

Torah Portion: Acharei Mot/Kedoshim (Leviticus 16:1-20:27)

[The focus of this Torah portion series is family structure and function as revealed in Scripture. I.e., headship, patriarchy, marriage, etc, graduating to understanding the community and Israel as a whole. If you have not read other portions up to this point, you may want to, as parts build on previous lessons in Torah, available at: <https://natsab.com/torah-portion-series/>]

As promised in the last couple weeks, this week's portion will be a biggie. While Scripture as a whole and the Torah in general instruct and display God's plan of patriarchy and order in male-female relationships, the subject matter is not apparent in every passage or every chapter. There are many other topics and matters Scripture covers besides headship, patriarchy, and relationships in the home and marriage. Just as some passages are light on the material, others are quite heavy, and this week's double portion is such. Not only will we present a lot of direct material, but this portion will include multiple appendices swelling this into the largest portion yet. So, let's dive right in.

On multiple occasions we have discussed the role of the man as head of the home and as the priest of the home, he is a type of mediator. Further, we have discussed that man, as the head of his home, is a representative for his family in the congregation of the sons of Israel. This illustration is demonstrated in its two parts at the beginning of our portion.

Leviticus 16:⁵ He shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. ⁶ Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household.

Right here we see 'the congregation of the sons of Israel' and the High Priest 'mak[ing] atonement for himself and for his household.' While both concepts are spelled out more fully throughout Scripture and in previous Torah commentaries, we see the reminder that the congregation is composed of the sons who function as representatives for their families. Further, we see the man, in this case, Aaron, functioning as intercessor/mediator for his own household

before he functions as intercessor for the congregation. As such, he demonstrates the role of man for family before demonstrating the role of Messiah for qahal/congregation. Very interesting.

Recall Ephesians 5:22-33, a passage we have looked at multiple times, that gives Paul's instructions regarding the picture marriage makes of Yeshua and the congregation. He is describing what is pictured in Leviticus 16:5-6.

Moving forward to Leviticus 18, we encounter a passage of Scripture that is loaded with instructions related to headship, patriarchy, family structure and dynamic, etc. This whole chapter needs to be looked at piece by piece.

Leviticus 18 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘I am the LORD your God. ³You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. ⁴You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. ⁵So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.

While this passage is applicable to all of Torah, it is specifically used in an introductory fashion for verses 6-23. You will notice that the end of the chapter closes with a very similar statement,

Leviticus 18:²⁴ ‘Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. ²⁵For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. ²⁶But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, *neither* the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you ²⁷(for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); ²⁸so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. ²⁹For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people. ³⁰Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God.”

From this we can see multiple important points. Foremost, apparently, the sexual relations practices of Egypt and Canaan are quite different than what God expects of His people, and He is about to clarify exactly what those parameters are. Further, their statutes and judgments may be ‘legal’ according to *their* code, but they are not according to ‘My judgments and My statutes.’ God’s Torah reigns supreme and is the standard by which we will be judged. It also is the standard of righteousness necessary for the restoration of kol Israel.

Let us now consider the next section of Leviticus 18.

6 ‘None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness; I am the LORD.

This introductory verse has several very important pieces of information.

- The following verses deal with ‘blood relatives,’ therefore this helps define for us what God views as a close relative.
- ‘Uncover the nakedness’ *can* mean ‘look upon’ but generally means ‘to have sexual relations with.’ For example, in the list one is not to uncover the nakedness of a brother’s daughter. Well, this does not prevent a woman from changing a niece’s diaper. However, the same circumstance where a man or woman is looking at a young niece for ill intent, is indeed grave sin. For our purposes we will focus on the more general application regarding marriage and/or sexual relations with an older relative.
- ‘I am the Lord’ is the primary reason why. We are to be holy, ‘set apart,’ like Him, and this is what He desires for us to be holy/set apart.

7 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, that is, the nakedness of your mother. She is your mother; you are not to uncover her nakedness.

The ‘nakedness of your father’ means his wife. It was not uncommon for a man to work in a relative state of undress. It was not sin to see a man stripped to the waist or more, and **ALL** sexual relations between men is an abomination (see v. 18:22), so God is not specifying that looking upon the nakedness of your father is wrong... rather, this is a direct statement that the nakedness of a married woman belonged to her husband. It is his alone as we will discuss later in this portion. So, notice over and over, the real focus is in which females are out of bounds for sexual (i.e., marital) union.

In this passage, ‘mother’ is off limits. In western culture we regard this as a ‘no-brainer’ but recall, the Lord is giving instructions to purge from Israel the abominations of Egypt and Canaan.

An example of this sin is Genesis 9:20-27 where we find Ham taking advantage of ‘his father’s nakedness.’ This explains why Canaan, the son of Ham, is the one cursed. He likely was the offspring of Ham’s sin. [A side note: Some consider that it is *possible* that Noah’s wife was not Ham’s mother. She *may* have been a different wife of Noah, but even so, the next verse in our text covers this possibility.]

⁸ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.

In our previous verse we are clearly told, ‘the nakedness of you mother.’ This verse refers to a father’s wife who is not your mother. As alluded in the previous paragraph, Noah’s wife, if she was not Ham’s mother, would fit here. A better and clearer example is Reuben lying with Bilhah, his father’s concubine. Genesis 35:22 and 49:3-4 detail that Reuben had sexual relations with Bilhah who was Jacob’s woman, but not Reuben’s mother. His act was a violation of this commandment. A New Testament example of this passage can be found in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

⁹ The nakedness of your sister, *either* your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether born at home or born outside, their nakedness you shall not uncover.

First Chronicles 3:1-2 indicates that Amnon was the eldest son of David and Ahinoam. Tamar, Absalom’s sister, was the daughter of David and Maacah. Therefore, when Amnon raped Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-23), he was in violation of this passage. Siblings, whether full or half siblings, are off limits.

¹⁰ The nakedness of your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for their nakedness is yours.

This command places granddaughters in the off-limits category.

¹¹ The nakedness of your father’s wife’s daughter, born to your father, she is your sister, you shall not uncover her nakedness.

Rabbinic understanding of this passage concludes that it is referring to the daughter of your father and a woman he is unable to ‘legally’ marry. An example would be a man having relations with a Moabitess who could not enter the congregation for ten generations, per Deuteronomy 23:3. This is *not* a prohibition against a step daughter by marriage. For example, if your father married a woman who previously had a daughter that she brought into the household, that daughter would be eligible for marriage by the father’s son from a prior marriage. See the explanation in *The Schottenstein Edition, Interlinear Chumash*, pg. 739.

¹² You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's blood relative. ¹³ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's blood relative.

While these laws clearly prevent incestuous relationships that would cause inbreeding and potential DNA defects, they also prevent the potential for divisions being introduced within a family unit due to divided loyalties with the family. A woman with familial connections or loyalties with members of the larger clan or family unit might struggle with setting those aside to be loyal only to her husband. Challenges or disputes within the family would be considerably exacerbated by additional lines of loyalty and connection within the family.

¹⁴ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother; you shall not approach his wife, she is your aunt. ¹⁵ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness. ¹⁶ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness.

Again, each of these cases refer to very close relatives and the Father desires peace and unity within a family. The relatives are not necessarily blood relatives, but the familial connection is very important and to be guarded for the sake of peace and to avoid division within the family.

¹⁷ You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, nor shall you take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; they are blood relatives. It is lewdness.

Again, this command ensures the peace and unity of a family. A woman should be close to her grandchildren and any disagreement with or through the husband would quickly cause great division between the blood relation of the woman and her grandchildren. Culturally, we are already inculcated with the idea that this would be rather creepy, but the Father is clear in every relationship that He does not want division injected in a family, nor does He desire 'sexual knowledge' spanning several generations within a family. As a side note, before addressing the next verse, the forbidden scenario described above presupposes polygyny, or the man having more than one woman simultaneously. The significance will be apparent momentarily.

¹⁸ You shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness.

Very simple in its statement, this verse directly says that a man is not to marry his wife's sister if his purpose is to use her as a rival. In fact, marrying sisters is not a violation of this command. Consider Jacob marrying Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29). Granted, it wasn't his choice, but God never refers to this as sin. A careful reading of the story, without injecting presuppositional bias,

demonstrated that the contention between the ladies was because Leah bore children and Rachel did not. In hindsight, God was clearly at work to cause the circumstances for the 12 sons of Jacob to be born.

Another example of sister wives that is often ignored in Scripture is God's repeated description of Himself in Ezekiel 23, Jeremiah 3:6-24, and 31:32 as the Husband of two sisters who He betrothed while they were in Egypt. God would not describe Himself in terms that violate His own Torah or impugn His righteousness.

Jewish rabbis and sages have consistently viewed this verse in exactly this manner throughout the ages. A man may not marry a sister of his wife *in order to vex her*.

Now, several modern day scholars as well as a couple Messianic Torah teachers have tried to make big hay out of this verse as a prohibition against polygyny, but they are easily refuted. We are placing multiple articles and a refutation of one ministry's anti-polygamy teaching at the end of this commentary. Some are long, but they are well worth your time. While a difficult topic, it is very important to get this right because a correct understanding of marriage and what the Word says is foundational to understanding God, righteousness, restored Israel, and what is acceptable in His sight.

19 'Also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity.

While God made intimacy to be pleasurable, His primary purpose is procreation: "Be fruitful and multiply!" And, God does not like death. Notice all of his instructions regarding touching dead things and being unclean. Therefore, when a woman's body is sloughing off the dead lining of her uterus, she is releasing 'death' and is incapable of procreation. During this time, she needs privacy and those around her need not come in unnecessary contact with 'death.' God's instruction in this verse is to help keep everyone in a state of cleanness so that they are free to approach Him and come into His Courts.

20 You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to be defiled with her.

Adultery will be addressed further along in this portion. This verse simply identifies sexual interaction with the wife of another man ('his woman') as another form of defilement.

21 You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.

Leviticus 20:1-5 addresses this in more detail, so it is covered in more detail below, however, notice that this is mentioned in a list of sexual sins that defile, or as we'll see next, are an 'abomination.' The connecting point is that the 'seed' of the man and the womb of the woman

are not to be misused. Sexual sins of every type are rooted in misusing or defiling the vessels God designed and set apart for a particular purpose! Man's seed is *not* to be 'planted' in a 'field' he does not possess. Once that 'seed' is planted, it is to be guarded and protected until it comes to fruition. And, the 'fruit' is to be guarded! (When we get to the agricultural passages we will address the parallels to God's instructions regarding the seed of man and not mixing it in fields. This is why a woman can only have one husband, but a man can have more than one wife....)

A further note, regarding the connection to patriarchy: What father would kill his own children?

²² You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.

All of the sexual relations forbidden to this point are regarded as 'prohibited,' but none with the level of disgust that God addresses sodomy. It is important to note that this is a male specific command that involves male-male sexual activity. The penetrative nature of intercourse is by nature dominating. Sodomy is a gross abuse of God's authority structure by subjugating a man over whom the participant has no authority. Further, it is an abuse of the vessels God created and a waste of the seed He purposed for procreation. Basically, this is a complete defiling of the persons involved by defacing and defiling God's Creation. See Romans 1.

²³ Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.

While this is a perversion and a gross misuse of God's vessels, unlike the previous verse, it does not violate the authority structure. This may explain the difference between 'abomination' and 'perversion.' Both misuse God's creation, but only homosexuality violates His authority structure (i.e., man taking sexual/dominant authority over another man):

God => Messiah => man => woman (and then animals/rest of creation)

Continuing to the next section.

Earlier in this commentary, I showed how Leviticus 18:24-30 serves as a terminating bookend to Leviticus 18:1-5. Since Leviticus was presumably written before the entry into the Promised Land, these two "bookends" show the importance that God attached to the verses in between. That means that fathers who are patriarchs need to look at these verses and not only apply them within their families, they need to understand for themselves and train their sons that God's rules "trump" the customs and laws of the neighborhood. The peoples of Canaan were not in covenant with God, but yet He held them defiled. Then it follows that in our present place of exile, we

have to consider God's statutes as more important and greater worth for our families, clans, and tribes. Deuteronomy 30:1b-3 shows how this will work:

Deuteronomy 30: ^{1b}..you call *them* to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, ² and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, ³ then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.

From this, we understand that we must implement **everything that He commanded us, the sons of Israel, even while in exile!** That includes not just a proper order of headship in our families, but also the laws of sexual and marital purity laid out in this double portion.

Another aspect of patriarchy found in this portion is Leviticus 19:3 and 19:29-30. This is addressed to the sons of Israel who have children, especially daughters.

Leviticus 19:³ Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 19:²⁹ 'Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot, so that the land will not fall to harlotry and the land become full of lewdness. ³⁰ You shall keep My sabbaths and revere My sanctuary; I am the Lord.

I want to draw your attention to the parallels in these two passages. First of course, there is the concluding statement that "I am the Lord [your God]." That indicates these say something about His nature. Both statements also include keeping the sabbath (or His rest). The first clause says "Everyone of you [men] shall reverence his mother and his father." The parallel clause says "Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot". As a man's mother is joined to his father, so also should a man make sure his daughter is joined to a good husband and not allowed to be without covering and forced to support herself through harlotry. Numbers 30 further demonstrates the father's responsibility to and oversight of his daughter while juxtaposing the exposed nature of a divorced woman or widow who is not under the protective covering of a man. (See Numbers 30:9)

Leviticus 19 ²⁰ 'Now if a man lies carnally with a woman who is a slave acquired for *another* man, but who has in no way been

redeemed nor given her freedom, there shall be punishment; they shall not, *however*, be put to death, because she was not free. ²¹ He shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord to the doorway of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. ²² The priest shall also make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the Lord for his sin which he has committed, and the sin which he has committed will be forgiven him.

Here, in Leviticus 19:20-22, God teaches us about a different aspect of authority. A female slave who has been acquired by her new master has laid with another man. The new master has failed to protect his slave girl, but it seems that she has not been designated for anyone just yet. There is no hint of sexual assault here. Since the girl was not redeemed by her father or near male kinsman, nor given her freedom, she is not considered free. Therefore, she, along with her lover, are punished, but not put to death for adultery. That makes this fornication. The sin is entirely on the man who laid with her, and he's the one that has to make atonement with the ram of the guilt offering. Another aspect of this is that the girl's father has already sold her to another man so her loss of virginity does not hurt her father, but only her new master.

If a man should protect his daughter from harlotry, how much more should a man protect his children from being offered as a human sacrifice?

Leviticus 20 ² "You shall also say to the sons of Israel:

'Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens sojourning in Israel who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. ³ I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given some of his offspring to Molech, so as to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name. ⁴ If the people of the land, however, should ever disregard that man when he gives any of his offspring to Molech, so as not to put him to death, ⁵ then I Myself will set My face against that man and against his family, and I will cut off from among their people both him and all those who play the harlot after him, by playing the harlot after Molech.

While in the 21st century in the West, there is no overt child sacrifice to Moloch, there is abortion of our precious infants who never make it out of their mothers' wombs to experience life. There are people who glorify abortion and say that killing their child was "freeing". Perhaps so, but from the passage above, allowing one's child to be killed in the name of "freedom" is just sacrifice to Moloch in different guise. In short, Roe v. Wade was a monstrous affront to God's

love for all of His children, and like the Land when the Caananites lived there, abortion defiles our lands of exile. Judgment *will* come.

This next statute puts teeth into the “Honor your father and mother”.

Leviticus 20:9 ‘If *there is* anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him.

Cursing one’s parent is the opposite of respect. Even in a patriarchal society, the mother is due the same respect as the father. In fact, the argument could be made that honoring the mother **is** honoring the father based on the parallel that to uncover the nakedness of the mother is uncovering the nakedness of the father as in Leviticus 20:11. They are one flesh, and no distinction in reverence is to be made between them. Because the father is a son of Israel, being under authority to God, when a man curses his father, he is cursing God’s servant, and He will not allow this utter disrespect and has made it a capital crime.

In Exodus 20:14 we have the commandment “Thou shalt not commit adultery” and here in Leviticus 20:10, what adultery is defined.

Leviticus 20:10 ‘If *there is* a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, one who commits adultery with his friend’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

Adultery is ***always*** based on the marital status of **the woman**, not the man. Notice in the above verse, the woman is married, but no such condition exists for the man. (Related passages: Deu. 5:21; 22:24) As we have repeatedly seen in the Torah, God allows a man to have more than one wife (e.g., Ex. 21:10; Gen. 29 & 30; Deu. 21:15-17), but this example demonstrates that a woman may *not* have more than one husband. A woman is joined to a man as a ‘one flesh’ union for life. The man, as regulated and exemplified in Scripture, *may* have more than one ‘one flesh’ union. Consider again, God describes Himself in Ezekiel 23 as marrying two sisters. IF having more than one wife is adulterous, then God describes Himself as an adulterer.

Where both freely choose to engage in adultery, both are to be put to death. (If she is taken against her will, it is rape on the man’s part and not adultery.) Christian thinking in the 21st century follows muddled doctrine stating that *any* extramarital sex is adultery.

God’s Word teaches the following for consensual sexual relationships:

- A single man + single woman = One-flesh (married)*
- Married man + single woman = One-Flesh (married) *
- Single man + married woman = Adultery (Se belonged to another man)
- Married man + married woman (that is not his own woman) = Adultery (see above)

* Note: The man now has the woman as a wife and she is his responsibility. See Ex. 22:16 and Deu. 22:29. His marital status is immaterial according to the Torah. As with Exodus 21:10, he has taken a second wife. Adultery is covered in greater detail in the article titled, *Marriage, Adultery, and Christian Error...* attached below.

Much more that we could tackle in the portion, but significant meat has been placed on the table, particularly when the following related articles are added. I do want to extend a HUGE “Thank you” to Brian Somers who contributed directly to the commentary this week.

Blessings and Shabbat Shalom!

Appendix

Index:

- [*Marriage, Adultery, and Christian Error*](#) from Natsab.com.
- [*Should Leviticus 18:18 Be Understood as Prohibiting Polygyny? A Response to David Wilber*](#) by Jason Caissie, Jesse ben Yosef, and Brian Somers
- [*More on David Wilber’s Suspect Treatment of Lev. 18:18*](#) by Peter G. Rambo, Sr.
- [*Answering 119 Ministries, Refuting the Falsehood Hidden Within Their Polygamy Video*](#) by Peter G Rambo, Sr., Jesse ben Yosef, Jeremy Guiton, Brian S Somers, and Robin Hardman

[Marriage, adultery and Christian error...](#)

Posted on [December 25, 2014](#)

by [Pete Rambo](#)

****It is with much fear and trepidation that I post something I have been working on for weeks, as this post will prove to be **a very challenging post**. Some topics are so ingrained in our traditional understanding of Scripture that they can become 'third rail' topics. In other words, touching them can lead to big trouble. This is one of those topics, and frankly, I've never shied away from the hard stuff! So, take a deep breath and let's take a slow stroll through some recent studies I've had... i.e., this post is nowhere near final or exhaustive, merely sharing some thoughts and throwing things out there for discussion.*

John 6:60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

.....

John 6:66 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

May we seek truth, no matter how hard the topic, or where it leads...

Thanksgiving dinner at our table was the normal mix of banter and topics which included the ever present weekly Torah Portion. That week, as you may recall, we had the story of Rachel and Leah. Our discussion meandered through the story but turned interesting as we pondered various aspects of the proper Biblical perspective on marriage. Foremost, we realized that what we learned in the church and through Western culture may have some errors. This led me to further reading and thinking, and of course, my paradigms have again been challenged!

We must remember from the outset that the entire Word of Yehovah is true and unchanging. We must also remember that it is not a letter written to us, but rather, His Word was given to a particular people in a particular time/culture/context. We therefore should seek to understand it in that context and apply it accordingly in our lives.

So, here goes...

Christendom readily agrees that, as an institution, marriage began in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were 'put together' by the Original Matchmaker. [Scripture tells us](#) that they became 'one flesh' and we would understand that to mean 'husband and wife.'

²⁴For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

The first interesting thought here is, where was the preacher/priest/rabbi to pronounce them? In fact, ‘by the power vested in me (by the state of whatchamawhoozit), I now pronounce you man and wife’ is nowhere found in Scripture. The only Authority in view is the Living God. Here we see a great example of the state and/or church assuming to itself a power (the power to declare marriage) they do not own and have no authority over. Interesting.

Secondly, we see that the becoming ‘one flesh’ is the act of physical unity. Or, more graphically, sexual union IS marriage! I Corinthians 6:16 warns against joining oneself with another, even for a moment’s pleasure because it is ‘union.’

Do you not know that he who unites himself with a **prostitute** is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”

Even more precise is [Exodus 22:16](#),

¹⁶“If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her *to be* his wife.

More verses express this same understanding.

This simple fact alone should give *immediate pause* to any young people who want to put the cart before the horse. **Physical union is marriage** in the eyes of Yehovah. No preacher, priest or rabbi necessary.

This also helps spell out why the Sin of Peor ([Numbers 25](#)) was so utterly repugnant to the Father. Further, this explains why the Greek word ‘porneia,’ is used so much in the Apostolic writings as we are warned away from misusing the marriage bed for personal gratification.

A final point from this first passage in Genesis that is taught, but may be on tenuous footing, is the ‘one man-one woman’ understanding. Generally, the defense for monogamous relationships goes back to the first couple in Genesis. Before we can settle on that definition however, there are some serious hurdles that must be overcome.

I have already stated that ALL of Yehovah’s Word is true, unchanging and applicable. I would add that Yehovah does not command anything that He defines as sin. So, here is [a major wrench](#) for ‘one man-one woman:’

⁵“When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be *married* outside *the family* to a strange man. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and **take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her**. ⁶It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall

^[a]assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

Clearly, here **God commands** that in certain circumstances a potentially married brother is to take a second woman as wife for the purpose of fathering and raising up a brother's progeny. Further, not only is she 'wife,' but the fact that 'first-born' assumes a 'second-born' evidencing that the marriage relationship was more than a one-time event. Now, I know most point to the cultural context and time, but the situation is equally possible today... We must ask, 'Does God command us to do something that is sin?' I think NOT!

Even if we write this off as potentially unlikely and highly unusual, there is [another passage](#) still harder to dodge:

¹⁰ If he (*a man, see v. 7*) takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her ^[a]food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. ¹¹ If he will not do these three *things* for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without *payment of* money.

Essentially, this demonstrates that a second wife *could* be taken for whatever reason as long as the needs (food, shelter and conjugal) of his first wife are met.

For most raised in Western culture and/or a Christian paradigm, that last paragraph is troubling. We see multiple patriarchs and heroes of the faith with multiple wives and it is easy to write off as purely cultural. However, confronted with the fact that it is nowhere in Scripture EVER defined as sin, but rather is allowed by Yehovah with certain guidelines, we can get pretty squeamish! I did!

There is even [a prophecy](#) that *seems* to speak to the potential for just this circumstance in the future:

4 For seven women will take hold of one man in that day, saying, "We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name; take away our reproach!"

So, reading and research led me to consider other cultures and further define terms.

I thought as I began this study that the term for multiple wives was '[polygamy](#).' Actually, that is an 'umbrella term' that includes several more specific words:

- Polygyny: One man with multiple simultaneous wives.
- Polyandry: One woman with multiple simultaneous husbands
- Group marriage: Undefined group with multiple men and women.

- Bigamy: A person legally married, in the eyes of the state, to more than one person.

Interestingly, “in the global context, acceptance of polygamy is common. According to the [Ethnographic Atlas](#), of 1,231 societies noted, 186 were monogamous; 453 had occasional polygyny; 588 had more frequent polygyny; and 4 had polyandry.^[6] At the same time, even within societies that allow polygyny, the actual practice of polygyny occurs unevenly.” ([Wiki: Polygamy](#))

Scripture seems very clear that polyandry and group marriage are perversions, however, polygyny is acceptable, even if not the norm. Christendom might immediately condemn the practice, however it is fascinating to find David, ‘a man after God’s own heart’ with eight wives. Or, Moses with two. Or Jacob/Israel, four. Caleb, four. Gideon, many. Elkannah, two. Joash, two. And, a couple dozen more Biblical characters specifically mentioned as having more than one wife.

The point is this: Whether we like it or not, the Western, Christian/cultural stance on monogamy may not be so solid a case when compared to Scripture, particularly when compared to verses wherein God commands the taking of a second wife, if only for [Levirate marriage](#). In fact, one article I read was so brazen as to say, (paraphrasing) ‘If you are debating against polygyny, you better not use the Bible as your proof-text or you’ll surely lose.’

All of that led me to a very interesting adjustment in understanding ‘adultery.’

Modern Christendom, Western culture and American [Jurisprudence](#) seem to agree that adultery is a married person being involved with a person with whom they are not married. I.e., a married man involved with any woman other than his wife would, in the eyes of Christianity, culture and American law, be committing adultery.

Scripture, however, tells a decidedly different story. If you look back at the clues already laid out, you may have arrived at the correct answer. *An unmarried woman, and the married man involved with her, cannot, by definition, commit adultery!* Rather, if they are involved sexually, according to Scripture, she has become his wife. He may owe a dowry, but he has not committed adultery.

Scripture defines adultery as *a married woman* breaking her marriage covenant (one flesh) by being involved with a man who is not her husband. Both she and the man she is involved with are adulterous. Some [verses](#):

¹⁰ ‘If *there is* a man who commits adultery with **another man’s wife**, one who commits adultery with his **friend’s wife**, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. ¹¹ If *there is* a man who lies with his father’s **wife**, he has uncovered

his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death, their bloodguiltiness is upon them. ¹² If *there is* a man who lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed ^[a]incest, their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

Some older theological dictionaries do define adultery in these terms, however a simple search of modern thought reveals the wrong understanding that any married person having relations with any person they are not married to is adultery.

[Moorish Bible Dictionary:](#)

This was forbidden in the ten commandments; but neither there nor anywhere else is the sin defined. **It seems clear, that as far as the man was concerned, if he had intercourse with a woman unless it was with a married woman, he would not be charged with adultery, though he himself might be married; indeed how could he be when he was allowed more wives than one,** as well as concubines and slaves? If he committed adultery with a married woman or with one betrothed, both were to be put to death. Deuteronomy 22:22-24 . With the woman it was stricter, she must have no intercourse with any man but her husband. If a man was jealous of his wife there was the ordeal of the *bitter waters* provided to test her innocence. Numbers 5:11-31

[Fausset's Bible Dictionary:](#)

A married woman cohabiting with a man not her husband. The prevalent polygamy in patriarchal times rendered it impossible to stigmatize as adultery the cohabitation of a married man with another besides his wife. But as Jesus saith, "from the beginning it was not so," for "He which made male and female said, They twain shall be one flesh." (*I'll deal with the errant understanding of Matthew 19: in a minute*)

[The 1901 Jewish Encyclopedia:](#)

Sexual intercourse of a married woman with any man other than her husband. The crime can be committed only by and with a married woman for the unlawful intercourse of a married man with an unmarried woman is not technically Adultery in the Jewish law....

Now, here is something that is fascinating. It would appear that even in some ancient secular cultures the law was in agreement with the Torah definition.

[1911 Encyclopedia Brittanica:](#)

ADULTERY (from Lat. *adulterium*), the sexual intercourse of a married person with another than the offender's husband or wife. **Among the Greeks, and in the earlier period of Roman law, it was not adultery unless a married woman was the offender.** The foundation of the later Roman law with regard to adultery was the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* passed by Augustus about 17 B.C. (See *Dig.* 48. 5; *Paull. Rec. Sent.* ii. 26; *Brisson, Ad Leg. Jul. de Adult.*).....

So, to recap,

- An UNmarried man commits adultery only if he is involved with a married woman.
- A married man commits adultery only if he is involved with a married woman.
- An UNmarried woman cannot, by definition commit adultery, though relations equal marriage and she immediately switches categories.
- A married woman commits adultery if she is involved with anyone other than her husband.

Some are asking, ‘but what about the New Testament?’ And, indeed there are a few verses that need to be addressed, but first we have to again be reminded of the ground rules.

- The Bible is One Book, not two.
- The Word of God, like the Giver, is unchanging and everlasting.
- Yeshua and Rav Sha’ul (Paul) **only taught Torah** and in no way overturned anything.

γυνή v. παρθένος (gunē v parthenos)

[Yeshua said,](#)

²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Growing up, I was taught that looking at any woman with lust was tantamount to committing adultery. This was the proof-text verse. Only, with our new understanding of the definition of adultery from the Torah (married woman...) we need to go back and consider if Yeshua is changing [His Instructions](#), or if we have misunderstood His teaching.

Greek has multiple words to describe a female at various stages of her life.

- κοράσιον (koration) : girl, damsel, maiden (Matt. 9:24)
- θυγάτηρ (thugatēr) : daughter, female descendant or figuratively, daughter of God (Matt. 9:18 & 22)

- γυνή (gunē) : woman, wife, betrothed (Matt. 9:20)
- παρθένος (parthenos) : virgin, marriageable maiden who is pure (Matt. 1:23, 25:1)

In our above quoted verse, Yeshua specifically uses the word γυνή (gunē : woman, wife, betrothed) instead of other cited options. Strong's Concordance is specific that this word means 'married woman, wife,' while Thayers Greek Lexicon broadens the meaning considerably to be 'a woman of any age, whether a virgin, or married, or a widow.' Their considerable hurdle in this particular use is that [Exodus 22:16 in the LXX](#) specifically uses παρθένος (parthenos) and a penalty that is markedly less than the stoning that adultery demanded. Yeshua cannot overturn the Law without violating the [Deuteronomy 13 test](#). Essentially, Yeshua, who we see in the Matthew 9 passage understanding and using the various Greek words for daughter/maid/woman, was being specific to lusting after married women when He warned against *look(ing) at a woman (γυνή / gunē) with lust*. He said, 'γυνή (gunē)' and meant, as the Torah teaches, 'married woman.'

μία (mia) : 'one' or 'first?'

[Paul states,](#)

² An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Does Paul mean 'one,' as in, 'singular?' That has always been my understanding, but, is that understanding in line with Torah, Yehovah's everlasting Word? And, if not, what might Paul actually be saying?

Moses was an 'overseer' and was married to the [Midianite woman](#) and to the [Ethiopian woman](#). Is Paul demanding a higher standard than Moses?

David was a king/overseer who was married to eight... You get the point.

It is interesting to note that Paul says,

the husband of one (μία : mia) wife,

While generally translated as 'one,' μία (mia), according to Strong's Concordance, can mean 'first.'

G3391 μία : mia : mee'-ah

*Irregular feminine of G1520; **one or first**: – a (certain), + agree, first, one, X other.*

Thayer's, considered to be the better Greek Lexicon, says,

G3391 μία : mia

Thayer Definition: 1) **only one, someone**

Thayer does not like 'first,' as Strong's cites, but theologians don't like to back off of that as it damages their understanding of the ['first day of the week'](#) passages, which we have dealt with before. The result is theologians choosing lexicons based on their paradigm. Even if they choose Thayer's for the 'mia' use in this verse, they still have to argue past 'someone' to get to 'only one.'

Here's the point: If Paul was keeping and teaching Torah, it makes perfect sense that he advocated for teachers and leaders to still be married to their 'first (mia) wife' **precisely because that is what Torah teaches** (and, as we shall see, is what Yeshua taught). This in no way precludes a second wife, allowed by Torah, and indicated by [his further instruction](#) that the overseer's home is to be orderly.

⁴ *He must be* one who manages **his own household well, keeping his children under control** with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),

Matthew 19:4-6 is often quoted as a rationale for 'one man, one woman.' After all, it is Yeshua speaking....

⁴ And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ 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'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

The real challenge, though, is that Yeshua is not talking about marriage. In fact, He has been asked to give a specific ruling about divorce and His topic has to do with the impossibility of rending, by divorce, two who have become 'one flesh.' Here is the broader context,

³ *Some* Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful *for a man* to **divorce his wife** for any reason at all?" ⁴ And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ 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'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." ⁷ They *said to

Him, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send *her* away?”⁸ He *said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.⁹ And I say to you, **whoever divorces his wife**, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Yeshua isn't asked His position about marriage, nor can He even give an opinion contrary to the Torah. (See the previously established practice in the Torah.) Rather, He is specifically tested about His opinion/thoughts on divorce, and, in keeping with the Torah, He affirms that a man cannot put his wife away except for the grounds of immorality (adultery?). Do note that by divorcing her, **he commits adultery** precisely because he forces her to break her marriage covenant. Again, it is the married woman who holds the key.

Here are a few closing random related items before a final conclusion.

- It is very interesting that in at least two passages, Yehovah is portrayed as having two brides. [Ezekiel 23](#) is the most obvious with Oholah and Oholibah, but also, the entire book of Hosea portrays the wayward House of Israel as an adulterous wife in the image of Oholah. In both cases, the direction Yehovah seems to be pointing is the gathering of the two together into one family that walks in covenant with Him. Think, [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#).
- There is no test for a jealous wife in Scripture. Numbers 5:11-31 clearly articulates the test of the jealous husband, but no such test exists for the wife. Very interesting. It again points to the husband being able to take a second wife, while the wife does not have that option.
- Solomon, often pointed to as an extremely bad example, did indeed break Torah. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 definitively states that *a king* is not to multiply wives. While David was seriously pushing the envelope at 18, eight wives and ten concubines, Solomon's 300 wives and 900 concubines is beyond the pale. And, predictably, his heart was turned.
- Generally, Judaism rejects polygyny, however, it is my understanding that Karite Judaism allows a second wife *with the consent of the first*. And, while rare, there are cases of a shared husband among the Karites. (And, it is no surprise that the Karites do practice this to some degree as they seem to be most Torah centric in their praxis.)

For some other day, I need to study out the differences between ‘fornication’ and ‘adultery’ from an Hebraic perspective.

In conclusion, as I studied out this most challenging topic, I could find zero Scripture to support the several errors we see in Christian/cultural/Western Jurisprudence.

- Marriage requires no legal authority of the state.
- Marriage occurs at the moment of first sexual intercourse between a man and an eligible woman.
- The sin of adultery can only occur by a *married* woman and the non-husband partner she is involved with.
- Biblically, marriage can be more than ‘one man, one woman.’ I.e., One man, more than one wife.

I believe polygyny was less than common in ancient Biblical times, but it was never denigrated or regarded as ‘sin.’ Rather, it was something the Father allowed, or in certain circumstances encouraged. Certainly, we see Levirate marriage, but among other circumstances, may have been a great way that a widow with no son could be cared for. (Paul *seems* to hint at that in 2 Corinthians if I recall. Further, on a closer look, Boaz may well have been married when he took Ruth as his wife. Everything in that passage points to Levirate marriage. And, a deep loving concern for her well-being.)

Our Thanksgiving conversation touched on parts of what the research for this post confirmed. The bottom line that we came to was, **“In some cases, it may not be wise to have more than one wife, but it certainly isn’t sin.”** Frankly, that is a less than popular opinion in today’s Christendom, Western culture or jurisprudence, but such is the pursuit of truth. ‘What does scripture say’ and then, ‘am I willing to believe it?’

I know that this topic **has totally challenged me** as another paradigm has been broken. What does it all mean in today’s environment? I have no idea. But it is satisfying to wrestle with scripture and seek the truth, even when it radically conflicts with what I have been inculcated with. I pray this doesn’t stir too many waters, but rather feeds our desire to wrestle with the tougher subjects for the sake of truth.

So... Don’t shoot the messenger... What does Scripture say?

Discuss.

Shalom and blessings.

Should Leviticus 18:18 Be Understood as Prohibiting Polygyny?

A Response to David Wilber

by Jason Caissie, Jesse ben Yosef, and Brian Somers

This short treatise is a response to David Wilber's article "Does the Torah Prohibit Polygamy? An Examination of Leviticus 18:18," in which the author has given a handful of reasons why he interprets Leviticus 18:18 as a general commandment against the practice of polygyny, defined as one man being married to more than one woman at the same time. Now because Wilber promises us that an article in greater detail is yet to come, this treatise will respond primarily to his claims regarding Leviticus 18:18.

As a disclaimer, this response should not be taken as an overt support of polygyny; rather, it is simply a scholastic disagreement on Wilber's textual interpretation of Leviticus 18:18, co-authored by several men who are each quite happy to call themselves "the husband of one wife."

The text in question is as follows:

"And thou shalt not take a woman to her sister, to be a rival to her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her lifetime." (Leviticus 18:18 JPS)

Wilber's argument, summed up, is that this passage, when interpreted "correctly" by his estimation, serves as a blanket prohibition against polygyny within Torah law. He does this by making four claims, which will be addressed in the following response.

First Argument

Wilber's first argument essentially hinges upon the translation of the Hebrew phrase "ishah el-achotah," which is commonly translated as "a woman to her sister," and is generally understood to be a prohibition against being married to both a woman and her sister at the same time. Wilber argues that instead of "a woman to her sister," the phrase should actually be translated idiomatically as "one to another," as it is used multiple other places in the Scriptures. Wilber writes, "...Since this phrase is used in this way everywhere else in the Bible, it doesn't make sense to interpret Leviticus 18:18 as referring to literal sisters. The word 'sister' in Leviticus 18:18, therefore, ought to be understood broadly as a female in general." In support of this, he then appeals on scholastic authority to the (alleged) Qumranic interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Does Wilber's first argument hold water? Respectfully, we would suggest that it does not, for the following reasons:

First, Wilber's appeal to the Dead Sea Scrolls is, frankly, misplaced. Wilber writes, "...this interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 was shared by the Qumran community." He appeals to the opinion of Biblical scholar Angelo Tosato, who suggested regarding a few passages from the Dead Sea Scrolls, that "Qumran's interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 is not only correct but even more faithful to the original sense than the interpretation commonly given today." Now no disrespect is intended here, but this claim is simply inaccurate. Admittedly, the Qumran sect made no attempt to hide their disdain for polygyny; however, the problem with Tosato's assertion (and by extension, Wilber's) is that neither of the passages referenced (11QT 57:15-19 and CD 4:19-5:4) were textually connected to Leviticus 18:18. By Wilber's own admission, both of these passages, rather, were commentaries on Deuteronomy 17:14-20 regarding the prohibition against kings multiplying horses, gold, and wives. (The actual Qumranic text of Leviticus 18:18, meanwhile, agrees implicitly with the Masoretic text.) This point is emphasized because unlike Leviticus 18:18, the commandments contained in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 regulate the activities of Israel's king, and not its common citizens. And while the idea that an ancient sectarian commentary on Deuteronomy 17:14-20 should be somehow connected to Leviticus 18:18 is, perhaps, interesting, it is, in the end, simply that: an idea, and not a solid conclusion.

The second problem with Wilber's first argument is it simply has no historical basis. Not only does his interpretation of "ishah el-achotah" lack the support he claims from the Dead Sea Scrolls, but there exists centuries of Jewish theology to its contrary. The truth of the matter is that Jewish scholars throughout the centuries, all of whom have been intimately familiar with the phrase "ishah el-achotah" have only ever understood this passage as referring to a prohibition against marrying literal sisters. Consider the following historical testimonies:

- The translators of the Septuagint understood the phrase "ishah el-achotah" to refer to literal sisters. The text of the Septuagint has "γυναῖκα ἐπὶ ἀδελφῇ αὐτῆς οὐ λήμψῃ" or "You shall not take a woman as a rival in addition to her sister."
- The Gemara, codified prior to the close of the 6th century, contains a lengthy discussion on this passage in Yebamoth 8b, and throughout the entire discourse the interpretation of "ishah el-achotah" is understood as referring to literal sisters.
- 11th century French Rabbi Rashi takes the phrase "ishah el-achotah" to mean "a woman with her sister," and understands it to refer to being married to "both at the same time."
- 12th century Jewish theologian Abraham Ibn Ezra understood this passage as relating to literal sisters, as he writes in his commentary on the Torah that the following parsha "does not mention the punishment for having sexual relations with two sisters."
- In enumerating Judaism's "official list" of the 613 commandments of the Torah in his monumental work Mishneh Torah, 13th century Rabbi Maimonides gives the 345th

negative commandment, “Not to have intimate relations with one’s wife’s sister.” Maimonides comments further in Issurei Biah 2:9 of Sefer Kiddushin, “Similarly, the sister of his wife is considered an ervah (unlawful) for him until his wife dies. Both her maternal sister and her paternal sister, whether conceived in marriage or promiscuously, are considered as an ervah (unlawful) for him.”

Additionally, no reputable translation of the Scriptures agrees with Wilber’s proposed retranslation of “ishah el-achotah” in Leviticus 18:18 to “one to another;” rather, Biblical translators unanimously understand that “ishah el-achotah” means, contextually, “a woman to her sister.” Now admittedly, a widespread belief in something does not guarantee its accuracy; however, the complete lack of historical and scholastic support for Wilber’s proposed retranslation of “ishah el-achotah” does strongly suggest that Wilber’s idea cannot be taken seriously as anything more than an intriguing, though ultimately unsupported, theory.

Second Argument

Wilber’s second argument is that because Leviticus 18:18 uses the preposition “to” (el) instead of the conjunction “and,” (vav) the commandment should “be understood idiomatically in the distributive sense.” Wilber writes further, “If it were referring to two literal sisters, we would expect the phrasing of the verse to be consistent with the other anti-incest laws of Leviticus 18.” Now, like Wilber noted, the conjunction “and” is used in Leviticus 18:17 to identify an explicitly forbidden relationship in marrying a mother and her daughter; but the fact is that in Leviticus 18:18 the preposition “to” is used rather than the conjunction “and” in describing the taking of a woman “to her sister.” It seems as if Wilber is trying to reason that inconvenient fact away by appealing to some idiomatic understanding of the “distributive sense.”

But what does that really mean? In a sense, it means that Wilber’s argument here actually strengthens our objection: that Leviticus 18:18 doesn’t fall in the same category as the anti-incest laws. The conjunction “and” has been used repeatedly in the previous verses to denote forbidden relationships; yet here we come to the preposition “to,” thus denoting a new, unique thought process on the part of the author.

Setting this aside, here is the biggest problem with Wilber’s second argument: the wording of law is supposed to be clear. If a specific law is supposed to mean something other than what is plainly read, then how can a Righteous Lawgiver penalize someone for following the plain interpretation of that law? What if a governmental law required knowledge in idioms to properly understand and follow it? What if that law would otherwise be interpreted to mean something totally different than the plain reading by using a Hebrew idiom? How could a righteous government enforce that law on someone who is not familiar with the idiom, or penalize one that read the law and followed the plain reading of it? Does it make sense for any local lawgiver to

use idioms in their law and then punish someone for breaking that law for using that phrase literally?

The answer to all of these questions should be clear: God is not the author of confusion, (1 Corinthians 14:33) but of order. (1 Corinthians 14:40) It does not make sense for the Creator of the Universe to send a secret code in His law which was only revealed to an extremely few number of people, able to crack the code several thousand years after the fact, that His instructions really mean something totally different than the plain (and historically accepted) reading. It is therefore unfathomable that a Righteous Lawgiver, who declares that He will hold His people accountable for their observance of the decrees that He gave, (Matthew 7:21-23) would be so negligent in giving His commandments as to give one with such convoluted verbiage.

Third Argument

Wilber's third argument speculates that the reason why this commandment was given was "to prevent rivalry between the two wives." He makes the assumption here that multiple wives automatically results in rivalry, and to support this assumption, he points to Sarah and Hagar, and Penninah and Hannah, neither of whom are known to be literal sister-wives. (We'll return to these examples later and discuss them in greater depth.) Now thus far, his arguments have been focused on matters of interpretation; however, where Wilber now seeks to explore the matter of causation of rivalry, the Torah itself discusses the matter of intent. This distinction is evident from the fact that the purpose of the commandment— as stated explicitly in the text— was to be a prohibition against a man taking his wife's sister as a wife "to be a rival" to her in her lifetime. It was never to be to a blanket law prohibiting a man from taking a second wife; rather, it was given as a protection to women in cases where her husband's intention was to vex his first wife by taking her sister "to be a rival to her." This is, and historically always has been, the clear meaning of the text, as will be shown below.

The 12th century Jewish sage Rabbi Nachmanides wrote in his exhaustive commentary on the Torah something very specific regarding the phrase "to be a rival" in Leviticus 18:18: "With this the Torah explains the reason for the prohibition. It is saying that it is not proper to take a woman and her sister to make them rival wives, to vex one to another, because it is fitting they should love one another and not be rival wives." Similarly, Targum Onkelos, an Aramaic paraphrase of the Torah dating to the end of the 1st century AD, agrees with Nachmanides on Leviticus 18:18, saying, "And a wife with her sister thou shalt not take to cause her tribulation by uncovering her nakedness over her in her life (time)."

Earlier, we noted that Wilber pointed to Sarah and Hagar, and Penninah and Hannah as examples of non-sister co-wives who were rivals. A closer examination of these two sets of co-wives

seriously weakens his argument and agrees with Nachmanides and the Targum Onkelos. Let's look first at Penninah and Hannah. In 1 Samuel 1:6, the word translated as "adversary" (NJPS) or "rival" (NRSV) is "tsarah," which has the given meanings of (1) straits, distress, trouble and (2) vexer, rival wife. (The first two uses of tsarah in the Torah are Genesis 35:3 and 42:21.) The vexer is not Hannah, but Penninah, as the text reads "[h]er rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her [Hannah's] womb." This is one wife feeling superior to the other wife because she has borne children to Elkanah while the other wife has not borne him children.. This has nothing to do with their shared status as wives to Elkanah. Moreover, Hannah prayed to YHVH and was heard in her distress (as a second wife) and was given a son who became a great prophet. Considering the situation of Sarai and Hagar, Hagar was Sarai's slave handmaiden. (Genesis 16:1) Sarai gave Hagar to Abraham her husband [he did not choose to take her first] as a concubine (Genesis 16:2) to obtain children through her. When Hagar conceived, she thought less of her mistress, which goes with thinking more highly of herself. (Genesis 16:4-5) Hagar ran away after being disciplined harshly by Sarai, and encountered the Angel of the Lord in the wilderness. The Angel addressed her as "Hagar, slave of Sarai" (Genesis 16:8) and asked her where she was going. Hagar answered that she was running away from her mistress. The Angel told her to return and submit to Sarai. In a nutshell, the issue between Hagar and Sarai was that Hagar was vexing her mistress by her disrespect, not by her status as a concubine. The Angel said nothing about Hagar being given to Abram as a concubine. In both instances cited by Wilber, the vexing occurred because of feelings of superiority over having provided children that the other wife hasn't yet, not because of being co-wives.

Next, Wilber makes an interesting claim, that "...if the reason for this commandment was to avoid rivalry between co-wives, it simply doesn't make sense that this law should be limited to literal sisters." This claim, however, is purely speculative; further, one need look only to the difficulties that marrying sisters presents in family dynamics. Imagine that a man who is married to two sisters is to divorce one of them. (God forbid.) The family dynamic would be plunged into great chaos, as the divorced woman would never be truly out of his life, and he would be probably expected to maintain a good familial relationship with his in-laws, to whom he is still attached through the wife he did not divorce! Then there is the matter of the Torah's use of the phrase "in her lifetime" to be considered. Imagine that a man divorces his wife, (God forbid) and then seeks to marry her sister afterwards. The family dynamics would still be sheer and utter insanity for much of the same reasons, as those same in-laws who he once removed from his life (along with his first wife) he is now attempting to graft himself back into. Now admittedly, these examples are, perhaps, an extreme edge case; however, they serve well as a potential example as to why Leviticus 18:18 pertains to sisters as opposed to unrelated women, as the family dynamics at play behind marrying two sisters is vastly different than those at play behind marrying two or more unrelated women.

To sum it up: Wilber asserts in his third argument that Torah prohibits the taking of a second wife because it will produce rivalry, when in reality, the Torah's intent is to prohibit the taking of a second wife if the intent is to produce rivalry which causes defilement -- specifically in the case of biological sisters, when the potential of doing so is significantly increased.

Fourth Argument

Lastly, Wilber's fourth argument is that because of literary style of the Hebrew, Leviticus 18:18 should be read as belonging to a separate part of moral injunctions than the anti-incest laws of Leviticus 18:7-17. Wilber speculates, "Leviticus 18 presents two separate units of laws—the first unit dealing specifically with laws prohibiting various incestuous relationships and the second unit dealing with laws governing sexual morality more generally."

Wilber tries to make a contextual argument about the literary structure of Leviticus 18. He is right about verse 18 starting a new literary unit because verses 6-17 all begin with "You shall not uncover the nakedness of (...)." He terms the section of verses 6-17 the "anti-incest" laws. One notes right here that means taking a wife's sister as a second wife is not part of the so-called "anti-incest" laws. Wilber is silent about the fact that there is a distinction made between a man's mother and his father's wife (see Leviticus 18:7-8). He is also silent about the fact that there are two kinds of sisters-in-law (a man's brother's wife or his wife's sister). The brother's wife falls into the "anti-incest" category, but the sister's wife does not fall into this category.

Wilber looks at several places to find the phrase "a woman to her sister" in Hebrew, but what he does not do (and note must here be taken that he said he intended to produce a video addressing the other scriptures) is look at related scriptures such as Leviticus 20 (this chapter was alluded to earlier in the reference to Abraham Ibn Ezra). Turning now to this chapter, we note the penalties for serious sexual infractions, up to and including death. These penalties put teeth into the prohibitions of Leviticus 18.

- adultery with: neighbor's wife, father's wife, son's wife | death penalty
- male homosexuality | death penalty
- wife and her mother | death penalty
- man's sister | cut off, bear his punishment
- male and female bestiality | death penalty
- sex during menstruation | cut off
- uncovering nakedness of paternal or maternal aunt | subject to punishment
- lie with uncle's wife | subject to punishment
- take brother's wife | die childless

A careful look at this list shows there is no punishment for taking a wife's sister, much less taking a second wife in general. If there is sin, it is in causing deliberate rivalry between two sisters, or diminishing what he has been giving the first wife in order to provide for subsequent wives for which the remedy was for the first wife to go out free. (Exodus 21:11)

Additional Considerations

For almost every Biblical argument, there is likely one "scholar" that has a different understanding than another "scholar." We have listed several scholars and Rabbis, spanning centuries, in support of the traditional understanding of Leviticus 18:18. In Wilber's article, he quoted four scholars: three of these scholars were born and studied mainly in the United States, (one of those three did get his PhDs in England) and one was born in Italy and studied in Rome. While there is no doubt that these scholars are/were well versed in Hebrew, it cannot be contested that King David and the writers of the Talmud knew Hebrew of that era and Hebrew idioms better than the best of the ancient Hebrew scholars of today. We are now going to turn our attention to their testimony and understanding of Leviticus 18:18 to solidify our response.

The Talmud, Sanhedrin 21a, shows a debate between several Rabbis debating about the maximum number of wives that Deuteronomy 17:17 would allow a king to have. In that debate, 2 Samuel 12:8 was used in support of their conclusions, which reads, "I [YHVH] gave thee [King David] thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that were too little, then would I add unto thee so much more." (2 Samuel 12:8) The following discussion then takes place between a number of Rabbis:

"Whence do we deduce the number eighteen? — From the verse, And unto David were sons born in Hebron; and his first-born was Ammon of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; the second, Chileab of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; the third Absalom the son of Maacah; and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shefatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron. And of them the Prophet said: And if that were too little, then would I add unto thee the like of these, [Ka-hennah] and the like of these, [we-kahennah], each 'kahennah' implying six, which, with the original six, makes eighteen in all. Rabina objected: Why not assume that 'kahennah' implies twelve, and 'we-kahennah,' twenty-four? It has indeed been taught likewise: 'He shall not multiply wives to himself beyond twenty-four.' And according to him who interprets the redundant 'waw,' it ought to be forty-eight. And it has been taught even so: 'He shall not multiply wives to himself, more than forty-eight.'" (Sanhedrin 21a)

We do not believe that the Talmud is 100% historically accurate, nor do we elevate any Rabbi's conclusion of a law to the status of the law itself; ("Scriptural Authority") however, we do believe that the writers of the Talmud and the Rabbis debating the issues therein fully understood

the plain reading of the Torah, and undoubtedly understood the Hebrew better than anyone born and studied many centuries later in non-Hebrew-speaking lands. In the above Talmudic discussion, we also do not see any of these Rabbis pointing to Leviticus 18:18 and claiming the maximum number of wives is obviously just one, and that King David was sinning by taking more. Why not? Did none of these Rabbis know Hebrew or Hebrew idioms as well as the few scholars that claim that this verse limits a man to one wife?

If Wilber's conclusion is correct, that Leviticus 18:18 was actually a prohibition to polygyny, then surely, without any doubt, King David (and other polygynists mentioned in the Scriptures that were considered to be righteous) would have read that law and be in agreement with its interpretation. When it came to understanding the Torah, King David believed (and the Holy Spirit confirmed) that he had a better understanding than many of the scholars of his time and before: "I have more understanding than all my teachers; for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than mine elders, because I have kept Thy precepts." (Psalm 119:99-100) Now since there can be no doubt that King David understood the proper textual understanding of Leviticus 18:18, if Wilber's understanding of Leviticus 18:18 was true, then we would have no choice but to view King David as being in open rebellion to the Father's commandments. Yet if King David was in open rebellion in this area, then wouldn't the Father have penalized him, or at least mentioned it to him? Would the Creator of the Universe overlook this open defiance of the Torah by the current leader of His people? Would the Scriptures still have such good words to say about King David? Would not unrepentant sin define King David as an evil king? Why is there no evidence in the Scripture that King David was at least remorseful for the "sin of polygyny?" Most importantly, when the prophet Nathan was chastising King David about his adultery and murder, why would he say that if the wives that the Father gave King David was not enough, then He would have given him more? If King David was intentionally transgressing the Torah by taking multiple wives, then surely, the following verse would have read very differently: "...because David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." (1 Kings 15:5, emphasis added)

Conclusion

Wilber adduces four arguments in support of his contention that Leviticus 18:18 is a blanket ban on polygyny. These arguments are (1) the use of the term "ishah el-achotah" as used elsewhere in scripture implies the general case of a "woman to another woman" instead of the specific instance of a "woman to her sister;" (2) a scholar's opinion on what the Hebrew should be understood to be saying; (3) the intent was to prevent rivalry between wives, not just rivalry between sisters, and (4) Dr. Copan's argument that the literary structure of Leviticus 18 points to general prohibited sexual relationships as opposed to anti-incest laws. We have shown that

contrary to Wilber's assertion in his first argument, the Dead Sea commentary was specific to kings in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, and the historical understanding of Judaism's greatest sages understood Leviticus 18:18 as literally referring to a woman and her sister. For Wilber's second argument, we counter with the common-sense notion that the straightforward literal reading is what's intended to convey YHVH's thoughts with the maximum clarity, so uneducated (and for that matter, educated) people can hear and obey. Wilber's third argument was an appeal to the conflicts between Sarai and Hagar, and Penninah and Hannah; yet we have shown them to be conflicts over the number of children one wife had while the other wife having none, which is not the same thing as taking a wife to vex the first, as Sarai gave Hagar to Abram, and Elkanah loved Hannah for herself. Finally, Wilber's fourth argument fails due to the fact that Leviticus 20 does not include the prohibition of plural marriage outside of prohibited kinship bonds.

To conclude, we cannot accept Leviticus 18:18 being anything more than a specific prohibition for a husband to take his wife's sister as an additional wife if his intent is to vex his first wife. Where the text says, "And thou shalt not take a woman to her sister, to be a rival to her," we accept that the text simply means what it says: "And thou shalt not take a woman to her sister, to be a rival to her."

*For more Scriptural defense and insight on this topic, click here: [Polygyny](#)

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More on David Wilber's Suspect Treatment of Lev. 18:18

By Peter G. Rambo, Sr

Someone once said that if you are going to try to defend against polygamy, you best not use the Bible. It is a lousy source for any information that condemns the practice. However, many still try and the results are laughable at best and often miserable reaches of logical fallacies and red herrings.

David Wilber, a normally solid guy theologically, set out to demonstrate that “the Torah explicitly prohibits polygamy” in an article on his blog titled [*Does the Torah Prohibit Polygamy? An Examination of Leviticus 18:18*](#). Evidencing the fact that there is no direct condemnation of the practice in the Torah, or anywhere else in Scripture, the best he can do is reach to a notoriously challenging verse, Leviticus 18:18.

His attempt is well refuted by several gentlemen in a rebuttal titled [*Should Leviticus 18:18 Be Understood As Prohibiting Polygyny?*](#) leaving little for me to add to their scholarly treatment.

What I found so troubling about Wilber's article, as I do with many other such attempts at refuting the Biblical legitimacy of polygyny, is the multiple logical fallacies and theological leaps treated as 'fact.' We need only Wilber's conclusion paragraph to witness multiple grave errors.

Here is the exact quote from Wilber's article in its entirety. Read carefully, then let's disassemble it.

All of this leads to the conclusion that Leviticus 18:18 likely refers to *any* two woman [sic] and not merely two literal sisters. Thus, Leviticus 18:18 prohibits a man from marrying another woman in addition to his first wife while she is alive. **That is to say, the Torah explicitly prohibits polygamy.** This, of course, aligns with God's original design for marriage as established in Creation. Like homosexuality and

adultery in the scope of sexual relationships, polygamy is a deviation from God's design, and therefore we shouldn't be surprised to find a commandment in the Torah that prohibits it.

We can take this line by line and watch how he baits and switches, twists Scripture, then curses Abraham and God. Tall order? No.

In his first sentence, Wilber clearly says, 'Leviticus 18:18 *likely* refers to any two women...' He knows well that his case is weak enough that he can't unequivocally state that Leviticus 18:18 absolutely refers to any two women. Only 'likely.' But, he insists on using this weakness as his foundation.

In the next sentence, he states as fact, "Thus, Leviticus 18:18 prohibits...", what he *just said* was "*likely*."

Then, to make sure you follow his unsupported logical leaps and accept his point, he bolds a further strengthened logical leap based on a 'likely' interpretation that is nowhere ever clearly attested in Scripture. In making the statement "That is to say, the Torah explicitly prohibits polygamy" he demonstrates extreme bias and gross theological error. Exodus 21:10-11 and Deuteronomy 21:15-17 as well as Levirate marriage laws demonstrate that the Torah *regulates* the practice, something *never done* for anything that is 'prohibited' or classified as sin. E.g., God *never* says, 'If you are going to steal, this is how you do it to please Me.' Yet, He gives specific guidelines for how a man is to act if he has more than one woman.

To make Wilber's assertion even more awkward, God, who is defined and revealed by His Law, describes Himself on no less than three occasions as having two wives. See [*Does God Have Two Wives?*](#)

Wilber follows up his false 'explicitly prohibits' assertion with the tired and easily refuted 'original design' declaration. Simply, God's heart *is* marriage, but He never defines it as 'one man, one woman.' Even Yeshua in Matthew 19 (in a discussion about divorce) does not state 'one man, one woman.' Yeshua says, 'A man shall...be joined to his wife...' In the Creation account we are told three facts: they were joined together, they were naked and they were unashamed. If we assert that the man and woman being joined together is an ideal that is sinful to violate, then we must apply the same diligence to being naked and unashamed.

The simple fact is the 'Creation ideal' myth is nowhere supported in Scripture as the will of God. He desires marriage that is for life. He never regulates how many marriages a man may have, however He does so for women.

But, Wilber's more egregious and disturbing error is yet to come. He has merely set the stage. Here is his final sentence:

Like homosexuality and adultery in the scope of sexual relationships, polygamy is a deviation from God's design, and therefore we shouldn't be surprised to find a commandment in the Torah that prohibits it.

Wilber just had the audacity to commit a theological error of epic proportions, curse God and the patriarchs, tell a bold falsehood and sell it to the reader's emotional and cultural aversion to polygamy.

First, he equates polygamy with homosexuality and adultery, both 'death penalty' sins. So serious are these two sins that they are on 1 Corinthians 6:9's short list of sins that prevent inheriting the kingdom of God. Equating polygamy with homosexuality and adultery is a very serious charge that impugns the character of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon and David, all men approved by God according to Hebrews 11. What is even more egregious is that Wilber's charge can be laid at the feet of God Himself who at least three times refers to Himself as having two brides.

Wilber's misstep here as he essentially curses God and Abraham is breathtaking. He clearly needs to rethink his understanding of what the Bible actually says and does not say about marriage.

An additional error in his using the false 'Creation ideal' as his comparison for polygamy and unilaterally declaring polygamy to be a sin equal to adultery and homosexuality, Wilber inadvertently implies that *anything* other than the 'ideal' is sin, therefore being single must also be equivalent to homosexuality and adultery.

His final error is to take his 'likely refers to' and state that it is a Torah commandment prohibiting polygamy. Logical fallacy upon fallacy followed by falsely equating polygamy with homosexuality and adultery leads to a conclusion that is emotionally inflammatory, but entirely false.

The very simple fact is, God *never* calls polygamy a sin, therefore, we should not. To claim polygamy is a sin is to add to the Torah, something God does strictly forbid.

As demonstrated, Wilber's conclusion alone is a gross misrepresentation of Scripture and a curse against God and the patriarchs in addition to being a fallacy laden trapeze from 'likely' to 'commandment.' Wilber would be wise to remove his article from the internet and post a very clear retraction based on what the totality of Scripture actually says concerning marriage. He

should specifically seek, with the same passion he addresses other doctrines, to identify the traditions we have inherited and understand where they came from and why.

Answering 119Ministries

Refuting the falsehoods hidden in their Polygamy Video

119Ministries has a strong reputation for testing the whole of God's Word and until their most recent video regarding the Biblical position on polygamy, We believed them to be a very solid ministry. In the past they have taken sometimes very difficult positions unapologetically, because they had a firm foundation on clear facts from the Word and solid logical reasoning.

Regretfully, their most recent release in the *Answering Atheists* Series is riddled with improper interpretation, logical fallacy and misrepresentation of truth. Because 119Ministries purports to value truth above all else, it is necessary to address the errors in this video. Following is their transcript with discussion inserted to expose the errors. We hope this will foster a deeper and correct understanding of the subject from a truly Biblical position.

As a final introductory note, there is a letter to 119Ministries at the end of this refutation. All of our comments are in blue. Their original teaching transcript is in black.

"The following is a direct script of a teaching that is intended to be presented via video, incorporating relevant text, slides, media, and graphics to assist in illustration, thus facilitating the presentation of the material. In some places, this may cause the written material to not flow or sound rather awkward in some places. In addition, there may be

grammatical errors that are often not acceptable in literary work. We encourage the viewing of the video teachings to complement the written teaching you see below.”

Answering Atheists: Does the Bible Endorse Polygamy?

Atheists, radical feminists, and other critics of the Bible often claim that the Bible has misogynistic overtones. That is to say, that the Bible is strongly prejudiced against women.

It is claimed that the human authors of the Bible regard women as mere property and of lesser value than men. One of the reasons given in support of this claim is the Bible’s alleged endorsement of polygamy—that is, the practice whereby a man is married to more than one woman at the same time.

Is it true that the Bible permits or even endorses this practice? Does God give any commandments in regards to polygamy—whether for or against? What do we make of the fact that many of the men in the Bible—who are often described as godly and righteous men—engaged in this practice?

We will be exploring this topic in depth throughout this teaching. First, if you haven’t yet watched our teaching, *Is the Bible Misogynistic?*, we recommend starting there. In that teaching, we give a broad overview of the biblical view of women, which sets the foundation for other teachings in this series.

So where do we begin in answering these questions?

In Matthew 19, Yeshua our Messiah was asked a question about marriage. When it came to this topic, we think it’s significant that Yeshua’s response was not to quibble with the Pharisees over the nuances of particular laws in the Torah. Yeshua’s response was to point us towards the original divine establishment of marriage in the beginning. He quoted Genesis, which says:

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

[119Ministries](#) chooses not to share where exactly in Matthew 19, Yeshua makes this claim, leaving it to the listener to assume they are correct, or to find the verses in question while likely

missing the context of Yeshua's conversation. In context, it is very clear that Yeshua has been asked a question about *divorce* and He clearly answers the specific question regarding *divorce and why* a man and woman cannot be torn apart. Here is the full context:

³ Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful *for a man to divorce his wife* for any reason at all?"

Notice, the topic is 'divorce' and the specific nuance is 'for *any reason* at all.' The context of this question is Deuteronomy 24:1-4 wherein a woman 'finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her.' The Pharisees were trying to nail down acceptable 'indecencies.'

The Deuteronomy passage clearly indicates that divorce was a two part process. First, write a certificate of release, then send her out. Allegedly there was a long running debate between the houses of Hillel and Shammai, at the time of Yeshua, as to the proper procedure for divorce and on what grounds. It was common to send her out without a bill of divorcement to avoid the cost, thus leaving her technically still married, while the man assumed himself guiltless. Yeshua was addressing this ongoing debate. While this requires quite a bit more explaining than we will interject here, it does serve to bolster our position that Yeshua's topic was not marriage, but divorce.

The Deuteronomy passage further demonstrates clearly that she *can* remarry lawfully, when the divorce was lawful, because vss 2 and 3 offer that she becomes another man's and then he gives her a bill of divorcement. Therefore, according to Torah, she *can* be divorced and remarried, however Yeshua is making a solid case that unless lawfully done, the two cannot be separated.

We *in no way* endorse divorce, but recognize that there are legitimate reasons, as even Yeshua acknowledges when He says 'except for immorality.' The point, as clearly demonstrated through the rest of this passage, is that the topic Yeshua is discussing with the Pharisees is narrowly limited to divorce.

Matthew 19:⁴ And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, ⁵and 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’? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” ⁷ They *said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND **her** AWAY?” ⁸ He *said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to **divorce** your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. ⁹ And I say to you, whoever **divorces** his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Since our Messiah pointed to the marriage between Adam and Eve in the Garden as the ideal picture of marriage, we think it’s appropriate to start there as well. You’ll notice in that verse we just read that God’s original design for marriage is that it of a monogamous relationship—that is, a man and his wife.

As just demonstrated, Yeshua’s use of the passage in Genesis is to demonstrate that like two pieces of duct tape, stuck together, the two who are joined cannot be separated without extreme damage to each.

119Ministries makes the fallacious logical leap that Yeshua is using this passage as an ‘ideal’ for marriage. In doing so, they repeat a fallacious argument from Christendom that eisegetically reads into the verses what they want to see. In doing so, they use selective reasoning and interpretation. Here is a quick side line sketch to demonstrate the fallacy.

Genesis 2:24 & 25 say, ²⁴ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Remember, in the original text, there are no verse or chapter breaks. Therefore, we should easily take the whole thought. In other words, becoming one flesh involves ‘naked and unashamed.’ So, if they are one flesh in the bedroom, are they also one flesh at the grocery store? If so, why aren’t they ‘naked and unashamed’ there?

Obviously, the ‘one flesh’ statement cannot be read or understood as a command for monogamy, because a consistent reading must then be applied to the rest of the verse. If so, the ‘monogamy only’ viewpoint, read into these verses must include a naked-only and unashamed-only viewpoint.

Scripture clearly does not *ever* teach or even promote a monogamy *only* command as will be clear by the time we are finished.

When the apostle Paul cites this verse, it's even clearer:

Ephesians 5:31 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

Actually, Paul is quoting from the LXX (Septuagint) that *adds* the word 'one' to the original Hebrew. We must be very careful building a picture of Pauline theology from this possible translation error as we will see in a minute.

You'll notice here that it says, "The two shall become one flesh." It doesn't say three, four, or more. It says two shall become one. This is God's divine design for marriage at Creation.

Why would God make the original marriage monogamous?

Did He? This is an argument from silence. There is no *command* for monogamy only anywhere in Scripture.

As Old Testament scholar, Dr. Richard Davidson, explains:

Monogamy is ultimately rooted in monotheism and in the concept of imago Dei (image of God): just as the Lord God, who is "one" (Deut. 6:4), is not involved in promiscuous relationships within a polytheistic pantheon, so husbands and wives, created in God's image, are to be monogamous in their marital relationship with each other.

-Richard M. Davidson, "Condemnation and Grace: Polygamy and Concubinage in the Old Testament," Christian Research Journal, Vol. 38, #5 (2015)

So God's original design for marriage is not some arbitrary decision on His part. It's deeply theological and ultimately rooted in biblical truths about God's very nature as expressed in the Scriptures. This is not an insignificant point!

As already demonstrated, using Genesis 2:24 as an 'original design' doctrine has eisegetical flaws. But, there are significant Scriptural flaws.

119Ministries waits until the very end of their video to introduce one of three key passages that demonstrate that God describes Himself as having two brides. It is a subject few Bible readers grapple with, but it is important to consider at this point whether God would describe *Himself* in terms that 119Ministries consider to be sinful. Let's consider several passages.

Ezekiel 23 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying, ²"Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; ³and they played the harlot in Egypt. They played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and there their virgin bosom was handled. ⁴Their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister. And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And *as for* their names, Samaria is Oholah and Jerusalem is Oholibah.

Clearly, God is describing Himself as the husband of two wives who are sisters, the daughters of one mother. The remainder of the chapter continues to play on this theme, making clear that the two were already separate from each other as two (not one) *while they were still in Egypt*. This point will be very important a little further on. But, see Ezekiel 23:8, 19, 21 and 27 to additionally prove that God viewed Oholibah and Oholah as separate sisters that 'became His' from Egypt. In other words, even before Sinai, God recognizes they are sister brides from 'one mother.'

Jeremiah 3:⁶ Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. ⁷I thought, 'After she has done all these things she will return to Me'; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. ⁸And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. ⁹Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. ¹⁰Yet in spite of all

this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception,” declares the LORD.

There are multiple major points that this passage undeniably reveals.

1. God clearly views the two as brides.
2. God clearly views the two as sisters.
3. One is divorced and the other is not. (MUST be two brides as half of a bride cannot be divorced while retaining the other half.)
4. God views Himself as husband. To wit, divorce and adultery are marriage language.
5. Denying the plural marriage evidenced in this passage destroys 119 Ministries position on two-house theology. (See The Lost Sheep video with which we strongly agree.)

Having displayed two witnesses demonstrating that God describes Himself as having two brides, we ought to proceed with extreme caution if our predetermined conclusion is negative toward polygyny.

Are there more witnesses? Yes!

Jeremiah 31:³¹ “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³ “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The New Covenant reiterates Jeremiah’s understanding from chapter 3. Husband. Two brides. ‘Them.’

Yeshua uses similar terminology to describe Himself in the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Go look up the passage and see that He says the 'bridegroom' takes five virgins into the 'marriage' using a Greek word that in other passages clearly means 'marry.'

Would both God and Yeshua use sinful terminology and imagery to describe themselves and their relationship with Israel?

If God's original design for marriage is meant to be a picture of His divine nature, then it could be argued that any deviation from God's original design would be, therefore, a distortion of that picture. As followers of the God of Israel, our purpose is to bear God's image—that is, to accurately represent who God is by how we live our lives, and that includes our marriages.

A fallacious logical presupposition (begging the question) introduced here. First, '***IF*** God's original design...' then, 'it ***COULD*** be argued...' 119Ministries asks the viewer to make an unsupported logical leap from which they will begin to build their case. Unfortunately, this will occur over and over.

Some might object, "But wait! If this is so important, why doesn't God give any commandments prohibiting polygamy?"

On the surface, this is a good objection. If polygamy were so against God's will and design for marriage, we would expect God to make that clear in His Law. After all, adultery and homosexuality likewise are distortions of God's original design for marriage, and thus there are clear laws against those acts. But when it comes to polygamy, several passages in the TANAKH, on the surface, seem to permit and even approve of the practice. How do we deal with that?

In fact, this IS a good objection precisely *because* God doesn't make *any* clear law against polygamy. But 119Ministries repeats the well-worn fallacy equating adultery and homosexuality with polygamy. As we saw a minute ago in Ezekiel 23 and Jeremiah 3, God clearly portrays Himself as having two brides in the house of Israel and the house of Judah, yet 119Ministries wants you to think that having two brides is synonymous with adultery and homosexuality, capital crimes in the Torah. When they make this assertion, they place God and the patriarchs in judgment by their own standard.

In this teaching, our argument is rather straightforward:

- First, like homosexuality and adultery, polygamy is a clear deviation from God's original design for marriage as established in Creation.
- Second, the Bible does, in fact, explicitly prohibit the practice of polygamy.
- Third, rather than being endorsed in the Bible, polygamy is painted in a negative light and actually discouraged throughout the Bible.
- And fourth, the passages in which polygamy might seem to be approved by God are misunderstood.

Regarding our first point, we've already seen through the Creation account in Genesis that monogamy is indeed God's original design for marriage. And again, we've seen that both Yeshua and Paul affirm this original design for marriage by using that established truth as the basis for their own teachings.

It's not a coincidence that the New Testament consistently and invariably upholds the teaching in Genesis that marriage is between one man and one woman.

The Apostle Paul says clearly in 1 Corinthians 7:2,

1 Corinthians 7:2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

What is clear is that 119Ministries either didn't bother to look at this verse in the Greek, or they intentionally chose not to address the fact that Paul uses two different and unambiguous words for 'own.' In fact, the Greek makes it *very* clear that not only was Paul completely aware of the lawfulness of polygyny, a man having more than one wife, but he intentionally allows for it in the wording of 1 Corinthians 7:2.

διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἔχέτω καὶ ἕκαστη
τὸν ἰδίον ἄνδρα ἔχέτω

1 Corinthians 7:2 Nevertheless, *to avoid* fornication, let every man have his own (ἑαυτοῦ
G1438) wife, and let every woman have her own (ἰδίον G2398) husband.

The difference between these two possessive words is interesting. The first, heautou, denotes exclusive ownership. She *belongs exclusively* to her husband. The second, idios, denotes belonging *to*, as in ‘each went to his own (idion) city’ or ‘his own country.’ The person spoken of doesn’t own the city or the country, but rather belongs *to* the city or country. See Matthew 9:1, Luke 2:3; 6:44 and John 4:44 for similar examples. A better translation of 1 Corinthians 7:2 would be,

“Nevertheless, *to avoid* fornication, let each man possess a woman, and let every woman be possessed by a man.’

Clearly, she does not ‘own’ him in the sense that she does not have exclusive control over him, where he *does have exclusive control* over her. The simple point is that Paul used two different words denoting ownership precisely because the Torah commands that she may not have relations with any man besides her husband, but no such corollary command limits a man to one woman *anywhere in all of Scripture*.

Paul’s instruction concerning marriage is based on the Torah and the teaching of Yeshua.

And, this is true! Paul uses different words for ‘own’ so that his teaching does not add to or take away from the Torah, per Deuteronomy 12:32!

In 1 Timothy 3:2 and verse 12, Paul also said that the elders and deacons within the congregation are only to have one wife, again reinforcing the importance of this divine truth, as elders are to be examples of righteous living to the rest of the congregation.

Again, 119Ministries provides a head fake without considering that traditional interpretation of the Greek through a monogamy only lens may be wrong. Here are the two verses with a bit of context.

1 Timothy 3:² An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. ⁴ *He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control* with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),....¹² Deacons must be husbands of ~~only~~ one wife, and good managers of *their* children and their own households.

In both cases, the Greek word translated as 'one' is *mias* (G1520 from *eis*) which can also be translated as 'a.' If we use the translation we are given, through a monogamy only bias, then Abraham, Jacob, Caleb, Gideon, Elkanah, David and Joash are unfit to even be an elder or deacon in a small fellowship, but God saw fit to have them lead Israel! If we instead use the word 'a wife' then the verses and instruction of Paul make perfect sense and are in keeping with the rest of the Tanakh. Simply, a deacon or elder must have 'a wife' in order to have a family and thus prove themselves capable of leadership by having a house under control. And, 'a wife' does not preclude more than one wife, thus *not* disqualifying the patriarchs from being elders and not making Paul seem to be adding to Torah.

Also 119Ministries adds the word "only" to this standard which is not supported by any Greek manuscript and is *italicized* when translated to English making our point clear.

At this juncture, we are barely seven minutes into the video and already there are fatal flaws exposed, but there are many more to expose.

Some attempt to suggest that Paul's words on righteous living in 1 Timothy 3:2 and verse 12 is referring to divorce—that is to say, one is to not be remarried following a divorce. However, there exists no instruction forbidding remarriage after divorce in the law of God. In fact, Deuteronomy 24 are the go-to instructions surrounding divorce in the Torah, and we find there that remarriage after divorce is acceptable. Paul is not adding to the Word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2). 1 Timothy 3 is not about divorce. In fact, according to the context, it should be strongly noted that divorce is not even mentioned in 1 Timothy 3!

Paul was instructing against taking on another wife while still being married.

As already explained, this is a demonstrably false claim. We believe the next statement is a false use of Paul to justify the improper use of a very poorly handled obscure verse in Leviticus to try to make a case that Torah never makes.

Again, Paul wasn't pulling the instruction out of nowhere. His teachings were based on the Torah, and therefore, he clearly interpreted the issue of polygamy as being prohibited. But where in the Torah does Paul get this idea?

As we stated earlier, God's original design for marriage is not arbitrary, but reflects deep theological truths about His character and His nature. Therefore, polygamy obviously goes against God's original intent for marriage at Creation. That much is clear. Paul certainly could have been citing the Creation account as Torah instruction forbidding polygamy, however, as critics would argue, the creation account of one man and one woman seems, at most, to lend itself as a "best practice" and not necessarily direct Torah instruction. Yet Paul presents his position as direct Torah instruction, clearly forbidding polygamy. Polygamy is defined by Paul as not being above reproach. Polygamy is not considered righteous living.

So, where in the Torah would Paul have found such clear instruction prohibiting polygamy, justifying his instruction that any elder entertaining polygamy was not representing righteous living?

That now brings our attention to our second point—that is, the Bible, the Torah, explicitly prohibits polygamy. To begin, consider this commandment in Leviticus:

Leviticus 18:18 You shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness.

This verse is usually translated as prohibiting one type of polygamous marriage, specifically a marriage to two sisters while both are alive. The implication of this interpretation is that a man cannot marry his sister-in-law, but polygamy in general is permitted.

However, scholars have challenged this interpretation. There are many reasons to believe that this verse does not necessarily refer to two blood-related sisters, but properly refers to two women in general.

Anyone who wishes to make an argument sound impressive on the surface can begin their statement with lines to the tune of “scholars suggest,” “experts agree,” or “statistics show.” Powerful opening statements do not make the assertion that follows true; and in this case, the assertion that “scholars have challenged this interpretation” is misleading at best. Not to deflate their argument ahead of time, but 119Ministries’ entire argument regarding Leviticus 18:18 hinges upon speculation by two relatively modern scholars whose interpretive works are at odds with several intellectual giants of the last two thousand years. We’ll get into that more later.

Thus, “sister” would have a broader definition to include any woman, and not just a blood relative. If this interpretation is correct, we therefore have an explicit commandment forbidding polygamy in the Torah.

“IF this interpretation is correct....”

Since this is such a crucial point, we are going to spend a lot of time unpacking the reasons for why we believe this verse prohibits polygamy in general. This will serve as a good foundation going forward when we examine this topic throughout the rest of the Scriptures.

So why should we believe that Leviticus 18:18 prohibits all polygamy rather than simply prohibiting a marriage between a man and two literal sisters? There are several points we’ll consider to make this case.

First, in Hebrew, “a woman in addition to her sister,” is *ishah el-achotah*, which literally means “a woman to her sister.” This is an idiomatic expression, which is always used in the distributive sense of “one in addition to another.” Consider the following verses in which this exact phrase is used idiomatically:

Exodus 26:3 Five curtains shall be coupled to one another [*ishah el-achotah*], and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another [*ishah el-achotah*].

Exodus 26:6 And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other [ishah elachotah] with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole.

Ezekiel 1:9 Their wings touched one another [ishah el-achotah]. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went.

In Exodus 26, you'll notice that it speaks of the coupling of curtains and clasps "one to the other," which is literally, "a woman to her sister"—ishah el-achotah—the exact same phrase used in Leviticus 18:18.

The verse in Ezekiel speaks of the wings of the cherubim touching "one another," which, again, literally translates to "a woman to her sister."

In fact, every time the phrase ishah el-achotah occurs in the TANAKH, it is used in an idiomatic manner, meaning "one to another."

• Exodus 26:3 • Exodus 26:5 • Exodus 26:6 • Exodus 26:17 • Ezekiel 1:9 • Ezekiel 1:23 • Ezekiel 3:13

This is also the case with the masculine equivalent of this phrase, ish el-akiw, which literally means, "a man to his brother." Every time this expression occurs, it's used idiomatically in the distributive sense of, "one in addition to another":

• Genesis 37:19 • Genesis 42:21 • Genesis 42:28 • Exodus 16:15 • Exodus 25:20 • Exodus 37:9
• Numbers 14:4 • 2 Kings 7:6 • Jeremiah 13:14 • Jeremiah 25:26 • Ezekiel 24:23 • Ezekiel 33:30

So, when we interpret the phrase ishah el-achotah in light of its consistent usage throughout the Scriptures, Leviticus 18:18 appears it ought to be understood idiomatically and distributively as saying you shall not marry one woman in addition to another woman. This phrase is used in this way everywhere else in the Bible, and therefore it doesn't seem to make sense to interpret Leviticus 18:18 as referring to two literal sisters.

Frankly, this argument is linguistic nonsense, and has no basis in sound academics. The truth of the matter is that Jewish translators and scholars [for the last two thousand years](#), all of whom have been intimately familiar with the phrase "ishah el-achotah," have only ever understood this

passage as referring to a prohibition against marrying literal sisters. Consider the following historical testimonies:

- The translators of the Septuagint understood the phrase “ishah el-achotah” to refer to literal sisters. The text of the Septuagint has “γυναῖκα ἐπὶ ἀδελφῇ αὐτῆς οὐ λήμψῃ” or “You shall not take a woman as a rival in addition to her sister.”
- The Gemara, codified prior to the close of the 6th century, contains a lengthy discussion on this passage in Yebamoth 8b, and throughout the entire discourse the interpretation of “ishah el-achotah” is understood as referring to literal sisters.
- 11th century French Rabbi Rashi takes the phrase “ishah el-achotah” to mean “a woman with her sister,” and understands it to refer to being married to “both at the same time.”
- 12th century Jewish theologian Abraham Ibn Ezra understood this passage as relating to literal sisters, as he writes in his commentary on the Torah that the following parsha “does not mention the punishment for having sexual relations with two sisters.”
- In enumerating Judaism’s “official list” of the 613 commandments of the Torah in his monumental work Mishneh Torah, 13th century Rabbi Maimonides gives the 345th negative commandment, “Not to have intimate relations with one’s wife’s sister.” Maimonides comments further in Issurei Biah 2:9 of Sefer Kiddushin, “Similarly, the sister of his wife is considered an ervah (unlawful) for him until his wife dies. Both her maternal sister and her paternal sister, whether conceived in marriage or promiscuously, are considered as an ervah (unlawful) for him.”

Additionally, no reputable translation of the Scriptures agrees with this proposed “re-translation” of “ishah el-achotah” in Leviticus 18:18 to “one to another;” rather, Biblical translators unanimously understand that “ishah el-achotah” means, contextually, “a woman to her sister.” Now admittedly, a widespread belief in something does not guarantee its accuracy; however, there is complete lack of historical and scholastic support for the proposed retranslation of “ishah el-achotah.” The idea that Leviticus 18:18 “ishah el-achotah” should be translated to support a blanket prohibition against polygamy cannot be taken seriously.

The word “sister” in Leviticus 18:18 therefore has a broader reference to a female citizen in general, which certainly has lexical warrant in the TANAKH. Take, for instance, this passage from Hosea:

Hosea 2:1 Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.”

Here the term “sisters” is not referring to literal sisters but has a broader meaning.

Interestingly, this interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 was shared by the Qumran community, a first century Jewish sect, from whom we get the Dead Sea Scrolls. For instance, among the Dead Sea Scrolls is what is known as The Temple Scroll, which contains a commentary on Deuteronomy 17:14-20 concerning kings. According to scholars, this commentary appeals to Leviticus 18:18 as an ancient Hebrew language proof text against polygamy, versus the more modern interpretation limiting it to only the wife’s sister. The Temple Scroll paraphrases Leviticus 18:18 as follows:

He may not take a wife from any of the nations. Rather, he must take himself a wife from his father’s house—that is, from his father’s family. He is not to take another wife in addition to her; no, she alone shall be with him as long as she lives. If she dies, then he may take himself another wife from his father’s house, that is, his family.

-11QT57:15-19, Michael Wise, Marin Abegg & Edward Cook, “Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation,” p. 485

Scholar and theologian, Angelo Tosato, argues that the interpretation of this verse in the Qumran community best reflects the original meaning of Leviticus 18:18:

Qumran’s interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 is not only correct but even more faithful to the original sense than the interpretation commonly given today.

-Angelo Tosato, “The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination,” CBQ Vol. 46, p. 208

The claim made here, that the Qumran sect understood Leviticus 18:18 as a prohibition against polygyny, is simply inaccurate. Admittedly, the Qumran sect made no attempt to hide their

disdain for polygyny; however, there is one glaring problem with Tosato's assertion that Qumran's interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 is (somehow) more accurate than the interpretation held by Jewish scholars for the last two thousand years: neither of the passages from the Dead Sea Scrolls referenced in Tosato's work were textually connected to Leviticus 18:18. (11QT 57:15-19 and CD 4:19-5:4) Both passages, rather, were commentaries on Deuteronomy 17:14-20, regarding the prohibition against kings multiplying horses, gold, and wives. **The actual Qumranic text of Leviticus 18:18, meanwhile, agrees implicitly with the Masoretic text.** (4QLev-Num a) This point is emphasized because unlike Leviticus 18:1-23, which regulates sexual immorality, Deuteronomy 17:14-20 regulates the activities of Israel's king, and not its common citizens.

Herein lies the logical weakness of appealing to the Dead Sea Scrolls for support on the idea that Leviticus 18:18 presents a blanket prohibition on polygyny: no clear connection can be made. The appeal here is not even rooted in the Scriptures themselves, but in a sectarian commentary on a completely separate passage.

Based on Paul's comments about men who take on additional wives while already married not being "above reproach," it appears that Paul took the same position on Leviticus 18:18 as the Qumran community.

Equating a second wife as not being 'above reproach' is a demonstrable fallacy considering Hebrews 11 regards Abraham, Jacob, Gideon and David as men 'approved by God' and all have multiple wives. As previously demonstrated, the 'mia gunaikos' phrases of 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 can both reasonably be understood as being 'husband of **a** wife' thereby giving the prospective elder or bishop the opportunity to prove himself capable in leading his house. *Both* passages include a list of other areas that Scripture does call sin, unlike polygyny, that would bring reproach on the elder, besides an unruly house. Titus 1:7 goes further and by very clearly stating what 'above reproach' means, and 'monogamous' is not among them.

Titus 1:⁷ For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,⁸ but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,⁹ holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Second, if the author of Leviticus intended Leviticus 18:18 to be understood as a prohibition against marrying literal sisters, thereby implicitly permitting polygamy in general, it would be very clear grammatically. But the textual evidence suggests something else. Old Testament scholar and professor, Dr. Gordon P. Hugenberger, explains as follows:

Indeed, had it been the intention of Leviticus 18:18 to prohibit a man from marrying two women who were literal sisters, it could have done so with considerably less ambiguity by the use of the conjunction “and [,] ו ” rather than the preposition “to [,] אל ” that is, “a woman and her sister.” The grammar of this expression would then be precisely analogous to that of “a woman and her daughter,” the phrase employed by the author in the immediately preceding verse, where he forbids sexual relations with a woman and her daughter. It appears likely that it was the awareness of this usage which already led the Zadokites and the Qumran community in the first century B.C., as well as the much later Karaites, to interpret Lev. 18:18 as an explicit prohibition against polygyny.

-Gordon P. Hugenberger, “Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law & Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi,” p. 115-116

In other words, the fact that the verse uses the preposition “to” rather than the conjunction “and” lends support to our argument that this phrase is intended to be understood idiomatically in the distributive sense rather than talking about two literal sisters. If it were referring to two literal sisters, we would expect the phrasing of the verse to be consistent with the other anti-incest laws of Leviticus 18, but it isn’t.

The conjunction “and” is used in Leviticus 18:17 to identify an explicitly forbidden sexual relationship with “a woman and her daughter.” Then, in Leviticus 18:18, the preposition “to” is used rather than the conjunction “and” in describing marrying a woman “to her sister.” Nothing about the use of “and” in verse 17 and “to” in verse 18 necessitates a drastic reinterpretation of the passage.

Further, it must be noted that God is not the author of confusion, (1 Corinthians 14:33) but of order. (1 Corinthians 14:40) It does not make sense for the Creator of the Universe to send a

secret code in His law which was only revealed to an extremely few number of people, able to crack the code several thousand years after the fact, that His instructions really mean something totally different than the plain (and historically accepted) reading. It is unfathomable that a Righteous Lawgiver, who declares that He will hold His people accountable for their observance of the decrees that He gave, (Matthew 7:21-23) would be so negligent in giving His commandments as to give one with such convoluted verbiage.

Third, the fact that Leviticus 18:18 prohibits polygamy in general is made all the more clear when we consider the reason for the commandment, which is to prevent rivalry between the two wives: "You shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival." This consequence applies to any type of polygamous union, not merely that of a marriage with two literal sisters. As Tosato remarks:

This motivation shows that the act legislated against is deemed criminal, not in itself (and thus it is not a case of an incestuous union; nor more generally of a sexual union retained intrinsically perverse), but is deemed criminal in relation to the man's first wife who would be damaged. In addition, the harm which the law wants avoided is such (rivalry, enmity) that any woman (and not necessarily a sister of the first wife) is capable of causing...

-Angelo Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," CBQ Vol. 46, p. 207

The language, "as a rival," used in Leviticus 18:18, is also used in 1 Samuel 1:6 in regards to the contentious relationship between Peninnah and Hannah, the wives of Elkanah. And there's no evidence that these women were literal sisters:

1 Samuel 1:6 And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord (YHWH) had closed her womb.

Clearly Peninnah and Hannah were not literal sisters, as Elkanah committed no sin in marrying them both, despite the fact that rivalry did (unfortunately) exist between them.

If the reason for this commandment was to avoid rivalry between co-wives, it simply does not make sense that this law should be limited to literal sisters. Throughout history we've seen the contentious relationship between co-wives, whether they are sisters or not. You need to look no further than Abraham's wives, Sarah and Hagar, to see this.

119Ministry's argument here is simply disconnected from reality. It is not difficult to see that literal sisters could, potentially, have a significantly more challenging time sharing a husband than women who were not sisters. That's just common sense. However, some women might find it easier to share a husband with their sister than they would with an unrelated woman. This is why Leviticus 18:18 was given as a protection for women from having to be in a vexing relationship with their sister.

Pointing to Sarah and Hagar, and Peninnah and Hannah, as examples of non-sister co-wives who were rivals to one another is actually immaterial to their argument, because, according to the common sense reading of Leviticus 18:18, there was no prohibition against rivalry existing between non-sister co-wives. In other words, the Torah does not prohibit the taking of a second wife because it will produce rivalry; rather, the Torah prohibits the taking of a second wife if the intent is to produce rivalry-- specifically in the case of biological sisters, when the potential of doing so is significantly increased.

Historically, this is how the passage has been understood.

- The 12th century Jewish sage Rabbi Nachmanides wrote in his exhaustive commentary on the Torah something very specific regarding the phrase "to be a rival" in Leviticus 18:18: "With this the Torah explains the reason for the prohibition. It is saying that it is not proper to take a woman and her sister to make them rival wives, to vex one to another, because it is fitting they should love one another and not be rival wives."
- Similarly, Targum Onkelos, an Aramaic paraphrase of the Torah dating to the end of the 1st century AD, agrees with Nachmanides on Leviticus 18:18, saying, "And a wife with her sister thou shalt not take to cause her tribulation by uncovering her nakedness over her in her life (time)."

In other words, if the more modern interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 is true, then why would there be rivalry and strife in a polygamous relationship only if the wives were literal sisters? The rivalry and strife are due to women competing for the attention and love from the same man. Would

only sisters experience rivalry competing for the attention and love of the same man? Of course not.

This claim is purely speculative; further, one need look only to the difficulties that marrying sisters presents in family dynamics. Imagine that a man who is married to two sisters is to divorce one of them. (God forbid.) The family dynamic would be plunged into great chaos, as the divorced woman would never be truly out of his life, and he would be probably expected to maintain a good familial relationship with his in-laws, to whom he is still attached through the wife he did not divorce! Then there is the matter of the Torah's use of the phrase "in her lifetime" to be considered. Imagine that a man divorces his wife, (God forbid) and then seeks to marry her sister afterwards. The family dynamics would still be sheer and utter insanity for much of the same reasons, as those same in-laws who he once removed from his life (along with his first wife) he is now attempting to graft himself back into. Now admittedly, these examples are, perhaps, an extreme edge case; however, they serve well as a potential example as to why Leviticus 18:18 pertains to sisters as opposed to unrelated women, as the family dynamics at play behind marrying two sisters is vastly different than those at play behind marrying two or more unrelated women.

How many women would willingly choose to share the love and attention of the same man versus the preferred arrangement of one man and one wife? That appears to be the point of Leviticus 18:18 stating that any polygamous relationship is likely to create rivalry between the wives, regardless if they are sisters or not.

Where 119Ministries is focused on causation of the rivalry, the Torah itself is focused on the matter of intent. This distinction is evident from the fact that the purpose of the commandment—as stated explicitly in the text—was to be a prohibition against a man taking his wife's sister as a wife "to be a rival" to her in her lifetime. It was never meant to be a blanket law prohibiting a man from taking a second wife; rather, it was given as a protection to women in cases where her husband's intention was to vex his first wife by taking her sister "to be a rival to her."

We have one last point we'll make about this passage in regards to the overall literary structure of Leviticus 18. Some people insist that Leviticus 18:18 is dealing with a specific incestuous union involving two literal sisters because it occurs directly after many other laws forbidding various incestuous relations.

However, scholars have pointed out that there is a major literary break between verse 17 and 18 in Leviticus 18. This chapter presents two separate units of laws—the first unit dealing specifically with laws prohibiting various incestuous relationships and the second unit dealing with laws governing sexual morality and more generally. Leviticus 18:18 is part of the second unit, and therefore not intended to be included with the anti-incest laws of verses 6-17.

Technically, this statement is correct: Leviticus 18:18 is not an anti-incest law. Why is this important? Because if a man is not permitted to marry his wife's sister if doing so will cause rivalry to exist between the wives, then by logical inference, a man is permitted to marry his wife's sisters if doing so will not cause rivalry with his first wife. This is the clear meaning of the text.

Theologian Dr. Paul Copan explains:

Each verse in 7-17 begins identically, starting with the noun “the nakedness (of) [erwat],” and it leads up to the command, “You shall not uncover ____’s nakedness.” Also, in each of these verses (except v. 9) an explanation is given for the prohibition (e.g., “she is your mother”); this explanation isn’t found in verse 18, which we would expect if it were an incest prohibition. By contrast, each verse in 18-23 begins with a different construction. Even if you don’t read Hebrew, you can truly just glance at the text and immediately see the difference in structure starting with verse 18. Verses 18-23 each begin with what’s called the waw conjunctive (like our word “and”) followed by a different word than “nakedness” (erwat); also, instead of the consistent use of the negative (lo) plus the verb “uncover” (tegalleh, from the root galah), as in 7-17, here the negative particles are used before verbs other than uncover. Why are these contrasts important? In verses 6-17, we’re dealing with kinship bonds while verses 18-23 address prohibited sexual relations outside of kinship bonds.

-Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*, p. 113

As was mentioned earlier, Jewish theologian and Torah commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra pointed out that Leviticus 20, when discussing the penalties for engaging in sexual misconduct, “does not mention the punishment for having sexual relations with two sisters.” Turning now to this chapter, we note the penalties for serious sexual infractions, up to and including death. These penalties put teeth into the prohibitions of Leviticus 18:

- adultery with neighbor's wife, father's wife, son's wife: death penalty
- male homosexuality: death penalty
- wife and her mother: death penalty
- man's sister: cut off, bear his punishment
- male and female bestiality: death penalty
- sex during menstruation: cut off
- uncovering nakedness of paternal or maternal aunt: subject to punishment
- lie with uncle's wife: subject to punishment
- take brother's wife: die childless

A careful look at this list shows there is no punishment for taking a wife's sister, much less taking a second wife in general. If there is sin, it is in causing deliberate rivalry between two sisters, or diminishing what he has been giving the first wife in order to provide for subsequent wives for which the remedy was for the first wife to go out free. (Exodus 21:11)

All of this leads us to the conclusion that Leviticus 18:18 likely refers to any two women and not merely two literal sisters. Thus, Leviticus 18:18 prohibits a man from marrying another woman in addition to his first wife while she is alive. That is to say, the Torah explicitly prohibits polygamy.

"All of this leads us to the conclusion that Leviticus 18:18 **LIKELY** refers..." 119Ministries, after all of their positioning on Leviticus 18:18, the cornerstone of their argument, say it "**LIKELY**" refers to any two women?!? The simple fact is they introduced this verse with a big **IF** and now they close with a **LIKELY**. Beware!

For almost every Biblical argument, there is likely one "scholar" that has a different understanding than another "scholar." While there is no doubt that the small handful of scholars 119Ministries quotes are/were well versed in Hebrew, it cannot be contested that King David and the writers of the Talmud knew Hebrew of that era and Hebrew idioms better than the best of the ancient Hebrew scholars of today. We are now going to turn our attention to their testimony and understanding to solidify our response.

The Talmud, Sanhedrin 21a, shows a debate between several Rabbis debating about the maximum number of wives that Deuteronomy 17:17 would allow a king to have. In that debate, 2 Samuel 12:8 was used in support of their conclusions, which reads, “I [YHVH] gave thee [King David] thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that were too little, then would I add unto thee so much more.” (2 Samuel 12:8) The following discussion then takes place between a number of Rabbis:

“Whence do we deduce the number eighteen? — From the verse, And unto David were sons born in Hebron; and his first-born was Ammon of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; the second, Chileab of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; the third Absalom the son of Maacah; and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shefatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream of Eglah, David’s wife. These were born to David in Hebron. And of them the Prophet said: And if that were too little, then would I add unto thee the like of these, [Ka-hennah] and the like of these, [we-kahennah], each ‘kahennah’ implying six, which, with the original six, makes eighteen in all. Rabina objected: Why not assume that ‘kahennah’ implies twelve, and ‘we-kahennah,’ twenty-four? It has indeed been taught likewise: ‘He shall not multiply wives to himself beyond twenty-four.’ And according to him who interprets the redundant ‘waw,’ it ought to be forty-eight. And it has been taught even so: ‘He shall not multiply wives to himself, more than forty-eight.’” (Sanhedrin 21a)

We do not believe that the Talmud is 100% historically accurate, nor do we elevate any Rabbi’s conclusion of a law to the status of the law itself; (“Scriptural Authority”) however, we do believe that the writers of the Talmud and the Rabbis debating the issues therein fully understood the plain reading of the Torah, and undoubtedly understood the Hebrew better than anyone born and studied many centuries later in non-Hebrew-speaking lands. In the above Talmudic discussion, we also do not see any of these Rabbis pointing to Leviticus 18:18 and claiming the maximum number of wives is obviously just one, and that King David was sinning by taking more. Why not? Did none of these Rabbis know Hebrew or Hebrew idioms as well as the few scholars that claim that this verse limits a man to one wife?

If Leviticus 18:18 was actually a prohibition to polygyny, then surely, without any doubt, King David (and other polygynists mentioned in the Scriptures that were considered to be righteous) would have read that law and be in agreement with its interpretation. When it came to understanding the Torah, King David believed (and the Holy Spirit confirmed) that he had a

better understanding than many of the scholars of his time and before: “I have more understanding than all my teachers; for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than mine elders, because I have kept Thy precepts.” (Psalm 119:99-100)

Since there can be no doubt that King David understood the proper textual understanding of Leviticus 18:18, then we would have no choice but to view King David as being in open rebellion to the Father’s commandments if this passage was a blanket prohibition against polygyny. Yet if King David was in open rebellion in this area, then wouldn’t the Father have penalized him, or at least mentioned it to him? Would the Creator of the Universe overlook this open defiance of the Torah by the current leader of His people? Would the Scriptures still have such good words to say about King David? Would not unrepentant sin define King David as an evil king? Why is there no evidence in the Scripture that King David was at least remorseful for the “sin of polygyny?” Most importantly, when the prophet Nathan was chastising King David about his adultery and murder, why would he say that if the wives that the Father gave King David was not enough, then He would have given him more? If King David was intentionally transgressing the Torah by taking multiple wives, then surely, the following verse would have read very differently: “...because David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” (1 Kings 15:5, emphasis added)

The argument simply doesn’t add up.

That being said, even if you ignore all of the evidence and insist that Leviticus 18:18 refers specifically to two literal sisters, it still wouldn’t necessarily follow that polygamy, in general, is permitted.

Scripture says, ‘where there is no law, there is no sin.’ (Romans 5:13) Knowing that there is no clear law against polygyny, a man having more than one wife, let us consider for a few minutes several verses that punch additional holes in 119Ministries’ and Christendom’s historical monogamy only position.

Genesis 30:¹⁷ God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Then Leah said, “God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband.” So she named him Issachar.

Leah ascribes to God the blessing of a son *because* she gave her maid to her husband. God, nor His Word contest her declaration.

2 Chronicles 24:² Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. ³Jehoiada took two wives for him, and he became the father of sons and daughters...¹⁵ Now when Jehoiada reached a ripe old age he died; he was one hundred and thirty years old at his death. ¹⁶ They buried him in the city of David among the kings, because **he had done well in Israel and to God** and His house.

Not only does the High Priest, the one who knows the Torah the best, including Leviticus 18:18, give Joash two wives, but we are clearly told that Joash ‘did what was right in the sight of the Lord!’ And, as if that weren’t enough, Jehoiada is said to have done well in Israel and to God.

Of course, we have already seen the verses from Ezekiel and Jeremiah wherein God describes Himself as having two wives, and He *never* describes Himself in sinful terms. He never calls Himself an adulterer or a thief. Not once does He refer to Himself as a liar or a murderer. Why then does He refer to Himself as a polygynist, unless there is no sin and in fact it is entirely permitted?

In fact, the monogamy only, or ‘Creation ideal’ argument is so weak and unsupported that strawmen must be created to support it. Examples follow.

For instance, Leviticus 19:29 prohibits a man from making his daughter a prostitute. The fact that this commandment specifically refers to a daughter gives no implicit permission for a man to make other women prostitutes, such as his wife or his sister. Likewise, there’s simply no reason to assume any kind of implicit permission of polygamy in Leviticus 18:18.

In fact, this verse would still be a case against polygamy! Even if we assume—again, contrary to the evidence—that Leviticus 18:18 says specifically not to marry the literal sister of your wife, a reasonable argument could still be made that it ought to apply more generally as a law against taking any additional wife.

Again, this would be just like the law in Leviticus 19:29. Even though the law specifically refers to a man's daughter, obviously it is applied generally as a law against making any woman a prostitute. So, a consistent, common sense exegesis gives us warrant for applying Leviticus 18:18 more generally rather than limiting the law to literal sisters.

In the Hebraic perspective, it is common to interpret commandments beyond their literal understanding. The spirit or intent behind each commandment is understood to apply as well.

For example:

Exodus 23:4 If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him.

If your enemy's horse or sheep goes astray, should you return the animal to him? ...or only if it is his ox or donkey that should be returned? Obviously we should return any animal, to be consistent with the intent or spirit of the commandment. It would even be reasonable to extract the understanding from the commandment that we are to extend courtesy and respect to all, even to our enemies.

As another example, we can see how Paul applies the spirit or intent of a law beyond what is literally stated.

1 Corinthians 9:8-9 Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain."

Paul appeals to his extended interpretation of the Torah to not be from him, but from YHWH Himself. Thus, Paul is stating that YHWH intends for us to understand each commandment beyond just the literal.

Paul agrees with the literal that an ox should not be muzzled when it is treading the grain.

But, what is the purpose or intent of the commandment?

The idea is that the animal is working for you, and it will be enabled to work harder and more effectively when being fed while working.

Paul then extends this concept beyond the literal to the feeding and supporting of ministry. The work of ministries feed the flock, and Paul uses the exemplified commandment in Moses to state that the flock should then feed the ministries. Just as feeding the ox is not for the benefit of the ox, but we benefit from the ox's work. Likewise feeding and supporting ministry is not for the benefit of the ministries, but for all those who benefit from the work of the ministry.

Paul explains further:

1 Corinthians 9:10-12 Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?

So we should understand that commandments are deeper in intent than just the literal, and such should be considered in practice.

As already mentioned, this would be just like the law in Leviticus 19:29. Even though the law specifically refers to a man's daughter, obviously it is applied generally as a law against making any woman a prostitute. So, a consistent, commonsense exegesis gives us warrant for applying Leviticus 18:18 more generally rather than limiting the law to literal sisters, just as we would with other commandments.

In fact, a much more supportable case is the very simple understanding that God never regulates sin. He only ever regulates what is permitted.

For example, God never says, 'If you are going to steal, this is how you do it to please Me.' Rather, He simply says, 'Thou shalt not steal.'

With polygyny, however, He has clear regulation on how to righteously walk within this permitted form of marriage. One such example is,

Deuteronomy 21:¹⁵ "If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and *both* the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, ¹⁶ then it

shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the firstborn before the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn. ¹⁷ But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn.

Simply, God says, 'If you have two wives, here is the righteous way to handle the inheritance rights.' God *never* regulates sin. He does regulate that which is permitted!

Some might object to the validity of this law by saying: "Even if Leviticus 18:18 is a law against polygamy, it still can't be wrong, because there is no legal punishment for transgressing it!"

To get to this point, 119Ministries has had one leap of logic after another while ignoring multiple counter arguments or even clear Scripture supporting or permitting polygyny. But, they are bias driven to force a conclusion contrary to the Scriptures. Instead of the very simple point that there is no punishment because it is not wrong, they will now attempt to equate unquantifiable hidden sins of the heart with the easily verifiable and outward practice of polygyny.

This objection is pretty easy to address. While it's true the Torah doesn't mention any legal consequences for practicing polygamy, the commandment against polygamy is certainly not unique in that regard.

For instance, there is no legal punishment for hating someone, despite the fact that Leviticus 19:17 says,

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart." Also, the tenth commandment prohibits coveting, but the Torah likewise provides no civil punishment for breaking this law. Nobody would suggest that the lack of legal punishments for transgressing these commandments invalidates the commandments.

So why does polygamy go unpunished within the Torah legal system despite being condemned by God as sin?

Logical leap!! God never condemns it as a sin? As previously demonstrated, He describes Himself as a polygynist. We defy the 119Ministries cast to identify a single place in Scripture where God uses a sinful action or characteristic to describe Himself. We don't need two witnesses. We'll settle for just one other than this alleged 'sin' of polygyny. [The only description

we can think of that comes close is where He comes as a thief in the night 1 Thes. 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10 This is metaphorical meaning He will be stealthy. 'As a thief' does not mean He IS a thief, where Ezekiel 23 says He IS the husband of two wives.]

To answer 119Ministireis' question: precisely because it is not a sin is the reason why polygyny goes unpunished in the Torah legal system. Sometimes the easy answer is the right answer. No theological, logical or exegetical gymnastics are necessary. God *never* calls it sin, therefore it has no punishment.

Hugenberger offers a possible reason:

Leviticus 18:18 can be categorized as a *lex imperfecta*, a law which prohibits something without thereby rendering it invalid (reflecting a society which would have lacked the requisite means of enforcement in any case).

-Gordon P. Hugenberger, "Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law & Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi," p. 118

The idea that the society didn't have the requisite means of enforcing monogamy only is laughable! God judged quite seriously much lesser sins, events, and circumstances. Hugenberger's theory here is laughable in the face of a holy God. To agree with Hugenberger is to think God impotent to judge His people. Utterly preposterous!

In other words, practically speaking, carrying out a punishment for transgressing this law would have been difficult to enforce in the ancient world. But whatever the reason may be, the fact that there are no legal consequences for transgressing God's law against polygamy certainly gives no basis for rejecting the law.

Again, preposterous!

On that note, the fact that there's no punishment for transgressing Leviticus 18:18 actually further distinguishes it from the previous anti-incest laws. Leviticus 20 reiterates the anti-incest laws of Leviticus 18 and lists the punishments for transgressing them. However, you'll notice that the commandment in Leviticus 18:18 is absent. This fact has led scholars to reasonably

conclude that the law in Leviticus 18:18, therefore, is not merely another form of incest, but a law against polygamy in general.

We would conclude that Leviticus 18:18 gives us an explicit commandment against the practice of polygamy. This of course aligns with God's original design for marriage as established in Creation. Like homosexuality and adultery in the scope of sexual relationships, polygamy is a deviation from God's design, and therefore, we shouldn't be surprised to find a commandment in the Torah that prohibits it.

With that said, it really shouldn't surprise us to discover that polygamy, rather than being endorsed, is often painted in a negative light, and through that, actually seems to be discouraged throughout the Bible. It could be reasonable to believe that those who practiced polygamy throughout biblical history were doing so in direct violation of not only God's original design for marriage exemplified in Creation, and likely, as we have seen, violating His Law.

This is also a fallacious argument.

The "Creation Ideal" led to Cain killing Abel. Righteous Noah's son, Ham, raped Noah's wife and Jacob is still fighting with Esau. Those are just monogamous marriages in the first half of Genesis!! If we use 119 Ministries' logic, then monogamy is also 'painted in a negative light' and we should avoid it as well.

The simple fact is, sinners are sinners. Polygyny simply reveals things in the heart that were already there. Jealousy, selfishness, rebellion and anger are real sins that the Scripture actually speaks against. *Those* are the root problems, not polygyny.

As Davidson remarks:

In the patriarchal period, there are several biblical examples of plural marriages. Although these biblical narratives provide no explicit verbal condemnation of this practice, the narrator presents each account in such a way as to underscore a theology of disapproval. The record of these polygamous relationships bristles with discord, rivalry, heartache, and even rebellion, revealing the motivations and/or disastrous consequences that invariably accompanied such departures from God's Edenic ideal."

-Richard M. Davidson, "Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament," p. 180

Notice, "these Biblical narratives provide NO explicit verbal condemnation..." The fact that Davidson eisegetically thinks each plural account has a negative theology of approval is a matter of opinion and presuppositional bias.

Some may want to bring up Lamech from Genesis 4, as a man in the Bible who had no negative consequences from his polygamy. We would agree, but the narrative we find in Genesis 4 paints us a picture of a man who lives a life already against the Torah. He is a descendent of Cain who we know rebelled against the Torah. Lamech lived a life of violence and vengeance. So, while we can't say that Lamech had any negative consequences from polygamy, we can say that he was already living a life in rebellion to the Creator. Even some scholars argue that the entire story of Lamech is designed to represent a departure from YHWH's ideal for humanity as established throughout Creation. Lamech's unrighteous lifestyle, being inclusive of polygamy, would hardly be supportive or a positive for polygamy. Aside from Lamech, there are a few more stories in Scripture about those who chose to be polygamists. Abram's polygamy is underscored with being associated with a negative environment. We see the strife and contention between Sarai and Hagar as well as between Isaac and Ishmael. There may even be a literary parallel between Abram's polygamy with Sarai and Hagar and the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3.

For instance, Genesis 3:6 says that Eve "took"—laqach—the fruit from the tree and "gave" it—nathan—to Adam.

Likewise, Genesis 16:3 says that Sarai "took"—laqach—her servant Hagar and "gave"—nathan—her to Abram.

Also consider Genesis 3:17, which says that Adam "listened to the voice of" his wife. Likewise, in Genesis 16:2 it says that Abram "listened to the voice of" his wife, Sarai.

You'll notice the identical Hebrew words and expressions used in the same order in both accounts. These parallels have led many scholars to conclude that the biblical author was intentionally connecting the Hagar scandal with the fall of Adam and Eve. In other words,

Abram's polygamy is portrayed as the "fall" of Abram and Sarai just like Adam and Eve fell in the Garden. Hagar, as the second woman, is the forbidden fruit.

Again, this is a stretch. The real question is, 'Why does GOD *never* call it sin?' There is not a single condemnation of a single person anywhere in Scripture. Is God mute? Unseeing? Incapable of being clear on the topic? Does He wink at one sin while having men stoned for another?

Moving forward, Jacob's polygamy likewise results in constant strife, contention, deception, and jealousy within his very dysfunctional family. Again, we see with Jacob a clear picture of the effects of turning away from God's original design for marriage in Creation.

Christendom has boatloads of theologians who love to throw Jacob under the marriage bus. They line up and try to outdo each other in vilification of Jacob and his four wives, but Scripture never does. Scripture portrays Jacob as a righteous father to the nation of Israel, the man chosen, as well as his wives, *for the purpose of establishing a nation*. God never condemns him or his polygyny, in fact, as previously shown in Genesis 30:17-18, the blessing of a son, Issachar, to Leah is ascribed to her having given Zilpah to Jacob!! *Every single Israelite, whether grafted in or native born* is a member of a tribe and by definition has one of those four ladies as a foremother. Why in heaven's name do we insist on disparaging them when God and Scripture do not? That IS sin.

The Bible records that when Esau was forty years old, he likewise became a polygamist. Esau's wives "made life bitter for Isaac and Rebecca" (Genesis 26:34-35). Hebrews 12:16 says that Esau had a "sexually immoral and unholy" character, so it's not surprising to see that he deviated from God's design for marriage by being a polygamist.

Fallacious. Guilt by association. All polygamists are sexually immoral and unholy in character? Maybe 119 Ministries should go back and read Hebrews 11 wherein Abraham, Jacob, Caleb, Gideon, David and likely Moses were all 'men approved by God' who also happen to have had multiple wives.

Another relevant passage dispelling the 'sexually immoral and unholy character' assassination is,

Genesis 20:² Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married.” ⁴ Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a nation, even *though blameless (Hebrew: righteous)*?” ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ **In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.**” ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, “**Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this**, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now therefore, restore the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore *her*, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.”.....¹⁷ Abraham prayed to God, and **God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids**, so that they bore *children*. ¹⁸ For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

God clearly says that Abimelech acted with integrity and was blameless (Hebrew says, ‘righteous’). And, Abimelech already had at least one wife and maids. Did God wink at Abimelech’s desire for another wife or did He act to protect both Sarah and Abimelech from adultery *because Sarah was already married*? Scripture strongly supports the latter, *not* the former.

Sometimes the judge Gideon, who is said to have had “many wives”, in Judges 8:30, is offered as an example of God’s endorsement of polygamy. While it’s true that Gideon is given as an example of faith in Hebrews 11:32, there’s no reason to assume that God endorsed every aspect of his character and deeds. In fact, a major theme of the Book of Judges is that “man did what was right in his own eyes.”

Show me one, just one, place where **God** condemns polygyny! Surely, there is one, somewhere in this big book we call a Bible. Can He not speak? Maybe He stepped out the day that page was supposed to be written?

The author's point is to condemn the idolatry and sexual immorality of the times, and he did that by recording all the ugly details and catastrophic results of sin. Gideon is no exception. Gideon's pride and idolatry later in life contributed to Israel's downslide into apostasy and reached its climax in Abimelech, one of Gideon's sons who had his seventy siblings murdered (Judges 9:5). In fact, it could be argued that the author deliberately mentions Gideon's polygamy in order to connect it to his negative legacy.

Complete and total fallacious overreach. Surely Jehoiada the High Priest knew these things and knew the Torah in 2 Chronicles 24 when he gave Joash the king two wives and 'did what was right in the sight of the Lord.' Clearly, 119 Ministries has an agenda that they are willing to sacrifice both logic and Scripture over. Consider this next argument. It is a doozie.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the disastrous consequences of polygamy is King Solomon who had married 700 women and had 300 concubines. Solomon's polygamy was in direct opposition to the commandment given to kings in Deuteronomy 17:17 not to multiply wives, which we'll unpack in more detail a little later.

The biblical author is clear that Solomon's idolatry and eventual downfall were the direct result of his polygamy:

1 Kings 11:3-4 He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord [YHWH] His God, as was the heart of David his father.

We acknowledge that Solomon married many foreign women, and those foreign women knew other gods, which appears to have influenced Solomon to also go after other gods. However, Scripture notes how many wives Solomon had for a reason, and clearly, this did not go well for him.

119 Ministries, an organization that has set a high standard for interpreting Scripture within its context and not reading into the text that which is not there, violates their own standard. Conveniently, they did not show the viewer the two verses before the cited passage. Let's see it in context.

1 Kings 11 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, ² from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, “You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.” Solomon held fast to these in love. ³ He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. ⁴ For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father *had been*.

We would agree that the number of wives, likely treaty wives, that Solomon had were excessive. However, God never says a single word about the *number*. God is very clear that the problem was **FOREIGN** wives who, exactly as He warned, turned Solomon’s heart away. God Himself does not point to polygyny as the problem in the clearest opportunity in all of Scripture. We can’t either. To do so is to eisegetically impose on the text a personal bias that condemns men and women over whom we have no authority to judge.

Opponents of our position might object to some of these examples that we pointed out and insist that the contention, heartache, rebellion, etc., were not because of polygamy.

We agree that all of these situations were maybe not caused by polygamy itself or just about contention between wives; of course, there were likely additional factors involved. However, there does appear to be a link between some fairly disastrous events and families in which polygamy occurred.

This is an admission of a weak case while begging the jury to accept the call for speculation and assumptions of motive and reason as fact. This is gross error and radical sin of the tongue against God Himself and the patriarchs whom He has called righteous. 119 Ministries should be ashamed.

Again, as Davidson has said, “Although these biblical narratives provide no explicit verbal condemnation of this practice, the narrator presents each account in such a way as to underscore a theology of disapproval.”

There you have it, “..these Biblical narratives provide no explicit verbal condemnation...”

The disastrous consequences that have accompanied the practice of polygamy throughout Israel's history perhaps contribute to the Jewish people all but abandoning the practice by the first century. Biblical scholar and rabbi, J.H. Hertz, says:

Polygamy seems to have wellnigh disappeared in Israel after the Babylonian Exile. Early Rabbinic literature presupposes a practically monogamic society; and out of 2,800 Teachers mentioned in the Talmudim, one is only stated to have had two wives. In the fourth century Aramaic paraphrase (Targum) of the Book of Ruth, the kinsman (IV, 6) refuses to “redeem” Ruth, saying, “I cannot marry her, because I am already married; I have no right to take an additional wife, lest it lead to strife in my home.” Such paraphrase would be meaningless if it did not reflect the general feeling of the people on this question.

-J.H. Hertz, Pentateuch & Haftorahs, p. 932

J.H. Hertz may offer one opinion of polygyny in the Second Temple Period, however historians, theologians and contemporaries to the period tell a different story. Adiel Schemer, in a paper titled [*How Much Jewish Polygyny In Roman Palestine \(2001\)*](#), documents many examples of polygyny during and around the time of Yeshua. He cites such sources as Jewish Roman historians, Josephus, and Justin as well as Roman law from 393 CE. Here is an extended quote that offers multiple evidentiary sources from the period. (Footnotes available in the source document.)

Moreover, this problem was raised only in cases where the husband died without having children, and one of his wives was forbidden to his brothers because of their close kinship. If such a combination was frequent enough to produce the great halakhic dispute in the Yavne generation, we may safely assume that cases of "normal" and "simple" polygyny (for example, cases where the husband did not die childless, or that none of his wives had any kinship relation with his brothers) were more frequent. This conclusion is corroborated by Josephus, who explicitly states that it is customary among Jewish men to marry more than one wife (Ant. XVII: 14; cf. War, 1:477). It is also supported by Justin's claim, that the Jews marry many women.³⁷ Since these testimonies

are of a general and observational character, they are of higher value for us than a few specific evidences for the actual practice of polygyny.

Furthermore, several sources from that period indeed testify to the existence of polygyny:

1. Joseph, son of Tobias, married his niece while being married to another woman (Josephus, Ant. XII:186-189).
2. Herod had many wives (Josephus, War 1:477; Ant. XVII: 18).
3. Antipater, Herod's son, married the daughter of his brother, Aristobolus, and another woman, the daughter of Antigonos.³⁸
4. In the families of Qifai and Alovai were rivals.³⁹
5. Abba, Raban Gamliel's brother, had two wives (bYev. 15a).
6. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrquenos married his niece while married to another woman.⁴⁰
7. A Jewish official under Agrippa II had two wives (bSuk. 27a).
8. Babatha's second husband, Judah, was married to another woman Miriam, at the same time.⁴¹

(More examples follow, then,)

All these examples demonstrate that polygyny was not regarded as an impossibility. Of more importance is the fact that in none of these cases is there any opposition whatsoever to the possibility of a man marrying more than one woman at a time.

A confirmation of this conclusion is found in Roman legislation of the time. There are several Roman rulings and laws which are directly concerned with marriage among the Jews. For example, the law of Arcadius and Honorius, given in the year 393, contains a prohibition forbidding the Jews to act according to their custom (*mos*) and law (*lex*) regarding marriage. It states: "None of the Jews shall keep his custom in marriage unions, neither shall he contract nuptials according to his law, or enter into several matrimonyes at the same time."⁵⁴ As this legislation explicitly forbids polygynous marriage, it may be assumed that the Jews of that era did actually practice polygyny. This conclusion is corroborated by Theodorithos, who, at the beginning of the fifth century C.E., testified that "In the past both the Jews and the Greek used to marry two, three, or four women, or even more, at the same time."⁵⁵ These sources confirm the information found in *Sefer Ha-Ma'asim*, which, depicting an identical reality, indicates that the halakhic discussion of that reality was not theoretical but practical. In light of all this, it can be assumed that at least some of the Tannaitic sources relating to polygyny, examined above, are far from being simply theoretical discussions in the rarefied atmosphere of rabbinical study circles and academies. Rather, they reflect a social reality with which the rabbis were highly familiar.

Many additional sources can be produce corroborating the fact that polygyny was widely practised among the Jews at the time of Yeshua which makes His Parable of the Ten Virgins still more interesting. Why did He *never* address polygyny? He addressed divorce, as previously demonstrated. He addressed adultery and fearlessly addressed other rabbinic and cultural misunderstandings and wrongful application of the Law. Why no direct address of polygyny, unless it simply is not a sin?

What is really important to note here—and please do not miss it—is that the Targum specifically mentions that the kinsman could not marry because he was already married. Not only that, but look at his further reasoning, “lest it lead to strife in my home.” That language connects directly back to Leviticus 18:18, in which marrying another would cause rivalry between the wives. This goes to show that the general interpretation of Leviticus 18:18 was not limited to just literal sisters, but instructed against taking any additional wife, lest it should cause rivalry in the household.

Of course, as we mentioned earlier, some sects of Judaism in the first century, like the Qumran community, completely prohibited the practice. Not only that, but, also like we mentioned earlier,

the apostolic instruction in the first century consistently and invariably upholds monogamy as God's design for marriage.

So this is what we have established so far:

First, like homosexuality and adultery, polygamy is a clear deviation from God's original design for marriage as established in Creation.

Second, the Bible does in fact, appear to explicitly prohibit the practice of polygamy.

And third, rather than being endorsed in the Bible, polygamy appears to be painted in a negative light and is consequently discouraged throughout the Bible.

Frankly, NONE of these three assertions have been proved unequivocally and the preponderance of Scriptural evidence leans away from the 119 Ministries conclusions, if not directly contradicting them.

Before we move on to our next point, it's important that we address the issue of concubines since it is related to this topic. It was not uncommon in the ancient world for men to have concubines in addition to wives, and we even see some men in the Bible who practiced concubinage. We will be unpacking this issue specifically in a later teaching, but here is a quick summary of the issue:

Sometimes the term "concubine"—*pilegesh* in Hebrew—refers to a legitimate wife whom a man marries after the death of his first wife. This is the case with Keturah, who is called Abraham's "wife" in Genesis 25:1, but his "concubine" in 1 Chronicles 1:32. Like we've already mentioned, there is nothing wrong with a man entering into a monogamous marriage with a woman after divorce or the death of his first wife.

However, most of the time, this term refers to a woman who could be taken by a man without any legal formalization. She would voluntarily sell herself as a maidservant to a Hebrew family for the purposes of the man's sexual pleasure as well as to bear children in the case of barrenness. We see this with Jacob who had two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah, in addition to his wives, Rachel and Leah. In the ancient world, a concubine did not have the same legal status as a full and legitimate wife.

Many of the arguments we've given in this teaching to demonstrate God's disapproval of polygamy can also apply to concubinage. For instance:

1) The ideal established in Creation is one man and one woman, which certainly precludes multiple sexual partners at the same time, whether or not they are official "wives" in the eyes of Ancient Near Eastern society.

2) In regards to Leviticus 18:18, one of primary reasons for the command was to prevent the rivalry and strife that occurs when women compete for the attention and love from the same man. Any sexual relationship with multiple women is likely to result in such rivalry. Thus, the harm that the Law wants prevented certainly would apply to concubinage as well as polygamy.

3) Concubinage usually appears right alongside polygamy as being painted in a negative light throughout the Bible and therefore appears to be discouraged.

So like polygamy, we'd argue that concubinage is against God's will. The nuanced difference being that concubinage could actually be classified as a type of fornication—that is to say, "unlawful sexual activity," which would include sexual relations outside of the marriage covenant. As we mentioned in the first part of this series, *Is the Bible Misogynistic*, we've learned that the sexual union is to be enjoyed only within the boundaries of a committed covenant relationship between husband and wife. Since a concubine is considered to have an inferior status to that of a legitimate wife, the practice of concubinage violates the sacredness of the sexual union between husband and wife.

There are multiple fallacies in these assertions, not the least of which is that God *never condemns either multiple wives or concubinage*. To assert that He disapproves is to put words in His mouth which He never spoke.

Without digging into a study of concubinage, it is important to note that two of Jacob's wives, Bilhah and Zilpah, also referred to as concubines, are mothers of Israel. God never condemns Jacob or his ladies. To do so is a radical affront to God, Jacob, all four wives and a violation of honoring your father and mother.

119Ministries' assertion that "concubinage could actually be classified as a type of fornication—that is to say, 'unlawful sexual activity,' which would include sexual relations outside of the marriage covenant" is extremely offensive. God never says such and they have the audacity to 'talk about my momma that way.' Again, this is dishonoring both father and mother as well as The Father!! How many commandments can be broken at one time?

It would be wise of 119Ministries to go study out the Scriptural definition of adultery (see Deut.22:22; cf Numbers 5:11-31). What they will discover is that adultery is ***always*** based on the marital status of the woman. A married woman is restricted to her husband only. No such law exists anywhere in Scripture for a man. A man, even if married, may take another wife or concubine, however, he assumes the obligation of providing for and protecting her because she becomes his exclusively. It is *only fornication* if he does not fulfill his responsibility to her and simply 'uses' her.

While concubinage was a slightly different legal status for the woman, it was an honorable position, not the 'sexual pleasure' role that 119Ministries wants to denigrate concubines with.

Like we said, this topic will be treated fully in its own teaching, but for now it's clear that the reality of concubinage in the Ancient Near East certainly does not lend support to the idea that God approves of such a practice, let alone that He approves of polygamy.

Now let's move on to our fourth point: The passages in which polygamy might seem to be approved by God are misunderstood.

Despite everything we've already covered, some people will still insist that the Bible teaches that God at least implicitly permits and perhaps approves of the practice of polygamy. A number of passages are presented in support of this assertion. Our contention, however, is that these passages have been misunderstood. When we read them in context, we find that they in no way suggest that God approves of this practice.

Let's now turn our attention to the main arguments and passages in support of the pro-polygamy position.

The first passage we'll look at is Exodus 21:

Exodus 21:7-11 When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her. If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

There is certainly a lot of confusion when it comes to this passage. It's beyond the scope of this teaching to address all of the difficult questions that arise from these verses—most notably the regulation of slavery—but if you'd like more information on that topic, we do unpack this passage and others in our teaching, *Slavery and the Bible*.

For now, we're just going to focus on a couple of particular points. When the passage speaks of the man taking "another wife to himself," it is assumed that this refers to another wife in addition to the young maidservant mentioned previously in the passage; thus, it is argued that this passage permits polygamy.

However, when you carefully read through the passage, it's clear that these laws have literally nothing to do with polygamy! A plain reading of the text demonstrates that these laws are in regards to what is to be done when an engagement falls through.

In summary, if the master decides not to marry the maidservant, the first solution is that she can be redeemed—that is, bought back.

Alternatively, there is the option that she and the master's son could get married if she desires. If this happens, then the master is to treat her not as a servant, but as his daughter.

If she is not redeemed and if she doesn't marry the master's son, and if the master decides to marry someone else other than her, the master is still required to meet her basic needs. If he doesn't provide what she needs, the maidservant can leave and is to be considered a free woman and cannot be sold.

These instructions in the Torah are all about looking after the best interests of the maidservant so that she does not end up on the street if engagement plans fall through between her and her master. It has nothing to do with polygamy.

119Ministries is only half right. This does relate to an engagement falling through, as one possible way it plays out, however, it absolutely does have to do with care for more than one wife if the husband has such. The plain reading of the text makes sense.

However, some have argued that the maidservant's "marital rights" that her master must provide her with, refer to conjugal rights—that is, sexual pleasure. While this interpretation is reflected in many English Bible translations, some scholars have challenged that understanding. The difficulty is that the Hebrew word, *onah*, translated as "marital rights," is notoriously difficult to translate due to the fact that it is found only once in the entire Bible.

Theologian Paul Copan argues that "shelter" or possibly "oil" are more accurate alternatives to "marital rights":

The problem with the translation "marital rights" (*onah*) is this: It's a stab in the dark with a term used only once in the Old Testament. Words occurring once can often be tricky to handle, and translators should tread carefully. Some scholars have suggested more likely possibilities. For example, this word could be related to a word for oil (or possibly ointments) [...] However, an even more plausible rendering is available. The root of the word is associated with the idea of habitation or dwelling (*ma'on*, *me'onah*); for example, "God is a dwelling place," or heaven is God's holy "dwelling place" (Deut. 33:27; 2 Cron. 30:27). We can more confidently conclude that quarters or shelter (though possibly oil) are in view here, not conjugal rights. So the servant girl should be guaranteed the basic necessities: food, clothing, and lodging/shelter.

-Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*, p. 115

Another objection to this plain reading of the passage is that it mentions the master having a "son." Therefore, it is argued, he must be married and is looking into getting a second wife. However, that assumption simply goes beyond the evidence. Other reasonable options are that the master's first wife had passed away or he is divorced. There is no reason to assume polygamy here.

As with a number of 119Ministries' assertions, they ask for an argument from silence. They choose to read the passage through a monogamy only bias, decidedly absent from the culture

this was given to. The result is a wild attempt to use silence to say ‘there is no reason to assume polygamy here.’ In fact, there is no reason *not* to assume polygyny.

No doubt this is a difficult passage, and we hope to address it more fully in a future teaching. As mentioned before, we do speak to the slavery aspect of this passage and others in our teaching, Slavery and the Bible. However, when it comes to the specific question of polygamy, as far as this passage is concerned, we can move on.

The second passage we’ll look at is Deuteronomy 17:17, which says:

Deuteronomy 17:17 And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.

The command not to “acquire many wives” is among several commandments given to kings of Israel. This is often interpreted as God forbidding a king from marrying an excessive number of women, but implicitly permitting polygamy for kings on a moderate level. In other words, it’s said that a king is allowed to marry multiple women, just not too many.

When this verse is taken in isolation, due to the imprecise language used, there simply isn’t enough evidence to say that this verse prohibits polygamy.

Actually, the verse clearly does have a prohibition! Do not *multiply* wives. Forcing it beyond that point is adding to the Torah, expressly forbidden.

However, when we read this verse in its immediate context, we see something interesting. Consider the verses that immediately follow:

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

Just like his fellow citizens, the king was to follow the Torah. He was to write his own copy of the Torah and study it that He may not turn from God's commandments. And of course, as we established earlier in this teaching, one of God's commandments appears to prohibit polygamy!

So, the king would copy the Torah and write many verses about Abraham and Jacob, revered patriarchs who had multiple wives. The king would write such verses as Leah ascribing the blessing of a son to God 'because I gave my maid to my husband.' He would write about Moses having a Midianite wife and a Cushite wife. He would also write about Caleb, who had multiple wives, inheriting the Land along with Joshua. And, as a wise student, the king would notice that *there is not one single condemnation from God or any other source*, just one short verse in family relations saying that he is not to marry sisters for the purpose of vexing one of the other.

Since the king's righteous behavior was to serve as an example to the nation of Israel, it's therefore reasonable to conclude that Deuteronomy 17:17 upholds the similar prohibition against polygamy given to all of God's people in Leviticus 18:18. Furthermore, since the intent of these commandments was so that the king would not think of himself as superior to other Israelites or think of himself as above God's Law, the language used in verse 17 to "not acquire many wives for himself" ought to be understood in that light. That is to say, the king is prohibited from having more wives than regular Israelites were allowed to have—namely, more than one.

The spurious cornerstone of Leviticus 18:18 is again used as the foundation for a leap of logic the Scriptures nowhere ever make. In fact, the opposite argument could be made more reasonably. The king was limited to not multiplying wives, but no such command exists for the common man who could afford it.

Now, if the intention of this verse was to prohibit all polygamy, some might say that it should be clearer. However, as Dr. Gordon P. Hugenberger explains:

One may object that this prohibition would have been clearer had it simply stated "the king shall not take a second wife" or "shall not have more than one wife," etc. Given the undeniable right to remarry following divorce or the death of a spouse, however, the expression as it exists in 17:17 may be deemed adequate.

-Gordon P. Hugenberger, "Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law & Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi," p. 120, n. 137

It is indeed humorous the great lengths to which scholars will go to make excuses for why God just couldn't be clear on the matter. The simple and eternally avoided truth is that God doesn't have a problem with multiple wives. He describes Himself as having such.

What God has a problem with is women not being in an exclusive relationship with a man that is for life, and He has a problem with a man who does not take proper care and responsibility for the woman or women he has taken under his covering. God values marriage and covenant. He does not care if it is monogamous or polygynous. His concern is that seed not be mixed (multiple husbands, Deuteronomy 22:22-24) and that once the woman (a field into which seed can be planted) is owned by a man, he is not to ever release that field from his family (Malachi 2:16). The parallels to the agricultural laws in the Torah are striking. Property has boundary lines. Property is to stay in the family. Seed is not to be mixed. Loosely, a man may own multiple fields, but a field may not have multiple owners.

This is not complicated stuff. It is quite simple when Scripture is read and understood as given, not forced into a monogamy only paradigm that originated in Greece 700 years before Yeshua.

In other words, insisting that the language in verse 17 ought to be more precise in its prohibition of polygamy doesn't take into account a person's right to take another wife after divorce or the death of their first spouse. Therefore, the language in verse 17 allows for that right while also prohibiting polygamy as we can clearly see when we read it in context.

The third passage we'll look at is Deuteronomy 21:15-17, which says:

Deuteronomy 21:15-17

If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn, but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his.

It is claimed that since this law regulates a polygamous union that God therefore approves of the practice. Again, that is an inaccurate assumption.

I defy 119Ministries to produce any example of a sin wherein God regulates it so that it can be done righteously. God never says, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery, but if you do, here's how to please Me.' He never says, 'Stealing is a sin, but if you want to do it righteously, here is what you should do.' The fact is, He *DOES* tell us how a man with two wives is to treat them and the offspring. By regulating the action, He is by definition, providing righteous boundaries for the practice. This argument alone shatters the entire anti-polygyny case.

To give an example, the same could be said for Deuteronomy 23:18, which forbids prostitute wages from being used as payment of vows. The existence of this Law certainly doesn't legitimize prostitution! Thus, in the same way, the existence of a law detailing the rights of the firstborn in a less-than-ideal situation—when a man has two wives—does not legitimize polygamy.

The fourth argument we'll look at is based on God's instructions concerning Levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. This law states that when a husband dies childless, his brother or near relative is to marry the deceased husband's widow in order so that the firstborn from this marriage would be the legal heir of the deceased husband.

It is argued that since this passage does not explicitly exempt a married brother from his Levirate duty, it's theoretically possible that this law would require a married brother to take an additional wife.

You could argue that possibility exists in theory, but when we look at the actual evidence of this law being carried out in practice, we see something different.

We see the practice of Levirate marriage being employed only two times in the Bible—with Tamar and Ruth. In both cases, they were remarried to men who did not already have a wife.

False. This is an argument from silence. Just because the text does not tell us the men they married were single or not married does not mean they were. This is approaching the text not from the cultural acceptance and predisposition of polygyny, but from a monogamy only bias that did not exist then. In fact, it is entirely possible that both Onan and Boaz were married and had additional wives. That the text does not explicitly tell us that they did not have a wife in no

way proves that they didn't. We simply aren't told and assuming will get one into trouble. It is therefore a logical fallacy to base the argument on the silence of the text.

It's important to also understand that this law was not given in a vacuum, but ought to be understood in light of everything else the Torah says on the subject. There are clear exemptions to this law, even if they aren't explicitly stated.

For instance, when Tamar's husband Onan died, she was told to remain a widow until Onan's brother, Shelah, was old enough to marry her. But an exemption for age is never stated in the law. We can reasonably conclude, therefore, that there could be other exemptions even if they aren't explicitly stated in the passage. And since we've already demonstrated how the Torah likely prohibits polygamy in Leviticus 18:18, we can reasonably conclude that this law exempts married relatives from this duty.

Again, a beg for argument from silence to support the assertion that the "Torah **LIKELY** prohibits polygamy in Leviticus 18:18..." 119Ministries *knows* that their Leviticus 18:18 argument is weak sauce. That they press forward in the face of such a weak position that is so easily disassembled is quite disturbing. Honestly, we are *very concerned* for the future of this ministry. They are demonstrating that they are willing to sacrifice clear verses to support their bias, something they have taken countless people to task for. Further, throwing God and patriarchs under the bus will incur judgment. They need to publicly and quickly recant!

Admittedly, since the passage does not exhaustively cover every single situation in which the Levirate duty may or may not apply, someone could argue that polygamy is permitted, however, that conclusion appears least likely. At most, it's the rare exception to the rule and only permitted in extremely specific circumstances.

This could be compared to the principle that breaking the Sabbath is allowed in order to save a life of a person or animal. Those specific situations in which breaking the Sabbath might be necessary to save a life, do not give permission for breaking the Sabbath in general. Likewise, while it's theoretically possible that polygamy might be permitted in extremely rare circumstances, that possibility certainly does not suggest that polygamy ought to be approved in any other situation.

“Where there is no Law, there is no sin.” (Romans 4:15)

Regardless, this commandment needs to be understood in light of everything else the Bible says on the topic. And since the Bible is clear that polygamy is against God’s will, it’s reasonable to conclude that married relatives would be exempt from Levirate duty.

“...since the Bible is clear that polygamy is against God’s will..’ A lie repeated often enough is still a lie.

The fifth argument we’ll look at is the claim that Moses himself had two wives at the same time. It is argued, therefore, that Moses couldn’t have given commandments from God prohibiting polygamy since Moses was practicing it himself.

But is this claim true? The suggestion that Moses is a polygamist is based on an assumption that Moses’ wife, Zipporah, a Midianite (Exodus 2:21; 4:25; 18:2), is a different woman than the “Cushite woman” mentioned in Numbers 12:1.

However, there is simply no evidence for this assumption. The most likely explanation is that the Cushite woman refers to Zipporah. In the Wycliff Bible Encyclopedia, John Rea remarks:

It is possible that Zipporah, a Midianite, was also designated a Cushite, for Midian included part of NW Arabia where some Cushite tribes lived. Furthermore, she may have been called a Cushite because her complexion may have been darker than that of most Israelites.

-John Rea, “Zipporah,” Wycliff Bible Encyclopedia, 2:1848-49

This can be further confirmed in Habakkuk 3:7, where Cushan and Midian occur in synonymous parallelism, suggesting that perhaps the terms referred to the same region.

This argument is a very long stretch that is much less probable than Miriam and Aaron being angered by Moshe taking another wife.

The issue in Numbers 12 is that Miriam and Aaron called Zipporah a derogatory name because, according to the very next verse, they were frustrated with Moses’ leadership and likely jealous

of the influence that Zipporah had over Moses as his wife. Calling her a “Cushite woman” was an attempt to demean and de-personalize Zipporah and therefore bring indictment against Moses for marrying a nonHebrew.

Whatever the case may be, the text certainly doesn’t prove that Moses had more than one wife at the same time. The only way to arrive at such a conclusion is through a series of baseless assumptions.

At the moment, “a series of baseless assumptions” is a rather ironic charge from 119Ministries.

The sixth argument we’ll look at is the suggestion that King David, a “man after God’s own heart,” practiced polygamy; therefore, God must permit, or even approve of it.

However, there are several reasons to reject that reasoning. First, when God anointed David as the future king and called him “a man after his own heart” in 1 Samuel 13:14, David was not yet a polygamist and was likely still single.

Moreover, everyone knows that David fell into terrible sins—including adultery and murder. So this statement certainly does not imply an endorsement of all of David’s behavior, and therefore it cannot be used to suggest that God approved of David’s polygamy.

Why don’t we ever see YHWH rebuke anyone for the sin of polygamy?

119Ministries continues to call polygamy a sin, but God has yet to.... This is a real problem with their argument. It is based on a verifiably false premise.

God does not always rebuke every sin that everyone commits, but that does not mean that YHWH endorses it.

True, but 119Ministries asked the right question. “Why don’t we ever see YHWH rebuke *anyone* for the sin of polygamy?”

Maybe because it is not a sin?

Seriously! 4000+ years of Biblical history and more than 40 recorded instances of polygamy, many are leaders of Israel, authors of Scripture and 'righteous men', but not *one single condemnation?* Really?

The answer to the question is blindingly obvious, but 119Ministries doesn't want to see it. They are more interested in tradition and doctrines of men (rooted in Greco-Roman law) that they can't see the very obvious fact that God doesn't care about monogamy or polygamy. What He cares about is **marriage** and that men and women walk righteously upholding the simple requirements He put in His Torah. The man has covenantal responsibilities to provide and protect the woman or women, and they have responsibilities to remain his exclusively and to honor and obey him. This is very simple stuff!

For example, we see that Samson committed fornication with a prostitute:

Judges 16:1 Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her.

We do not see YHWH rebuking Samson.

When Cain committed murder, he got a personal warning in advance (Genesis 4:6-7) and an immediate punishment (Genesis 4:9-12). But several generations later, Lamech, the first polygamist, killed a man and boasted about it (Genesis 4:23-24); yet, nothing is recorded as having happened to him.

Genesis 4:²³ Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, Listen to my voice, You wives of Lamech, Give heed to my speech, For I have killed a man for wounding me; And a boy for striking me; ²⁴ If Cain is avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

Lamech gets falsely accused of murder over and over but the truth is this was probably self defense being spoken about and that is why there is no condemnation of Lamech. There is no sin here.

However, there is a command given, 'Thou shalt not murder!' Cain clearly and willfully violated it and God punished him. No such command exists for polygyny and neither does a penalty, as previously admitted by 119Ministries.

We cannot assume from what isn't said that nothing had happened or will happen. When there is silence in the Scriptures, all you can say is that God did not say, and we don't know. We cannot put words into God's mouth. "

Proverbs 30:6 Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

The brothers at 119Ministries need to read and reread the previous two paragraphs. They are the ones guilty of this at the moment.

Some might point to 2 Samuel 12 where God sent Nathan with a message of reproof to David. It is claimed that Nathan's word makes it clear that God approved of David's polygamy:

2 Samuel 12:7-8 Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more.

Some might say, "See, God gave David Saul's wives! How can God be against polygamy if He gave David multiple wives Himself?"

There are some problems with this argument. First, why do we assume that God's "giving" of Saul's wives to David implies that David married them? There is no evidence to suggest that.

It's much more likely that God's giving of Saul's house and wives into David's arms merely speaks of all of Saul's estate being transferred to David's care. There's nothing in the text that indicates marriage at all.

Not so. The passage is about David taking a wife that didn't belong to him. Nathan the prophet, speaking the word of the Lord, says, 'I would have added many more things like these.' The passage continues talking about David taking Bathsheba. The *clear text* is about wives and the clear rebuke is that God would have given more of them if David had asked. 119Ministries chooses to look away and excuse it as if God said, 'Sure, you wanted another wife, but I'll give you a house or piece of property instead, because that is just 'like these.'

Honestly, 119Ministries' argumentation and interpretational avoidance of the clear literal reading is appalling.

Second, just a few verses later—in verse 11—God says that he will “give” David’s wives to David’s neighbor who would then sleep with them:

2 Samuel 12:11 Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.

As we know from the rest of the story, this “neighbor” to whom God would give David’s wives turned out to be David’s son Absalom.

Now, Absalom sleeping with David’s wives was not only adultery, but also incest. Therefore, if we’re going to say that God’s “giving” of Saul’s wives to David is an endorsement of polygamy—assuming that David married Saul’s wives, which, again, there’s no evidence of—then that same logic could be used to say that God’s “giving” of David’s wives to Absalom is an endorsement of incest and adultery. But obviously that would be absurd!

No, Absalom was clearly judged for this and the women were ‘put away’ upon David’s return to Jerusalem. 119Ministries is again reading something into the text that isn’t there and then creating a strawman argument. Very misleading and a real mark of deception on their track record.

Third, David couldn’t have married Saul’s wives, because in addition to violating God’s law against polygamy, he’d also be violating an anti-incest law. As we see in 1 Samuel 14:50, one of Saul’s wives was Ahinoam, who was the mother of David’s wife, Michal. Leviticus 18:17 prohibits marrying one’s mother-in-law. Thus, this passage certainly does not give any support to the view that God approves of polygamy.

In order to defend the righteousness of David, this is what he wrote at the end of his life,

2 Samuel 22:²¹ “The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.

²² “For I have kept the ways of the LORD,

And have not acted wickedly against my God.

²³ “For all His ordinances *were* before me,
And *as for* His statutes, I did not depart from them.

²⁴ “I was also blameless toward Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.

²⁵ “Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness,
According to my cleanness before His eyes.

Was David lying?

1 Kings 15:⁴ But for David’s sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, to raise up his son after him and to establish Jerusalem; ⁵ because David did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.

And, among the things that David did that were ‘right in the sight of the Lord,’

1 Chronicles 3 Now these were the sons of David who were born to him in Hebron: the firstborn was Amnon, by **Ahinoam** the Jezreelitess; the second was Daniel, by **Abigail** the Carmelitess; ² the third was Absalom the son of **Maacah**, the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur; the fourth was Adonijah the son of **Haggith**; ³ the fifth was Shephatiah, by **Abital**; the sixth was Ithream, by his wife **Eglah**. ⁴ Six were born to him in Hebron, and there he reigned seven years and six months. And in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years. ⁵ These were born to him in Jerusalem: Shimea, Shobab, Nathan and Solomon, four, by **Bath-shua** the daughter of Ammiel; ⁶ and Ibhar, Elishama, Eliphelet, ⁷ Nogah, Nepheg and Japhia, ⁸ Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet, nine. ⁹ All *these were* the sons of David, besides the sons of the concubines; and Tamar *was* their sister.

And of course, **Michal** who was David’s first wife who bore him no children.

All of that and Scripture says, “David did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.”

Sadly, the brothers at 119Ministries can't accept something so simple that is clearly written throughout Scripture. God **NEVER** judges polygyny. Period. Why? Maybe because God **is** a polygynist!

The seventh argument we'll look at, is the accusation that God Himself is a polygamist. This argument is based on Ezekiel 23, which is an allegory in which God is represented as being married to two sisters who represent the divided kingdom of Israel—Oholah, which represents Samaria, and Oholibah, which represents Jerusalem.

The point of this allegory was to illustrate all of Israel's sin and unfaithfulness to God. Pointing to this allegory as a proof-text for polygamy is obviously missing the point.

NO! Ignoring the fact that God describes Himself as having two brides is obviously missing the point. Nowhere, ever, in Scripture, does God describe Himself in sinful terms. Therefore, polygyny **can't** be sin.

Further, that He would use polygyny as the model for the relationship between Himself and the houses of Israel and Judah, two brides, exactly explains the envy and jealousy between the two! Once one understands the dynamic and the sinful hearts of each and their reaction toward each other, one can begin to truly understand what is necessary for redemption and what the Husband has to do to guide and lead a house!

Moreover, the symbolic marriage between God and Israel began long before Israel was divided into two kingdoms. Therefore, all of Israel is to be regarded as one people chosen by God.

Actually, this is false. Ezekiel 23, as previously pointed out, clearly states that God viewed them as sisters *while they were still in Egypt*. Therefore, when they came to Mount Sinai, He covenanted with them both, simultaneously. That is why in Jeremiah 3:8, the house of Israel was divorced but the house of Judah was not. The house of Israel and the house of Judah were both covenanted with YHVH, but the covenants were viewed *by Him* as separate from the start.

Not only that, but Ezekiel also speaks of these two kingdoms reuniting as one in Ezekiel 37:

Ezekiel 37:22 And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.

God says in Isaiah 2, 'Come house of Jacob, let us walk in the light.' Obviously, a house can have more than one wife. God's purpose in Ezekiel 37, when He speaks of one Kingdom, does not mean they will be a single bride. Rather, as prophecy affirms in multiple places, they learn to walk together and bring their respective giftings to the table. They will be two brides, two sticks that 'draw near' and are echad, united, in My hand. One house, but not one bride. See Hosea 1:10-11, Zechariah 9:11-15 and Isaiah 11:11-16.

So according to the consistent biblical testimony, God and Israel's relationship is "monogamous," despite the temporary division of the nation. Ezekiel's allegorical message was one that addressed Israel's specific situation at that time. But from God's perspective and plan, His people are one.

The eighth argument we'll look at might go something like this: "Despite the fact that the practice of polygamy obviously seems to be condemned in the Bible, God nevertheless continued to bless and work through practicing polygamists such as Abraham, Jacob, and King David! So maybe the practice isn't ideal, but you really can't say that it's against God's will, can you?!"

Again, false. 119Ministries says, 'the practice of polygamy obviously seems to be condemned in the Bible...' Actually, there is not a single condemnation anywhere in Scripture unless eisegetically read into the narrative. 119Ministries has not produced even one solid verse of condemnation. Not one.

The answer is yes. The fact that God worked through fallen people—and indeed continues to work through every believer despite our many flaws—is not an argument that God approves of the behavior. It's a testament to His amazing grace and mercy despite their behavior (Romans 8:28)

Yet in the midst of an imperfect situation caused by people going against His will, we see in God's Torah that He took special care to protect the victims of polygamy, such as Hagar and Ishmael. As we've seen, God even gave laws looking out for their best interests, such as the

firstborn son born to the polygamous parents in Deuteronomy 21. Indeed, the nation of Israel itself was born from the twelve sons of Jacob who were the products of polygamy. God is certainly able to work within an imperfect situation in order to bring about His purposes. And to anyone who transgresses God's will and seeks forgiveness from the Lord, forgiveness and healing are available.

God has not abandoned His people, yet that does not stop Him from calling us back to His standard of holiness—even with regard to His design for marriage. Again, God's compassion for the polygamist no more justifies polygamy than His compassion for the thief justifies theft. God is merciful, but He calls us to repentance.

In conclusion, with regard to the question, "Does the Bible Endorse Polygamy," here is what we've learned:

We've established that polygamy is a clear deviation from God's original design for marriage as established in Creation, to which Yeshua and Paul agree.

We've established that Paul clearly interprets the Torah to instruct against polygamy, going as far to say that a man is not above reproach unless he is married no more than just one wife.

We've established that the Bible does, in fact, appear to explicitly prohibit the practice of polygamy in Leviticus 18:18, which justifies Paul's position.

We've established that polygamy is painted in a negative light and discouraged throughout the Bible.

And finally, we've established that the passages in which polygamy might seem to be approved by God have been misunderstood.

Therefore, we believe the answer to this question is an obvious NO. Polygamy was never endorsed, not then and not now. Our conclusion is, for whatever it is worth, that the Bible prohibits it, and it is contrary to God's will and design for marriage.

Actually, no. The only thing 119Ministries has proven is that the case against polygyny is exceedingly weak with exactly zero Scriptural support. Unfortunately, what we have also

learned is that even solid ministries like 119Ministries can succumb to culture and pressure and allow blind spots and tough stances to crush the truth. Our final conclusion and warning below.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

Dear brothers at 119Ministries,

When we saw some months ago that you were preparing a teaching on polygamy, we were immediately concerned. On multiple occasions, along with many others, we warned you not to broach this topic.

As a ministry, you have done very well teaching possibly hundreds of thousands of people to search the Scriptures for themselves and to 'Test Everything.' This is a topic we have each tested over the last several years and found the traditional Christian position and the 'Creation Ideal' to be exceedingly lacking. Practically, it is outright falsehood.

In the months leading up to this Pre-Release, David Wilber published a piece on Leviticus 18:18 that was refuted by several of us individually and without corroboration. We went to the trouble of ensuring he heard our refutations and warning.

Now, our worst fears have been realized. Your ministry is pushing all the chips into the center of the table and betting your reputation on a verifiably false set of premises and wrong conclusions that denigrate God Himself, the Patriarchs, and His Word. By releasing this video and transcript, even if only to a Pre-Release group, it is 'out there.' You have painted yourself into a corner and the Living God is across the room watching what you do next.

Brothers, you ***MUST*** recant and immediately publish a complete reversal and retraction, or you will find Him as your enemy. He will not stand idly by while you disparage Him, Abraham, Jacob, David and every other Godly man who has walked righteously and had or have more than one wife, particularly after you have taken such a strong stand for testing everything.

You will be judged by your own citation: Proverbs 30:6 Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

You have added considerably. You will be found a liar.

Please, we beg you to immediately back down, only now, you will have to publicly reverse course and reap the fire that you could have avoided by not broaching the topic or at the very least, dealing truthfully and finding that “it may not be wise, but it is not sin.”

We pray for your immediate awakening from the stupor of this madness. Please.

We kindly request that you acknowledge receipt and your chosen course of action by February 17, 2020. Because your position is in the public square, even if as a pre-release, we will be compelled to publish in entirety our refutation and admonition. If you choose to publish your current position, we will immediately respond by sharing this refutation and additional supporting Scriptural and evidentiary truths.

We are genuinely concerned for you as brothers, but are still more concerned for Truth and the reputation of our Elohim and our fathers and mothers.

May Yah deal with you mercifully.

Peter G Rambo, Sr.

Jesse ben Yosef

Jeremy Guiton

Brian S Somers

Robin Hardman

