



Is Polygamy (Polygyny) Biblical? Does God Allow it?

Description



Is polygamy biblical? We'll take an exhaustive, in-depth

look at all the biblical arguments both for and against polygamy (*technically polygyny*) and see. Many Christians wouldn't even ask the question because it's not an issue in the West. **However, it can be a serious question in Muslim countries.**

Consider a Muslim man with two wives (*and young children from both*) who converts to Christianity. Some Christians insist that he must divorce one of the wives, abandoning her and his children from her. These men often seriously and genuinely want to know if the Bible/God permits polygamy because they don't want to abandon their wives and children.

(By the way, I have a very complete [article on divorce and remarriage](#) that covers verses on the topic that I've literally never seen another Bible teacher deal with.)

Serious questions about what God forbids or permits deserve serious answers. Therefore, we will examine this topic carefully and in the light of scripture. The Bible is very clear on some things (*like [all sex outside of marriage being wrong](#)*), but less clear on other things. Fortunately, this is one of the clear things.

A clarification of terms before we begin:

- **Polygamy** is the practice of one person having multiple spouses. It's a broad umbrella term for every possible arrangement of multiple spouses.
- **Polyandry** is the practice of one woman having multiple husbands. Biblically, this is clearly wrong as Romans 7:2-3 plainly says.
- **Polygyny** is the practice of one man having multiple wives. That's what we'll examine today.

We'll look at the most common arguments both for and against polygamy (*polygyny*), and examine all of them thoroughly. Here's a brief summary of the arguments we'll look at:

Arguments against polygyny:

- Doesn't polygyny mean the husband is committing adultery?
- Doesn't "Two shall become one flesh" preclude multiple wives?
- Israel's kings were commanded not to "multiply wives"
- 1 Cor 7:2 says wives should have "their own husband"
- Elders are required to be the "husband of one wife"
- Even if it was allowed/tolerated by God in the Old Testament, some say it's either:
 1. Not tolerated in the New Testament or for Christians
 2. Not His ideal, while monogamy is His ideal

Arguments for polygyny

- In three places in the Bible, God commanded polygyny (*once to a specific person, twice in the Mosaic Law under certain conditions*)
- King Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and that included marrying two wives.
- God rewarded a woman for helping her husband get an additional wife
- God describes himself as a polygamist, married to two women.
- Jesus describes Himself as a polygamist (*in a parable*) as marrying five women.
- King David was a polygamist, but the Bible says that he was blameless "except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."
 - God said that He would've given King David additional wives if he had wanted them.
- God says the "sexually immoral" will end up in the lake of fire, but many polygamous men are in the Hebrews 11 "faith hall of fame".

We'll look at all these points "both for and against" one at a time, starting with the arguments against polygyny.

Arguments against polygamy (*polygyny*)

It's important to realize that there's no scripture that specifically and clearly prohibits polygyny by saying something like: "you shall not take more than one wife". There's also no verse which clearly calls it sin by saying something like: "if a man takes a second wife, he has sinned".

However, that doesn't mean that the Bible is silent on the topic. Therefore, we'll look at the verses that both sides use to support their positions. But remember, **it's important not to read our thoughts into the Bible**. That's adding to His commands, which we shouldn't do.

God said this:

Deuteronomy 4:2

2 "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you

And few will forget the warning at the end of Revelation, which is in the same vein.

Revelation 22:18-19

18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;**

19 and **if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.**

God **hates it** when people twist, add to, or take away from what He has said. We talk about this at length in my article on [What's the Best Bible Translation? And More Importantly, Why?](#) So while we will examine this issue in-depth, we won't make any passage say something that it doesn't. (*Like the Pharisees did when adding to the law.*)

Doesn't Polygamy (*polygyny*) mean the husband is committing adultery?

This might seem like an easy and obvious problem. In fact, it's one of the most common objections to polygamy (*polygyny*).

However, the way we define adultery today isn't the same as it was originally defined. Adultery is a **very** specific sin with a **very** specific definition. We'll get to that definition in a moment, but the verse below indicates that a man who has multiple wives **must** have sex with all of them because God Himself **commanded** it.

If God commanded it, it can't be a sin.

Exodus 21:10-11

10 If he takes another wife to himself, **he shall not diminish** her food, her clothing, or **her conjugal rights.**

11 And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

(Note: This verse is only one chapter after the Ten Commandments, which obviously include not committing adultery.)

God said that a man who takes a second wife must have sex with all of them. In fact, a man denying sex to a wife was cause for her to divorce him. This verse contains the only explicit reasons that God gave in the Mosaic Law that women could divorce their husbands.

Therefore, a man who has sex with multiple wives must not be committing adultery because God commanded men to do it, whereas He commanded us not to commit adultery.

But that begs an obvious question: what is adultery?

The answer lies in the definition of the Greek and Hebrew words, which have a different definition than our English word "adultery". In English, "adultery" means a man or woman having sex with someone who isn't their current spouse. Even by this definition, polygyny isn't technically adultery since the man is still having sex with his wife. Our English definition of adultery assumes monogamy, which the Greek and Hebrew words don't. (*We'll look at them in a moment*)

However, the Greek and Hebrew words have a more specific and clear definition:

The definition of the Greek and Hebrew words that we translate "adultery" are the same: Biblical Adultery is when a man has sex with another man's wife (or betrothed).

That's it.

Nothing else is adultery according to every relevant Greek and Hebrew word. Here they are with their meanings, and links to the lexicons so you can double-check if you like.

Greek words:

- [μοιχάλις](#) (moichalis) meaning adulteress (female). The technical definition is: (a) *an adulteress (that is, a married woman who commits adultery)*, (b) *Hebraistically: extended to those who worship any other than the true God*
- [μοιχός](#) (moichos) meaning adulterer (male). The technical definition is: *an adulterer, that is, a man who is guilty with a married woman*
- [μοιχεία](#) (moicheia) a noun meaning adultery. The technical definition is also adultery, with nothing further given from the lexicon. However, it's related to the following Greek verb, so it shares the same idea (*again requiring a married woman*).
- [μοιχεύω](#) (moicheuō) a verb meaning commit adultery. The technical definition is *to commit adultery with, have unlawful intercourse with another's wife*
- [μοιχάω](#) (moichaō) a verb meaning to commit adultery. The technical definition is: *to have unlawful intercourse with another's wife, to commit adultery with*

Hebrew Words:

- **נָפַח** (**naaph**) a verb meaning **to commit adultery**. Technical Definition is: **literally commit adultery; usually of man, always with the wife of another; with accusative woman**. **This is the Hebrew word used in the Ten Commandments.** Therefore, whenever **You shall not commit adultery** is quoted, this is the command, and it requires another man's wife.
- **נִיּוּף** (**niuph**) meaning **adulteries**. No Technical definition given, but related to **naaph** above, so sharing the same definition.
- **נִיּוּפִים** (**naaphuph**) meaning **adultery**. No Technical definition given, but related to **naaph** above, so sharing the same definition.

And for more proof, here's the Easton's Bible Dictionary entry on adultery:

conjugal infidelity. **An adulterer was a man who had illicit intercourse with a married or a betrothed woman**, and such a woman was an adulteress. **Intercourse between a married man and an unmarried woman was fornication.** Adultery was regarded as a great social wrong, as well as a great sin.

If a married man has sex with an unmarried woman, that's called **fornication**, not adultery. Both are serious sins, and **the Bible is crystal clear that all sex outside marriage is wrong.** Biblically speaking though, **it's the marital status of the woman not the man that determines if it's adultery or fornication.** Both are serious sins, and God promised that He would judge both in Hebrews 13:4. Nevertheless, biblical adultery **only** occurs when a man has sex with another man's wife.

Since adultery only occurs when a man has sex with another man's wife, it therefore does not occur when a man has sex with his own wives, no matter how many he has.

This is confirmed by God commanding husbands to have sex with all their wives in the Old Testament, as we've already seen. Further, the above definition fits with every single usage in the Bible, with no exceptions.

But someone will say: **But that's the Old Testament Law, so it doesn't apply.** Yes and no; don't forget Paul's statement:

Romans 15:4

For **whatever** was written in earlier times **was written for our instruction**, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of **the Scriptures** we might have hope.

While we don't need to obey the law, it was written for our instruction. The passage in Exodus **instructs** husbands to have sex with all their wives. From that, we can learn that God doesn't consider a man having sex with multiple wives adultery.

More importantly, God commanded a man with multiple wives to have sex with all of them in Exodus 21:10-11. Unless you want to take the position that God Himself commanded such a man to commit adultery (*one chapter after prohibiting it in the Ten Commandments*), then having multiple wives doesn't equal adultery.

Two Shall Become One Flesh

One of the most common verses used to say that polygyny is wrong is Genesis 2:24, and especially Jesus' quotation of it in the Gospels. It makes some sense at first glance. However, using this verse that way is twisting things a bit, as we'll soon see.

Matthew 19:4-6

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 argument goes that it doesn't say "three fleshes" and one man can't become "one flesh" with two women. However, with a little more Biblical context, you'll see that's not the case. Jesus is quoting Genesis 2:24, which is only talking about the physical act of sex. This can be easily proven by Paul's quotation of it in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 6:16

Or do you not know that the **one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."**

So then, a man becomes "one flesh" with a prostitute in the **exact same way** that he becomes "one flesh" with his wife. We know this because Paul is quoting Genesis. The only way in which sex with a prostitute is the same as sex with a wife is the physical act itself.

According to Paul, an (*immoral*) man could become "one flesh" with as many prostitutes as he could afford.

Basically, God says in Genesis 2:24 that "they'll get married then have sex".

In reference to polygyny, a man could absolutely have sex "that is, become "one flesh" " with two different women. "One flesh" is just a Hebrew idiom for sex, otherwise the 1 Corinthians verse doesn't make sense.

Another argument based on this verse says: "But this verse reveals God's original plan for marriage, so we should follow it and practice monogamy-only."

Yes, God's plan was that people should get married and have sex afterward. However, this verse isn't about polygamy (*polygyny*) and doesn't even touch on this topic. As we've already

seen, it was also God's plan and commandment that a man have sex with all of his wives.

Exodus 21:10-11

10 If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.

11 And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

God said that if a man marries a second woman, he **must** keep having sex with the first wife. So yes, God's plan was for married people to have sex. By God's command, a husband was required to have sex with all of his wives; plural. And yes, this was a command from God. Not having sex with all your wives was breaking the Mosaic Law and therefore a sin. (*While the Law was in effect, which it isn't anymore of course.*)

Paul reiterates this in the New Testament too:

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

The word translated "fulfill his duty" is the Greek word $\epsilon\upsilon\phi\acute{\omicron}\nu\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ([opheilá, —](#)), which means:

Cognate: 3782 *opheilá, —* (a feminine noun) "a **specific (applied) kind of indebtedness**, implying an **applied obligation due to the debt (what is owed)**. See 3781 (*opheiletás*)

And the word translated "depriving" in verse 5 is $\alpha\pi\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\epsilon\omega$ ([apostereá³](#)), which means:

650 *apostereá³* (from 575 /*apá³*, "away from" and 4732 /*stereá³*, "deprive") "properly, keep away from someone, i.e. by **defrauding (depriving); to cheat, taking away what rightfully belongs to someone else**."

The King James Version gets verse 5 right by translating it "defrauding". A husband depriving his wife of sex "regardless of the total number of wives" is defrauding the wife, which is sin.

“He shall not Multiply Wives”

The passage below refers to restrictions that were put on the King of Israel.

Deuteronomy 17:16-17

16 “Moreover, he shall not **multiply** horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to **multiply** horses, since the LORD has said to you, “You shall never again return that way.”

17 “**He shall not multiply wives for himself**, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he **greatly increase** silver and gold for himself.

The words I’ve highlighted in **red** are all the same Hebrew word, which is “רָבַח” ([rabah](#)). It means:

Strong’s Concordance:

Definition: to be or become much, many or great

Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon:

I. [רָבַח, רָבַח] 225 verb: be, or become, much, many, great

Notice, the same limitation “with the same word” is also applied to the king’s gold, silver, and horses. If this verse means that the king can’t have more than one wife, then wouldn’t it also mean that he couldn’t have more than one horse or more than one gold or silver coin either?

That’s ridiculous.

The instance above where “rabah” is translated “greatly increase” captures the word better. **The idea here is about hoarding; kings shouldn’t hoard gold, silver, horses, or wives.**

A king can:

- have multiple horses, but not a ton of horses
- have multiple gold coins, but not a ton of gold
- have multiple wives, but not a ton of wives

A king could have multiple wives, just not hoard them. (*Though God doesn’t give a specific limit.*) The stated reason is that too many wives will turn the king’s heart from God.

That’s exactly what happened to Solomon.

He had 700 wives and 300 concubines (*concubines in the Bible were wives* “actual and true wives who were married to the man” that were also slaves). They led his heart away from God just as the law predicted. Personally, I’m not sure how you could maintain an actual relationship with more than two or three wives.

Plus, we know for an absolute fact that this verse doesn’t prohibit polygamy (polygyny).

How?

Because King David definitely practiced polygyny.

2 Samuel 5:13

Meanwhile **David took more concubines and wives** from Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron; and more sons and daughters were born to David.

David is especially notable because of what the Bible says about him. Besides being the “*man after God’s own heart*”, it also says this:

1 Kings 15:5

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.

David had at least seven wives and ten concubines that we know of. However, according to 1 Kings, David also didn’t sin by marrying multiple wives. We’ll return to this point later in the article.

The “Husband of One Wife”

The following verse is from a passage where Paul describes the required qualifications for elders

1 Timothy 3:2

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

The argument goes like this:

The “husband of one wife” is *technically* only required for elders in this passage, but like the rest of the items on the list, it should be a goal for all Christians. Therefore, having more than one wife is wrong.

That's an interesting point, but it misses something: **what about having *less than one wife*?** (*Being unmarried.*) Seriously. Please take the above argument to its logical conclusion.

If this list is something that **all** Christians should aspire to, then by that logic, **wouldn't remaining unmarried be just as wrong as having multiple wives?**

Remember that Paul himself was unmarried, and he said that was an acceptable way for a man to live in 1 Corinthians 7.

1 Corinthians 7:7-9

7 Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. **8** But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain **even as I**. **9** But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.

Paul certainly allows for a man to remain unmarried, even though it would disqualify him from being an overseer. Paul even goes so far as to imply that him being single is a gift. Jesus said something similar about singleness:

Matthew 19:10-12

10 The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry."

11 But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given."

12 "For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and **there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven**. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."

(Note: the Greek word for eunuch there is "εὐνοῦχος" {eunouchos} literally means "alone in bed", and can refer to someone who voluntarily abstains from marriage. Jesus wasn't talking about Christians mutilating themselves.)

So while someone might use 1 Timothy 3:2 to say a man with multiple wives **can't become an elder**, it **can't be used to say that having multiple wives is wrong**. It also **can't be used to say that "the husband of one wife" is the ideal for all Christians** because God called some men to not have wives at all.

This is also reinforced by the requirement "able to teach".

Not all Christians can, and this is by God's design.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. **28** And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. **29** All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? **30** All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? **31** But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

The fact that teaching is a gift is also mentioned in Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:7-12. Again, not all men are given the same gifts, and teaching is explicitly stated to be a gift. Some men aren't given that gift, meaning those men can't be elders.

- Not having the gift of teaching isn't a moral failure.
- Likewise, not getting married isn't a moral failure.

Thus, since there are not one, but two items on this list of requirements that aren't moral issues, you can't say that the entire list is a moral ideal because it isn't. To be sure, most of the list is about character and moral requirements because they are of supreme importance in leaders. However, "husband of one wife" is clearly not a moral requirement because it's 100% moral to have less than one wife.

Additionally, it's 100% moral to not be able to teach.

Now, some Christians take this list of qualifications for elders and see this as the highest ideal, and thus something that every Christian should strive for.

However, that's why we looked at "able to teach".

God Himself decided that not all Christians would be "able to teach". Thus, being "able to teach" literally can't be the ideal for all Christians because God made it impossible. Likewise, the "husband of one wife" is explicitly stated to not be the ideal for all Christians because God gifted some men with singleness.

It's a bad idea to take qualifications that aren't moral in nature and say that they are moral qualifications.

This is especially true because we actually know why the elder must be the "husband of one wife":

1 Timothy 3:2-7

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?), **6** and not a new

convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. **7** And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Notice verses 4 and 5. In order to morally have children, a man needs a wife. Those children and their behavior are a good indicator of whether he will be a good leader because if a man can't raise children well, he likely won't be a good leader.

I don't think I need to explain why "able to teach" is important for a church leader because it should be obvious.

Again, these two requirements aren't moral in nature.

So while you can certainly legitimately say that a man with multiple wives can't be an elder, you can't use this verse to say that it's immoral or that exactly one wife is some kind of ideal for a Christian.

(As for the reason, it could simply be an issue of time. A man with more than one wife who treats all his wives as the Bible commands wouldn't have a lot of free time for being a church leader.)

Addendum: Is it an idiom?

In 1 Timothy 3:2, we have the phrase "husband of one wife". Just 2 chapters later, we have the gender-reversed version of that phrase:

1 Timothy 5:9

9 Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, **having been the wife of one husband,**

Now, neither Christianity nor Judaism has ever allowed a woman to have more than one husband. Ever. Thus, some take this to be an idiom that means "to be sexually moral". Part of the reason for this is that there's no requirement for sexual morality on the list of requirements for elders in 1 Timothy 3. That seems conspicuous by its absence, unless "husband of one wife" is an idiom.

That doesn't necessarily change the plain meaning of 1 Timothy 3:2, but it's additional context worth mentioning for completeness.

Moving on.

Each husband should have his own wife, each wife her own husband

The verse below is one of the most commonly cited to argue that polygyny is wrong.

1 Corinthians 7:2

2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have **his own wife**, and each woman is to have **her own husband**.

The argument from this verse goes like this:

The wife is said to have her **own** husband. Therefore, since the husband is **her own**, he must not be anyone else's husband, thus prohibiting polygyny.

This is 100% true, but only in English. There's more than one word used for **own** here in Greek, but you can't tell by reading most English translations. Please feel free to double-check the following by looking at [1 Corinthians 7:2 in an interlinear Bible](#).

There are two **different** Greek words in this verse that are translated **own**; one for the husband, and a **different** one for the wife.

Spoiler: the word **own for the husband requires exclusivity, while the word **own** for the wife allows for non-exclusivity.** (It doesn't require non-exclusivity, which is good because of monogamous marriages, but it certainly allows for non-exclusivity.)

We'll look at those words now.

The word used for the husband is **ἑαυτοῦ** ([heautou](#)).

1438 *heauto* (reflexive pronoun of the 3rd person) **1438** /*heauto* (**himself, her self, itself**, etc.) is the **3rd person reflexive** (singular, plural) form which also functions as the reflexive for 1st and 2nd person

I highlighted **himself** because it's the masculine singular reflexive pronoun in English. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 7:2, it's in the masculine singular form. English has exactly one masculine singular reflexive pronoun: **himself**. Notice that **himself** is listed as a definition above.

1 Corinthians 7:2 literally reads **the of himself wife**, which would read: **the wife of himself** with English word order. That's terrible English but good Greek. Usually it's (*accurately*) translated **his own** to indicate possession because of the grammar (*Greek genitive for those who've read [my Greek 101 article](#) or know Greek*).

In most cases, **his own** is a **perfect** translation. However, in this case it's less ideal because the word translated **own** later in the verse is a **different** word. Translating them both as **own** gives the mistaken impression that they are the same word, yet they aren't (*more on that in a minute*.) So, how do we indicate the difference while keeping the emphatic sense of possession? As an admittedly imperfect solution, and I'll have another lower down, I suggest translating **of himself** as **to himself** because it retains the emphatic sense of possession in Greek while being readable in English.

So what would that look like in this verse?

1 Corinthians 7:2

2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have ~~his own~~ **the wife to himself**, and each woman is to have her own husband.

(Note: I also added back an untranslated Greek definite article {â€œtheâ€• in English} which is often omitted for readabilityâ€™s sake.)

Not a lot different, but definitely different. Notice that the husbandâ€™s â€œhavingâ€• of the wife is very exclusive; â€œto himselfâ€• is very exclusive, excluding all other men from â€œhavingâ€• that manâ€™s wife. That is like the Greek construction, though expressed in a slightly different way (*â€œtoâ€• versus â€œofâ€•*).

However, the word thatâ€™s translated *â€œownâ€• for the woman is a **completely different word**. Itâ€™s the word *â€œá¼ˆíŒŒ,â€• ([idios](#))*. Oddly, the lexical definition is slightly at odds with the Biblical usage. So in lieu of quoting the lexicon, weâ€™re going to look at a few other places that itâ€™s used.*

Matthew 9:1

1 Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to **His own (idios) city**.

John 4:44

44 For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in **his own (idios) country**.

Acts 2:6

6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in **his own (idios) language**.

Notice: all of these instances allow for non-exclusive ownership.

I repeat: **non**-exclusive.

These are just a few examples of many places with this usage. Itâ€™s also used of multiple people speaking *â€œon their ownâ€•*, again indicating shared/non-exclusive ownership. It doesnâ€™t *always* mean non-exclusive ownership, but it quite often does indicate non-exclusive ownership.

Thatâ€™s important.

Now, this non-exclusive component is often ignored or downright contradicted to twist this passage. Thatâ€™s why I quoted the verses so you could see for yourself. Thereâ€™s [a popular article from *â€œNever Thirstyâ€•*](#) which does this twisting in a typical fashion to *â€œproveâ€• this verse*

doesn't allow for polygamy (*polygyny*). Ironically, I can simply quote the article to refute that same article: (*yes, the case is that weak*)

The Greek word *idios* is a possessive pronoun and also has the sense of ownership. Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest state,

Idios, idia are similarly used for persons in a way synonymous with a **simple possessive**, notably with regard to members of a family: one's own brother and sister, mother, father (John 5:18; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.230; 9.99), **spouse**, son or daughter.[1]

Some Greek lexicons state that *idios* means "being the exclusive property of someone's own, one's property." However, **at the time 1 Corinthians was written, *idios* was weakened.**

Whether used as adjective, noun, or adverb, this term means "peculiar to, particular, private," but **its sense is weakened in the Koine, where it is usually equivalent to a possessive.**

In English, simple possessives are "his", "hers", and "its". **Ironically, I completely agree that *Idios* indicates simple possession "like his/her/its does in English" and simple possession definitely allows for nonexclusive possession.** So let's look at the passage with *idios* translated as a simple possessive, which I agree is how it should be translated. (*Irony*)

1 Corinthians 7:2

2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have ~~his own~~ **the wife to himself**, and each woman is to have **her** husband.

The husband is supposed to have the wife exclusively "to himself", but the wife merely has "her husband" (*which can definitely have a non-exclusive sense*). You could also translate it "each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her husband", but I like that less because it obscures some of the elements we've just covered. Basically, it doesn't show the force of the contrast in Greek.

Properly understood, this verse seems to specifically **allow** for polygamy.

That "Never Thirsty" article goes on to list a verse where *idios* refers to Jesus' own (*idios*) disciples (*Mark 4:34*), and then says that based on that one verse, *idios* must **always** be totally, 100% exclusive.

No joke.

This next quote from that "Never Thirsty" article is an example of **truly terrible exegesis eisegesis:** (*reading your own thoughts into the text:*)

Jesus's disciples were His disciples. They were not the disciples of another teacher. Therefore, the husband is the exclusive property of the wife. No other woman owns him.

Except they ignored the definition they repeatedly listed previously in the article (*simple possession, which allows for non-exclusive possession*), and didn't mention all the places where it's used non-exclusively. It's bad when you can refute an article simply by quoting that same article, translating as they suggest you translate, and looking at a few Bible verses they didn't mention.

Even the "Never Thirsty" article agrees that "her husband" with simple possession is the right understanding. (*And it can be non-exclusive possession as other verses indicate*) We've also seen that the husband gets "the wife to himself". That allows for polygamy (*polygyny*) quite clearly.

Paul didn't need to write it this way. He could've used the same words for wives as he did for husbands and thus closed the door on polygamy (*polygyny*) forever.

He didn't.

Under God's inspiration, he chose words that specifically allow for polygamy (*polygyny*).

If all scripture is God breathed, then that includes the words used here. Again, God could've closed the door to polygamy (*polygyny*) easily by also using a reflexive pronoun for the wife (*to herself*).

But He didn't.

Instead, the words God chose specifically allowed for polygyny in this passage.

If God doesn't do things by accident, then wouldn't it be safe to assume He did that on purpose?

It's worth considering.

Jesus on Divorce, Remarriage, and Adultery

I'll give two answers to this verse: a short one and a long one.

Matthew 19:9

And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.

The short answer is that Jesus says there are two conditions to meet for adultery here: divorce and remarriage. If you don't meet both conditions (*divorce and remarriage*), then you aren't an adulterer. If you just get divorced, it's not adultery (*pretty much everyone agrees on this*). So if you

just get married again (*without a divorce*), itâ€™s also not a sin.

However, I realize this answer wonâ€™t satisfy many people.

I wrote another article on this topic that explains the full and complete historical and cultural context which most people completely miss. If you want to fully understand what Jesus was saying here, I recommend you read my article on [What Jesus Meant by Adultery in Matthew Chapters 5 & 19](#). (*Fair warning, itâ€™s ~4700 words long*)

Once youâ€™ve read that, youâ€™ll understand why Jesusâ€™ words here canâ€™t refer to polygamy (*polygyny*). Itâ€™s actually impossible.

(*Hint: remember how adultery requires another manâ€™s wife to be involved? In the Gospelâ€™s divorce passages, the woman he (re)marries is still married to another man because of an improper divorce, which is clear in Greek but obscured in English.*)

â€œOkay, maybe Polygyny was Fine in the Old Testament, but God has changed that for the Church.â€

Thatâ€™s a truth claim, and the Bible is clear what we should do with those:

1 Thessalonians 5:21

But **examine everything carefully**; hold fast to what is good;

The question then becomes: whereâ€™s the scriptural basis for that? Whereâ€™s the verse that says it was acceptable then but isnâ€™t acceptable now? God said we shouldnâ€™t â€œadd to the words of the bookâ€. To make a unilateral statement like â€œGod permitted XYZ then, but He doesnâ€™t nowâ€ is a **very** bold claim unless you have chapter and verse to back it up.

I have never seen that passage.

The verses above are the only places you can go to say that God doesnâ€™t allow polygamy (*polygyny*). I hope you see the arguments are obtuse at best and downright silly at worst. Put simply, there is simply no Biblical evidence that Godâ€™s opinion on polygyny has changed.

â€œOkay, Polygamy (polygyny) might be allowed, but itâ€™s not Godâ€™s ideal.â€

Again, this is a true claim, so we should test it. The trouble is, weâ€™ve run out of verses to argue that polygyny isnâ€™t acceptable to God, and none seem to indicate that itâ€™s not His ideal either.

There arenâ€™t any more verses to go to.

However, there are verses that argue that polygyny is acceptable to God. Hereâ€™s just a short sampling of the content of those verses:

- In three places in the Bible, God Himself **commanded** polygyny
- God rewarded a woman for helping her husband get an additional wife
- God describes himself as a polygynist, married to two women
- Jesus symbolically describes Himself as a polygynist (*in a parable*) who marries five women
- King David was a polygynist, but the Bible says that he was blameless â€œexcept in the matter of Uriah the Hittiteâ€
- God said He would have given King David additional wives if he had wanted them
- God says the â€œsexually immoralâ€ will end up in the lake of fire, but many polygamous men are in the Hebrews 11 â€œfaith hall of fameâ€.

Weâ€™ll get to the evidence that God approves of polygyny now, and I think youâ€™ll find it more compelling than the arguments against it.

Biblical Arguments for Polygamy (*Polygyny*)

There are many arguments used to support the idea that polygamy (*polygyny*) is still 100% acceptable in Godâ€™s eyes. Weâ€™ll look at each in turn.

King Joash was Righteous with Two Wives

This argument also applies to other kings, like King David, but this verse is clearer because itâ€™s so concise.

2 Chronicles 24:1-5

1 Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His motherâ€™s name was Zibiah of Beersheba. 2 Joash did *what was right in the sight of the Lord* all the days of **Jehoiada** the priest. 3 And **Jehoiada** took two wives for him, and he had sons and daughters.

4 Now it happened after this *that* Joash set his heart on repairing the house of the Lord. 5 Then he gathered the priests and the Levites, and said to them, â€œGo out to the cities of Judah, and gather from all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that you do it quickly.â€

There is relatively little to comment on in this verse. Joash is clearly stated to have done â€œwhat was right in the sight of the Lordâ€ as long as Jehoiada was alive, and Jehoiada was the one who got Joashâ€™s two wives for him.

Thus:

- If Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest
- And if Jehoiada the priest got his two wives for him
- Then Joash married two women while Jehoiada was alive
- **Thus, Joash marrying two women was right in the sight of the Lord because he married them while Jehoiada was alive, and Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.**

That's a very strong argument.

In fact, it's the second strongest argument in scripture for the position that polygamy (*polygyny*) is right in the sight of the Lord. (We'll look at the strongest passage next.) I literally do not see how this verse can be avoided by those who say that polygamy (*polygyny*) is wrong.

(There is one counter-argument based on a misunderstanding of Hebrew grammar. That argument says it should read: "Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. 3 [but] Jehoiada took two wives for him". However, even though "and" can normally also mean "but" in biblical Hebrew, that's not the case with the construction in this verse. If you see someone making that argument, that person likely doesn't know Hebrew grammar.)

This seems like a clear statement that polygamy (*polygyny*) is right in the sight of the Lord.

Anyone who wishes to say that God does not allow polygamy (*polygyny*) must deal with this verse, yet most ignore it completely.

Of those who do address it, I've never heard a convincing explanation. It might exist, but I haven't heard it yet. *(Please drop it in the comments if you've heard one.)* That makes this passage the second strongest one in the entire Bible to support the idea that polygamy (*polygyny*) is right in the sight of the Lord.

We'll look at the strongest passage next.

God Commanded Polygamy/Polygyny "Round #1"

Under two specific circumstances, polygamy (*polygyny*) was not only allowed by the Mosaic Law, it was also required/commanded by God. We'll look at the first instance first:

Exodus 22:16-17

16 If a **man** seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a bride-price **for her to be his wife**. **17** If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bride-price for virgins.

Question: **What if the seducing man was already married?** Was he less required to marry the girl he had seduced?

Thereâ€™s no exception in the text to indicate that he was less require to marry her. God was incredibly clear when there were exceptions to a law. Just look at the preceding verses in the chapter to see how God accounted for various nuances. For that matter, look throughout the Mosaic Law and youâ€™ll see that God often makes a law and then adds a few exceptions to it.

He didnâ€™t here.

Thus, if a married man seduced a virgin, he was still required to marry her.

Thatâ€™s even clearer if you look at the Hebrew word translated **â€œmanâ€**. Itâ€™s the word **â€œish** (ish, pronounced **â€œeeshâ€**), and itâ€™s used 376 times in the Old Testament. But get this: **almost 20% of the time itâ€™s used (nearly 1-in-5), itâ€™s translated â€œhusbandâ€**.

No joke.

For example:

Genesis 3:16

To the woman He said, **â€œI will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband (ish), And he will rule over you.**

The word simply means **â€œmanâ€**.

It means any man, whether he was married or not.

The man was required to marry the girl he had seduced, **regardless of whether he was already married or not.** Again, God commanded polygyny here because he used a word that means any man â€” even a married one â€” and added no exception clause for married men. God couldâ€™ve used the word **â€œadam** (adam) which simply means **â€œmanâ€**, without the nuance of also meaning husband, but He didnâ€™t.

He chose a word that means any man, including a married man.

Thus, it would be entirely appropriate to understand the verse in the following way:

Exodus 22:16 (modified)

16â€œIf a married man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a bride-price for her to be his wife.

You donâ€™t need to like this, but it seems clear.

Further, God does not tempt us to sin:

James 1:13

Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and **He Himself does not tempt anyone.**

If God doesn't tempt anyone to sin, then He clearly also doesn't command us to sin.

God commanded polygyny here.

Therefore, polygyny by itself cannot be a sin.

Thus, if God issued a standing, ongoing command to engage in polygamy under certain circumstances, then **polygyny simply can't be wrong because God doesn't command us to sin**. This isn't the only place where God commanded it either. There's one more standing command, plus God commanded Hosea to take two wives as well, but we'll get to that after a common objection that people raise.

But God commanded slavery, divorce, and genocide, which are wrong, so why can't polygyny also be wrong?

We'll look at each in turn.

Biblical Slavery

God never, not even once, commanded slavery. Not once.

You might respond: 'But He allowed slavery'. To that I'll respond: *'You keep on using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means' in a biblical context.*

For starters, consider this:

2 Chronicles 12:8 (*God letting someone defeat Israel to teach them a lesson*)

But they will become his slaves so that they may know **the difference between My slavery and the slavery of the kingdoms** of the countries.

The 'slavery' that God allowed isn't *anything* like what we would consider slavery today. For starters, **kidnapping (necessary for forced slavery) was punishable by death**, so no one could be forced into it.

Exodus 21:16

He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, **shall surely be put to death.**

This applies to both the kidnapper and to anyone the kidnapper sold the kidnapped person to.

Thus, God's slavery was 100% voluntary on the part of the slave, and it was of a limited duration; 7 years or until the Year of Jubilee. (*Whichever was sooner.*) Further, when he went free, he was given a bunch of stuff to help him start his life again.

Leviticus 25:39-42 ~If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that **he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's service.** **40** ~He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. **41** ~He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers. **42** ~ For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are not to be sold *in* a slave sale.

Deuteronomy 15:1-13

12 ~If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then **he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free.** **13** ~When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. **14** ~You shall furnish him **liberally** from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you.

Further, it was forbidden to return a runaway slave to his master, and when the 7 years were up:

Deuteronomy 23:15 ~You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you.

So no, God did not command slavery the way modern man thinks of it. Further, God didn't command it at all. Ever. Not even once. He allowed it, but never once commanded it.

By contrast, He did command polygyny under certain conditions.

Biblical Divorce

God never, not even once, commanded divorce. Now, your first thought will probably be the Israelites putting away (divorcing) their wives when they came back from exile in Ezra chapter 10. However, **please read that passage again because it was not God's idea.** In fact, they didn't even consult with God on it!

Seriously.

Please go read Ezra chapter 10 again. It was the idea of *Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam*, not God. They didn't even consult the prophets first! The idea was proposed, they swore an oath to do it, and then they did it. Now, remember Joshua 9 where Israel got in trouble for doing the exact same thing. (*swearing an oath without consulting God*)

The other passages in the Bible that talk about it aren't commands, and in fact discourage it. [I have an article on divorce](#) where I go through all of them, if you are interested.

So no, God didn't command divorce even though He allowed it. By contrast, He did command polygyny.

Genocide

Now, in contrast to slavery and divorce, God did actually " Oh wait, no He didn't" sort of. The typical example of this is the conquest of Caanan, but it's never mentioned in its proper judicial context:

Leviticus 18:21-25

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.

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

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.

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.**

25 "For the land has become defiled, therefore **I have brought its punishment upon it**, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.

That first item of "You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech", which refers to child sacrifice. They would take a living infant and put him or her on a fire as an offering to Molech, burning the infant alive.

No joke.

There is a difference between God using man to execute His righteous judgement and man killing because of hate.

They are **not** the same.

Not even close.

But more importantly for this article, there was no standing command like there is for polygyny.

There is a standing command (*actually two, we'll get to the second one next*) in the law where a man was required/commanded to have more than one wife. By contrast, God spoke through His prophets to execute judgement on specific people at specific times. There was no standing command for this. By contrast, there was a standing command for polygyny.

Actually, there were two standing commands for polygyny, and we'll look at the second one now.

God Commanded Polygyny – Round #2

Here is the other circumstance where polygyny was required by the Mosaic Law.

Deuteronomy 25:5-6

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.

6 "It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

This is called levirate marriage.

At first glance, you might not see the command for polygamy (*polygyny*). Consider: **what if all the widow's brothers were already married?** That's the essence, and you'll see that this applied when the brother was already married based on the following verses. Also, notice the use of the Hebrew word *ish* in the following passage, which is the word we just looked at that's often translated husband and means any man, including a married one.

Deuteronomy 25:7-10

7 "But **if the man (*ish*) does not desire to take his brother's wife**, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, "My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me."

8 "Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And if he persists and says, "I do not desire to take her,"

9 then **his brother's wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders**, and pull his sandal off his foot **and spit in his face**; and she shall declare, "Thus it is done to the **man (*ish*) who does not build up his brother's house**."

10 "In Israel his name shall be called, "The **house of him whose sandal is removed**."

A man could refuse to marry his brother's widow, but God was clearly not very happy with him if he did. (*The widow was supposed to spit in his face in public; that's shaming, which would be devastating in that culture.*) **Notice, there is no exception if the husband's brother already had a wife.** The Jews were a polygamous (*polygynous*) society ever since their inception with Abraham.

Some have said that because the husband's brother could opt out, he was expected to refuse if he was already married. To put it bluntly, that's silly. For 500+ years before the Law and nearly a thousand years after Christ, polygyny was a normal, common, and accepted practice among God's people.

Not once did God correct them for it.

That alone should tell you something.

And in this case, the **assumption** is that the husband's brother was **already** married.

The word translated "house" is the Hebrew word "bayith" (בַּיִת). The literal definition is "house", but it's more typically used to indicate a household; i.e. a house and everyone who lives there. Several of the possible meanings are:

- of house as containing a family, hence in phrase of slaves belonging to household
- ordinary sense, those belonging to the same household
- family of descendants, descendants as organized body
- house, including household affairs, persons, property, etc.

It's used this way all over the Old Testament. For example:

Genesis 7:1

1 Then the LORD said to Noah, "Enter the ark, you and all your household, (bayith) for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time."

Genesis 18:19

"For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household (bayith) after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

Deuteronomy 26:11

11 and you and the Levite and the alien who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which the LORD your God has given you and your household (bayith).

Those are just some of the many, many examples where bayith means "household", as in the people and/or descendants of those who live in a house. I would like to point out, **in order for a man to have his house/household called "The house(hold) of him whose sandal is removed", he must first have a house(hold). So it definitely means a house, as in a household with**

people/descendants.

Some people say that the brother must be single because of the phrase highlighted below.

Deuteronomy 25:5-7

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.

The argument is that since they “live together”, the husband’s brother isn’t married. However, the book of Ruth answers this objection quite handily. You can read [this article on levirate marriage](#) for some context. As you read below, remember that they called the relative who would marry a widow a “kinsman-redeemer”.

Ruth 2:20

20 Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the LORD, who has not withdrawn his kindness from the living or the dead.” Naomi continued, “The man is a close relative. **He is one of our kinsman-redeemers.**”

Ruth 3:9

9 “Who are you?” he asked. “I am your servant Ruth,” she replied. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, for **you are a kinsman-redeemer.**”

However, if you read the book of Ruth, you’ll see that Boaz wasn’t living anywhere near Naomi, Ruth, or Ruth’s (deceased) husband for at least ten years. So “together” doesn’t necessarily mean “living together in the same house” or even the same town.

Therefore, we now have a second place where God commanded polygamy/polygyny.

That’s notable because:

2 Corinthians 13:1

This *will be* the third *time* I am coming to you. “**By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.**”

We have three scriptures that testify that God commanded polygamy/polygyny. Thus, if God doesn’t command us to sin, then polygyny can’t be wrong. And there’s yet more evidence, including God telling the prophet Hosea to take a second wife. However, we need more context before we look at that.

Weâ€™ll look at that context in the next section.

God Describes Himself as a Polygamist/Polygynist â€“ Twice

Itâ€™s true.

Jeremiah 3:6-9

6 Then **the LORD said** to me in the days of Josiah the king, â€œHave you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there.

7 â€œI thought, â€œAfter she has done all these things she will return to Meâ€™; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it.

8 â€œAnd 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.

9 â€œBecause of the lightness of her harlotry, **she polluted the land and committed adultery** with stones and trees.

And again:

Jeremiah 31:31-32

31 â€œBehold, days are coming,â€ declares the LORD, â€œwhen 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**,â€ declares the LORD.

In these two passages, God describes Israel and Judah as being His wives â€“ **plural** â€“ and in Jeremiah chapter 3, He says they both committed adultery against Him. They couldnâ€™t have committed adultery against God if they werenâ€™t â€œmarriedâ€ to Him (*symbolically/metaphorically*). He calls Himself their husband and gave them a writ of divorce, so you know marriage is the metaphor here.

The argument here is that God obviously wouldnâ€™t do anything that was wrong, and wouldnâ€™t portray Himself doing something that was wrong either. If polygamy (*polygyny*) was wrong, God wouldnâ€™t have pictured Himself (*even symbolically/metaphorically*) as being married to two â€œwivesâ€ because then the picture is of God doing something thatâ€™s wrong.

We are told to imitate God all over the Bible. If He had two wives (*symbolically/metaphorically*), why would it be wrong to imitate that?

That goes double because Jesus described Himself the same way. (*sort of*)

Jesus Describes Himself as a Polygamist/Polygynist

To be clear, Iâ€™m **not** saying that Jesus married, much less that He married more than one woman. Jesus didnâ€™t marry and the following is a **parable**.

Matthew 25:1-12

1 â€œThen the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten **virgins**, who took their lamps and went out to meet the **bridegroom**.

2 â€œFive of them were foolish, and five were prudent.

3 â€œFor when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,

4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.

5 â€œNow while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep.

6 â€œBut at midnight there was a shout, â€œBehold, the **bridegroom**! Come out to meet him.â€™

7 â€œThen all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

8 â€œThe foolish said to the prudent, â€œGive us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.â€™

9 â€œBut the prudent answered, â€œNo, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.â€™

10 â€œAnd while they were going away to make the purchase, the **bridegroom** came, and those who were ready went in with him to **the wedding feast**; and the door was shut.

11 â€œLater the other virgins also came, saying, â€œLord, lord, open up for us.â€™

12 â€œBut he answered, â€œTruly I say to you, I do not know you.â€™

(Note: the NLT and a few obscure translations have â€œbridesmaidâ€• instead of â€œvirginâ€•. However, â€œbridesmaidâ€• is a blatant, heinous, and intentional mistranslation of the Greek word â€œ $\rho\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\iota$, $\rho\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha$ â€• ([parthenos](#)), which means â€œvirginâ€•.)

The ten virgins here are clearly betrothed to the bridegroom, and the bridegroom is clearly Jesus.

Notice that in the parable, Jesus takes the virgins (*brides*) into “the marriage feast”, so a wedding is definitely in view. In this parable, Jesus described Himself as marrying five women (*the virgins/brides*).

The customs of 1st century Jewish weddings confirm this:

- According to Jewish wedding customs at the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the bridegroom came at a day and hour that his bride did not know. As he came, the friend of the bridegroom went before him and shouted, “Behold, the bridegroom comes.”
- This shout would be accompanied by the blowing of a shofar—a trumpet made from a ram’s horn. As the shout was heard, **the bridegroom would get his bride and take her back to his father’s house**, where the ceremony and celebration would take place.
- These customs sound a lot like Jesus’ description of His second coming from the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13).

(Source: [The Jewish Wedding System and the Bride of Christ](#))

The obvious and clear meaning of the parable is indeed the obvious and clear meaning of the parable: Jesus was telling a parable about Him marrying multiple women.

Now, some say that the virgins here were bridesmaids, not brides.

We’ll get to the data and historical context in a minute, but first, let’s do a “common sense check”. Remember that the virgins were waiting for the groom. Remember also that “according to the quote above and other research I’ve done” “the bridegroom came at a day and hour that his bride did not know”. Okay, so if the Bridesmaids were waiting with the bride, then here’s a question: **how long would the bridesmaids need to wait with the bride for the groom?**

The Jewish marriage ceremony had two parts that began with the betrothal! ...**This period could last up to a year before the wedding** and covenant.

(Source.)

Up to a year?

Hmm.

Does it make sense to you that the supposed “bridesmaids” would hang out at the bride’s house **every day for up to a year?** Remember that just dashing to the store to get oil delayed them enough to miss the wedding. There’s simply no way that ten bridesmaids would live with the bride for up to a year. That strains credulity. In fact, it breaks it completely. It wouldn’t happen.

In fact, we know it wouldn't happen.

How?

Because there were no bridesmaids in 1st century Jewish weddings!

Seriously.

Do some research and see if you can find a scholarly source that says they existed. I mean more than tiny article stubs from wedding magazines/blogs. I'm talking about a scholarly and reputable source that confirms the existence of bridesmaids in 1st century Jewish weddings, or even before that. I haven't seen it and spent a long time looking.

(Ironically, something close to groomsmen did exist in the 1st century. Their job was to help the groom prepare the wedding, see Matthew 9:15. However, since the bride had zero say in the wedding, she wouldn't even need bridesmaids for that.)

Since bridesmaids didn't exist in the 1st century, we can be sure that the virgins in this parable are brides; not bridesmaids.

Bridesmaids didn't exist back then, and even if they did, it requires a near total suspension of disbelief to think they would wait in the same house as the bride for up to a year. Therefore, this parable is about the bridegroom marrying ten virgin brides.

One man marrying multiple women is the very definition of polygyny.

That's how Jesus describes Himself here.

True it's in a parable "not an actual event because Jesus didn't marry" but parables are designed to make a point using a story. **If a man marrying multiple women was wrong, why would Jesus set a bad example by picturing Himself as a polygamous (polygynous) man?**

It makes no sense!

unless polygamy (polygyny) isn't wrong.

Further, to remind you yet again, God actually commanded polygamy (polygyny) on more than one occasion. We'll look at the third example next.

God Commanded Polygyny "Round #3

God commands the prophet Hosea to marry a woman in chapter 1.

Hosea 1:2-3

2 When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD.”

3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

Hosea marries Gomer at God’s command. But then in chapter 3, God tells Hosea to marry another woman. (Note: the chapter heading added to Hosea 3 in the NASB 95 is: “Hosea’s Second Symbolic Marriage”)

Hosea 3:1-2

1 Then the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”

2 So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley.

Hosea was commanded to love (*marry*) a woman, yet she would be an adulteress even though he (*Hosea*) loved her. Symbolically, this represented God’s longing after Israel and Judah. As we’ve already seen, God describes Himself as a polygamist (*polygynist*) married to two unfaithful women (*Israel and Judah*; God repeats this distinction in 1:6-7, saying He won’t have compassion on Israel but will on Judah).

Some have said that the second woman in chapter 3 is Gomer again, but that’s simply not possible. We know the second woman was a slave because Hosea bought her. However, Gomer wasn’t a slave, otherwise Hosea would’ve committed a sin.

Leviticus 19:20-22

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 the **sin which he has committed**, and the sin which he has committed will be forgiven him.

Unless you believe that God ordered Hosea to commit a sin by “*elaying carnally*” with another man’s slave, Gomer was a free woman.

Therefore, we can be 100% certain that Gomer was a free woman, but the second (unnamed) wife was a slave that Hosea bought in order to marry her.

Iâ€™ve even heard people twist this passage by saying that Gomer sold herself into slavery and Hosea had to buy her back. However, that idea is found nowhere in the book of Hosea. Absolutely nowhere. Itâ€™s completely made up. In fact, itâ€™s coming perilously close to adding to the Bible, which is a very bad idea as weâ€™ve already seen.

(Further, itâ€™s simply not possible for Gomer to sell herself into slavery, even if she wanted to. She simply wasnâ€™t able to in that culture. Thereâ€™s no provision for it in the Mosaic Law. Even if Gomer found herself indebted through being unable to pay a vow, Hosea couldâ€™ve simply annulled the vow when he found out about it; see Numbers chapter 30.)

The point remains:

In Hosea, God commanded a man to marry multiple women.

Commanded.

Itâ€™s there in black and white.

Therefore, God directly commanded Hosea to engage in polygamy (polygyny).

James 1:13 tells us that God does not tempt people to sin. It follows logically that He doesnâ€™t command them to sin either. **So if God commanded Hosea to engage in polygyny â€œ and He did â€œ then polygyny itself must not be wrong.**

(Unless God commands people to sin.)

Some have said Hosea divorced Gomer before marrying the second wife. However, there is no mention of a divorce from Gomer. None. Any attempt to say that Hosea divorced Gomer before marrying the second wife is pure conjecture at best, and doing outright violence to Godâ€™s prophetic picture at worst.

Remember that God described Himself as married to two faithless women (*Israel and Judah*). Likewise, He told Hosea to marry two faithless women to represent the faithlessness of Israel and Judah. If Hosea only married one woman, it would destroy the symbolic parallel, ruining the prophetic picture.

In order to be a true picture of God being â€œmarriedâ€ to two faithless women, Hosea mustâ€™ve been married to two faithless women.

Anything else isnâ€™t a true picture.

God rewarded Leah for giving her husband (*Jacob*) an additional wife

This goes beyond merely commanding someone to engage in polygyny, God rewarded someone for **voluntarily** assisting her husband in getting an additional wife.

Genesis 30:9 and 17-18

9 When **Leah** saw that she had stopped bearing, **she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.**

â€

17 God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.

18 Then Leah said, â€œ**God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband.**â€ So she named him Issachar.

God actually **rewarded** Leah for giving her maid to Jacob to be his wife.

Interesting no?

I donâ€™t believe thereâ€™s a single bible verse in which God rewards a non-righteous act. It might be in there, but I havenâ€™t seen it. Thereforeâ€

King David, was a polygamist (*polygynist*) and didnâ€™t sin when doing so

Weâ€™ve touched on this before, but itâ€™s worth looking at in more detail. We know that King David was a polygynist who had multiple wives.

2 Samuel 5:13

Meanwhile **David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem**, after he came from Hebron; and more sons and daughters were born to David.

David is especially notable because of what the Bible says about him. Besides being the â€œ*man after Godâ€™s own heart*â€œ, it also says this:

1 Kings 15:5

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.**

David had at least seven wives and ten concubines that we know of. However â€œ according to 1 Kings â€œ David also didnâ€™t sin by marrying multiple wives. If David was sinning by marrying 17 women, then 1 Kings couldnâ€™t say that he hadnâ€™t turned aside from **anything** that God commanded.

Further, if marrying multiple women and taking them to bed is a sexual sin, then here's what God says about that.

Revelation 21:8

But for the cowardly, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and **sexually immoral persons**, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, **their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**

Unless you think that King David was committing a sexual sin which would land him in the lake of fire, polygamy (*polygyny*) isn't a sexual sin. It's 100% certain that he wasn't sinning that because of 1 Kings. 15:5. Therefore, polygamy (*polygyny*) isn't a sin.

(We can be more sure because of the verse in Exodus that requires a man to have sex with all his wives.)

God would've given David additional wives?

Speaking of King David, God said He would've given more wives to David if he had been dissatisfied with the ones he had. We're going to look at two translations, because all modern ones mistranslate a word that only the original KJV gets right.

(Note: this is Nathan the prophet rebuking David after the incident with Bathsheba.)

2 Samuel 12:7-8 (NASB)

7 Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! **Thus says the LORD God of Israel,** "It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul.

8 **"I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care,** and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and **if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!**

The phrase "into your care" is a single word in Hebrew and every modern translation mistranslates it. That's probably because of what it would mean for polygamy (*polygyny*) if it was properly translated. Here's the KJV's correct translation, and then we'll look at the word itself.

2 Samuel 12:7-8 (KJV "because it translates more literally than all others in this passage.)

And Nathan said to David, Thou *art* the man. **Thus saith the LORD God of Israel**, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

And I gave thee 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 had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.**

The Hebrew word there translated "bosom" is **חֶקֶת** (*cheq*, pronounced *khake*). Here is the word's definition from multiple lexicons:

Strong's Concordance:

Definition: **bosom**

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

bosom, bottom, lap, midst, within

Or cheq {khake}; and chowq {khoke}; from an unused root, apparently meaning to inclose; **the bosom** (literally or figuratively) "bosom, bottom, lap, midst, within.

NAS Exhaustive Concordance:

Word Origin: from an unused word

Definition: **bosom**

Brown-Driver-Briggs:

1. of fold of garment, at breast
2. carry (חֶקֶת, חֶקֶת, חֶקֶת) in bosom,
3. bosom as part of body:
 1. a. **external, lie in bosom, of wife**
 2. b. internal, anger resteth

Here are some of the other places that it's used:

Micah 7:5

Do not trust in a friend; Do not put your confidence in a companion; Guard the doors of your mouth From **her who lies in your bosom.**

Genesis 16:5 (KJV)

And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: **I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived**, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee.

Proverbs 5:20 (NASB 1995)

For why should you, my son, **be exhilarated with an adulteress And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?**

Deuteronomy 28:54 (NKJV)

The sensitive and very refined man among you will be hostile toward his brother, **toward the wife of his bosom**, and toward the rest of his children whom he leaves behind,

Deuteronomy 28:56 (NKJV)

The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, **will refuse to the husband of her bosom**, and to her son and her daughter,

1 Kings 1:1-4 (NASB 1995)

1 Now King David was old, advanced in age; and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm.

2 So his servants said to him, “Let them seek a young virgin for my lord the king, and **let her attend the king and become his nurse; and let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may keep warm.**”

3 So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king.

4 The girl was very beautiful; and she became the king’s nurse and served him, **but the king did not cohabit with her.**

Notice that 1 Kings 1:4 actually had to clarify that although she laid in his “bosom”, she wasn’t having sex with him. The assumption from the verses we’ve seen is that “in this context” bosom directly implies sex/marriage.

Now, looking back consider what this means:

2 Samuel 12:7-8 (NASB)

7 Nathan then said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, “It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul.

8 “I also gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your care **bosom**, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and **if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!**

God said that if David had been dissatisfied with his palace, and **wives** “ plural “ and the kingship over Israel and Judah, then God would’ve given David “many more things like these”. That would include wives.

God literally said that He had no problem giving David more wives.

Thus, how could having multiple wives be wrong?

The Hebrews 11 “Faith Hall of Fame” includes many polygamous men

Most of the heroes of the faith in the Old Testament had multiple wives. The Faith “hall of fame” in Hebrews 11 includes many polygamists (*polygynists*), including Abraham, Moses, Gideon, and King David. (*Who we’ve already talked about*)

How could these men be included in the Faith “hall of fame” in Hebrews 11 if having multiple wives was a serious sin?

“But there are no healthy polygynous marriages in the Bible!”

!and there are so many healthy monogamous marriages in the Bible?

Frankly, if you only look at the examples of marriage in the Bible, you might come away with the idea that marriage itself is very unhealthy because the Bible doesn’t portray healthy ones; monogamous or polygynous. The only real exception is Mary and Joseph, and they don’t really count for obvious reasons.

Doesn’t Polygyny Degrade women?

This is one of the most common objections and the short answer is no. Polygyny doesn't degrade women or even devalue them (*it actually increases their value for reasons that will become obvious in a yet-to-be-published follow-up article*). However, polygyny does fundamentally change the relationship between men and women in a very important way. I'm currently working on an article that explains these changes, and will update this article when it's published.

Now, the immediate reaction of many women is something like:

“Why would he want a second wife?! Am I not good enough for him?”

And they feel hurt. For those women, I have an analogy that might help. **I will admit that the following is an absolutely terrible analogy for multiple reasons but it's the best one I have**

Consider some parents who have one child and they like having that one child so much that they want another child. There isn't anything wrong with the first child that makes them want another one, they simply want another one. Perhaps the first child even makes them want another one because the first child is such a delight. Again, it's a bad analogy for several reasons (women aren't children for starters), but I hope it gets the point across.

Polygyny is (sort of) like this for men.

Ladies, it's not like something is necessarily wrong with you or that you aren't enough. A husband wanting multiple wives is much like a mother wanting multiple children. **Parents don't want more children because there's something wrong with their current children.** (Often it's the reverse and they like their children so much that they want more of them.) **Likewise, a man doesn't necessarily want another wife because there's something wrong with his current wife.**

Polygyny isn't an attack on a woman's value any more than a mother wanting a second child is an attack on the child's value. (And again, it's a bad analogy, but it's the best I have)

Addendum 1: some history

Martin Luther said this:

“I confess that I cannot forbid a person to marry several wives, for it does not contradict the Scripture. If a man wishes to marry more than one wife he should be asked whether he is satisfied in his conscience that he may do so in accordance with the Word of God. In such a case the civil authority has nothing to do in the matter.”

(Letter to Chancellor Gregory Bruck, January 13, 1524)

It should be noted that Luther wasn't polygyny's biggest fan though, and in other places he argued that Christian men shouldn't take multiple wives except under certain circumstances. Ironically, what he spoke of isn't far off from what Pope Gregory II said in a decretal in 726 AD:

“When a man has a sick wife who cannot discharge the marital function, he may take a second one, provided he looks after the first one.”

The Catholic Church then officially denounced polygamy in the Council of Trent.

Addendum 2: A common question on the topic

The question goes like this: “So! if I can have two wives and must have sex with both of them, can I have sex with both of them at the same time?” (a polygynous threesome.)

This question often comes up when polygamy is discussed and there is an answer. However, it’s too long to get into here. I’m planning to write an addendum to this article which tackles the topic in depth. Until then, the only guidance I can give is to suggest that you read my article: [The Bible on Gay and Lesbian \(Homosexual\) Sex](#). It’s relevant for obvious reasons, and the P.S. at the end might give you a clue to what I think the Bible says.

Addendum 3: Does a husband need his wife’s permission to take another wife?

In short, no; a husband does not need his wife’s permission to take an additional wife! but. (read addendum 4 for the *“but”*)

Many people will think of Sarah “giving” her slave Hagar to Abraham as evidence that a man need his wife’s permission. However, that’s not why Sarah “gave” Hagar to Abraham. Marriage in the Bible is transactional, with the bride being “given” to the groom, almost always in exchange for a “bride price”; aka money. Sarah owned Hagar (since Hagar was Sarah’s slave), so Sarah was the one who had to “give” Hagar in marriage to Abraham.

For more information on how Biblical marriage is supposed to be contracted, please see my article: [What is Betrothal in the Bible? Is it the Same as Modern Engagement?](#) The article also covers the issue of Sarah and Hagar in more depth than the short summary above.

Addendum 4: “So I can have a second wife?”

Maybe, but there is a potential issue with vows. If a man has promised not to, then according to Numbers 30:

Numbers 30:2

2 If a man makes a vow to Yahweh or swears an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

I have yet to hear a wedding service where the vows didn't include a vow of monogamy. Thus **if a man has made such a vow, he can't take a second wife**. Now, two people in a contract could change the terms of the contract, so if the wife was okay with it perhaps he could. That's a sticky situation though, and there isn't time to cover it fully.

Suffice to say that if you're already married and your wife isn't on board, Numbers chapter 30 almost certainly prevents you from taking another wife because of your vow.

(Note: in most modern cultures, taking an additional wife probably isn't wise if your first wife isn't on board because she has legal recourse that could make your life hell. Further, there's also the issue of legality; it's illegal in much of the world today.)

Conclusion

There is only one verse that can reasonably be used to argue that men can't have multiple wives (1 Tim 3:2, the "husband of one wife"). However, this verse only applies to elders, not the rest of Christians. Further, saying "husband of one wife" is God's ideal discounts men who are called to be single. Additionally, an understanding of Greek makes it nearly impossible that it's referring to polygyny because it's an idiom.

The other verses simply don't support a "monogamy-only" position at all.

On the other hand, God commanded polygyny several times. This includes a direct command to a prophet and two standing situations where polygyny was commanded by God in the Mosaic Law. Further, God pictures Himself as a polygynist married to two unfaithful wives (*Israel and Judah*), and Jesus likewise pictures Himself as marrying 5 women in a parable. (*Though obviously He didn't marry and it was just a parable.*)

Further, **God rewarded Leah for helping her husband get an additional wife**, and God said he would've given David more wives if he had wanted them. Additionally, God explicitly stated that King David hadn't turned aside from the Lord except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite! even though David was a polygynist. There's also the fact that many of the members of the "Faith Hall of Fame" had multiple wives.

The evidence that God allows polygyny is absolutely overwhelming!

but it must be done as God commanded it to be done.

The Bible gives many instructions to husbands that ***still must be followed*** with two or more wives, just as they must be followed with only one wife. Adding wives doesn't eliminate a husband's God-given requirements on how he treats his wife/wives. Further, given God's commands in the NT, **it would be nearly impossible for a Christian man to have more than two wives "perhaps three at the absolute maximum" and obey the New Testament's commands about how wives are to be treated.**

Further, **unless your income is about double the median income where you live, don't even consider getting a second wife.**

We'll look at these things in a follow up article (*that I'm still writing*), plus look at how allowing polygyny causes some very significant changes in a society.

Marriage Series Index:

- a. [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#) (*This article was written later, but serves as an excellent, balanced intro to gender roles in marriage. I highly recommend reading this article before the others.*)
1. [How Getting Marriage 'Wrong' Destroyed Every Great Civilization in World History](#)
2. [Gender Differences and the Biology of leadership](#)
3. [The "Why" Behind God Telling Wives to Submit to their Husbands in Marriage](#)
 - a. [Does 1 Corinthians 11 Require Women To Wear "Head Coverings"](#)
4. [The Bible on Authority & Submission in Marriage](#)
5. [Does God View Women as the \(Social/Political\) Equals of Men?](#)
6. [Biblically, What's the Role of Women in Society and Marriage?](#)
7. [Gender and Attraction: What Men vs Women REALLY Want](#)
8. [Biblically, What's the Role of Men in Society and Marriage? \(still writing it...\)](#)
9. [Is Polygamy \(Polygyny\) Biblical? Does God Allow it?](#)
10. Follow up articles coming...
 - o Appendix A: [Biblical Reasons for Divorce, When Remarriage is Allowed, and How Adultery Figures In](#)