen in the English translation, the words *his own* and *her own* are translated from two completely different Greek constructions. The words *his own* are translated from a Greek word with the Strong's number: #1438, *eautou*; of himself. This word denotes the personal possession of the woman by the man; she belongs to him. The words *her own* are translated from

a Greek word with the Strong's number: #2398, *idios*; one's own. This word *idios* shows a sense of belonging to a particular person or thing; a word describing a noun which does not give a restricted number as long as it belongs to someone, or is properly or privately assigned. For example her *own* city is a city that she has a particular relationship with but it is also several other people's city. Saying, "I might miss my *own* flight..." *own* is used as a possessive adjective but it does not mean it is not another man or woman's *own* flight as well, provided he or she bought a ticket for the same flight. In 1 Corinthians 7:2 the apostle Paul chose to use two distinct Greek words conveying a difference in the proprietorship of the husband from that of the wife. In fact, the Greek words he penned, being guided by God the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Peter 1:21) accurately describe the relationships between men and women in both single and plural marriages. Looking at the context, we see that this instruction has nothing to do with Paul redefining or setting out new restrictions on marriage. Paul wrote this section of 1 Corinthians in answer to the question he received from the Corinthians about celibacy. We read in 1 Corinthians 7:1; *Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.* Because sexual immorality was a common problem at Corinth (see e.g. 1 Cor. 5:1, 9; 6:9-11, 15-18) Paul commands the Corinthians to be married and actively avoid the opportunity for sexual immorality to occur. In 1 Corinthians 7:5, he writes; *Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.* And in 1 Corinthians 7:9; *but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.* Paul isn't redefining marriage but is rather affirming marriage as the God-designed and rightful place for the man and woman to find sexual satisfaction and fulfil one another's needs. The means therefore to avoid sins involving sexual immorality such as Paul is addressing, is for every man to have the woman who belongs exclusively to him, and every woman is to have her man.

An important consideration to note is that Paul makes a distinction in 1 Corinthians 7:12 and also in v:25 where he introduces something new to the Corinthians. In v:12, he begins giving new information about a situation that has not been dealt with previously; i.e. the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever and what to do in such a relationship. He begins by saying, *But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.* Then, in v:25, he begins to give special instruction regarding virgins; *Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.* From the perspective of the apostle at that time, both these situations necessitated introductions as something new from the word of God. Considering the context, and with the references previously made in regard to the moral issues at Corinth; including sexual immorality, adulterers, homosexuals, and sodomites (cf. 5:1; 6:9), 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 doesn't introduce a new standard for marriage or redefine what marriage is, but affirms the marriage of the man to the woman as the rightful and God-ordained place

for finding sexual satisfaction. The construction affirms the male/female relationship without introducing any new restriction for marriage, such as a man not to be married to more than one woman at one time. Linguists generally agree that the phrase does not discuss the question as to whether one or more than one wife would be allowed. The language in this verse does not present an argument for either monogamy or polygamy but rather affirms the marital relationship as ordained by God in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

If there was to be a change for the Church from the Old Testament practises regarding whom a person is permitted to marry, the place we might expect the issue to be raised is when the apostles and church elders gathered at Jerusalem to consider the application of the Jewish law to the Church. In Acts Chapter 15 we have the record of the leaders coming together where, according to Acts 15:5, *some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."* While the Church leaders were gathered, it was affirmed that salvation for both Jew and Gentile is *through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Acts 15:11); that is, by grace through faith apart from any works of the law. However, it was also decreed that it is necessary for Christians to *abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality* (v:29). These are aspects of God's law; i.e. *the law of Moses*, which are applicable to Christians and include abstaining, or keeping away from *sexual immorality*.

But who or what defines the term *sexual immorality* here? Is it the state government, a religious denomination, popular vote, the movie or entertainment industry, or what? Could it not be God Himself who defines such an important term there in Acts 15, or are we to debate among ourselves and speculate as to what *sexual immorality* means? The word used in the Greek text is from a form of the word *porneia*, and refers to illicit sexual activity. The context tells us this is in reference to the restrictions God imposed in *the law of Moses* around sexual practise, in just the same way as the word *blood* refers to the consumption of blood forbidden in *the law of Moses*. Regarding blood, Moses wrote in Leviticus 17:10-12; '*And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.*' Therefore I said to the children of Israel, '*No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.*'

In the same way as God commands abstaining from *blood*, God commands Christians to abstain from *sexual immorality*; that is, abstaining from illicit sexual relationships or practises outside those God allowed in the first five books of the Old Testament scriptures. Simply put, what God established in the Old Testament regarding sexual practise, is applicable to all in the New Testament. This is what the

apostles and church leaders determined and was written in the letter they sent to the Gentile brethren (cf. Acts 15:23-29).

In spite of all we've considered, we find condemnatory statements in study Bibles or commentaries in regard to men like Lamech who took two wives. For example, in the Ryrie Study Bible, in regard to Gen. 4:19; "This bigamy was the first recorded violation of God's pattern of monogamy." Or in the MacArthur Study Bible; "No reason is given on Lamech's part for the first recorded instance of bigamy. He led the Cainites in open rebellion against God (cf. 2:24) by his violation of marriage law." Or one more; from the Holman Study Bible: NKJV Edition "...the description of Lamech's life paints a troubling picture of an individual who lacked respect for marriage or human life. By taking two wives Lamech became the first polygamist, a violation of God's intentions for marriage (2:22; Mark 10:6-8)." It is important we question such comments because, if the word of God doesn't condemn Lamech or others like him, why do these Bible commentators? If God blesses such heroes of the faith as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, and many others who had more than one wife, why do Bible commentators and teachers condemn them for something God doesn't? There is no such word as "bigamy" in the Bible; it's just God blessing each union of the man to a woman even when the man may take more than one woman in marriage. Proverbs 17:15 warns; *He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.* For those who condemn men like Lamech, Abraham, Moses, David and others for taking more than one wife, calling such action "sin" and speaking evil of them, James admonishes; *Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?* (James 4:11-12). The God of the Bible is the *one Lawgiver*; He is the only Legislator, the only one who gives the law and is *able to save and to destroy* sinners. By means of His law we can know what is sinful and what is not, and God never refers to a man having more than one wife as being an adulterer, sinful, or unrighteous. To speak against His law is to speak against Him - an act of high treason against Almighty God.

On a different note, yet in regard to redefining what God says concerning marriage, there is a lot of interest in Bible prophecy, or "End Times" as it is commonly referred to, among people today. This isn't new but with world events such as they are, there is a growing perception that something of significance in regard to Bible prophecy is going to happen soon.

One particular subject that has not received a lot of attention is the prophecy concerning marriage in the latter times; i.e. in these times in which we live. In his epistle to Timothy, Paul wrote saying, *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry...* (1 Tim. 4:1-3). According to data published by Bible

Gateway, after the US Supreme Court decided in *Obergefell v. Hodges* on June 26, 2015, that same-sex marriage is legal nationwide, searches on the website for "end times" climbed rapidly to more than five times their average. It seems people view the direction governments are taking regarding marriage, and in particular to the acceptance of same-sex marriage, as an indicator of the fulfilment of End Times prophecy. (We should note; the term "same-sex marriage" is an oxymoron since God defines marriage as the union of a man and woman.)

However, if we look at what is written in 1 Timothy 4:3, we see that this prophecy isn't concerned with the propagation of alternative forms of marriage and the acceptance of them, but rather *forbidding to marry*. The word in the Greek text which is translated by the English word *forbidding*, is from a root that means; to refuse or hinder; to prevent or cause something not to happen. It must be understood, marriage isn't what the same-sex marriage movement is campaigning to prevent but rather to have the right to participate in. They want the right to marry; not hinder, refuse, or prevent others from marrying. And a quick search of internet sites which promote so called "same-sex" marriages reveals no suggestion of any kind that they are trying to prevent others from marrying.

So what does this prophecy about *forbidding to marry* refer to, in 1 Timothy 4:3?

Paul wrote this epistle to Timothy in the first century while Timothy was in Ephesus sorting out problems in the church located in that city (cf. 1 Tim. 1:1-4). Paul wrote telling Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4:1 saying; *some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*. What we learn is that in latter times there will be people who will fall away or become apostate from *the faith* while *giving heed to* demonic teachings. These teachings will include a refusal of, prevention, or prohibition against marriage; i.e. v:3, *forbidding to marry*.

A question we need to ask therefore is; what changes have men made to God's laws governing marriage since the time Paul wrote to Timothy and which prohibit, refuse, or prevent marriage in these latter times? One notable by its influence is the Council of Trent where, in 1563, the apostate Roman Catholic church opposed plural marriage in the strongest terms. In Canon II of the Doctrine on the Sacrament of Matrimony, the Church declared: "If any one saith, that it is lawful for Christians to have several wives at the same time, and that this is not prohibited by any divine law; let him be anathema." In the Decree on the Reformation of Marriage the church banned "concubinage" and called upon the civil authorities to enforce this ruling by the severest of punishments for those who did not put away their concubines. The edict institutionalized monogamy, requiring all weddings to be performed by a priest, and adopted a belief that marriage so entered is both a sacrament and indissoluble. However, in spite of declaring marriage a sacrament, celibacy became even more sacred. Canon X of the Doctrine on the Sacrament of Matrimony declares: "If any one saith, that the marriage state is to be placed above the state of virginity, or of celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony; let him be anathema." With the political and religious influence its leaders had, the Roman Catholic church was able to institutionalise these changes to marriage with Catholics accepting and abiding by

them across the world. That influence has since extended to secular world governments were there are only a few that now accept plural marriage.

It is worth noting here that at the time of Christ the Roman authorities had passed laws outlawing polygamy for all but the Jews. Those laws were enacted in worship to the pagan goddess Juno, also known as the Queen of Heaven; a deity worshipped by the Romans and Greeks. For those pagans, Juno is the goddess of conjugal union and monogamy, and wife of the god Jupiter. The Jews were exempt from this requirement because the Roman authorities accommodated Jewish religious law which defined marriage to include polygyny. Therefore if Jesus Christ did teach a change to God's law regarding marriage; one allowing for plural marriage, and instead required strict monogamy like the Roman law, the Jews would not have had to find false witnesses to testify against Him so that they could have Him put to death (cf. Matt. 26:59, 60; Mark 14:56; etc.).

Many Christians today are probably unaware that Martin Luther would not forbid plural marriage. This is indicated in his statement: "I confess that I cannot forbid a person to marry several wives, for it does not contradict the Scripture. If a man wishes to marry more than one wife, he should be asked whether he is satisfied in his conscience that he may do so in accordance with the word of God. In such a case, the civil authority has nothing to do in such a matter" (Martin Luther, *De Wette*, II, 459).

Other Christian advocates of a man having more than one wife arose in the 17th and 18th centuries, most notably John Milton (1608-1674), the famous author of *Paradise Lost*; Martin Madan (1726-1790), an itinerant English preacher in the Calvinist Methodist movement and author of *Thelyphthora, or A Treatise on Female Ruin*, and Wesley Hall (1711-1776), brother-in-law to John Wesley and dedicated evangelist. Hall had the distinction of actually practicing polygamy and yet many churches and Christian evangelicals supported him and his wives throughout his ministry.

So we have come to understand from the Bible that marriage is a relationship defined and ordained by God where He joins the man and woman together. It is a relationship of companionship between a man and woman who are united by covenant; the woman being the suitable helper for the man. A man may be united by covenant to one or more women and God blesses those unions which are consistent with His word, and He blesses according to His mercy and grace. Proverbs 18:22 *He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the LORD.* Contrary to popular belief, nothing in the Old or New Testaments of the Bible proves that God has changed His law and made monogamy the only option for marriage. Our close examination of the many passages has shown us what God actually states in the Bible. Re-examining this issue can be extremely difficult emotionally, but we must not define right and wrong based on our emotions, but purely from the Word of God. Let's conclude with a word of wisdom; *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths* (Proverbs 3:5-6).