

Yahweh, the Almighty God of Israel, is with us
"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet,
and shew my people their transgression,
and the house of Jacob their sins." Isaiah 58:1

Divine Law

Study Prayerfully & Study Carefully

Polygamy ... Is it Wrong?

1. Introduction

We live in a world of conflicting customs, where an acceptable code of practice in one country is considered unacceptable in the next; where the respected moral standards of one community are abhorrent to another; a world where religious differences directly influence the lives of millions. Whilst presenting Yahweh's message to the people of many countries **A Voice In The Wilderness - Canada** has in the past been repeatedly asked questions about **celibacy, marriage, adultery, divorce, remarriage, polygamy**, etc. The questions are often penned by believers from foreign lands and though individual queries vary from letter to letter, underlying all is the desire to know what the Bible has to say about these very important matters.

2. The Aim

The aim of this article is, therefore, to present the Scriptural teaching on the question of whether or not a believer in Yahweh the Holy One of Israel is permitted to have more than one wife at the same time. **This article is addressed to believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel.** It is aimed at believers all over the world, no matter in which country they find themselves. It is based on the Scriptural teaching concerning marriage and the texts and the examples given may be checked for accuracy. The article is divided into several sections, each dealing with the matter from a different angle. The sections are as follows:

1. Should an unmarried believer in Yahweh stay single?
2. Is it a sin for a married man to take a second wife?
3. Should a man with two wives divorce one of them when he becomes a believer?
4. Should a married believer separate from an unbelieving partner?
5. Should a married woman who is the second (or subsequent) wife of an unbelieving husband leave her husband when she becomes a believer?
6. Should a Christian girl agree to become the wife of an unbeliever?
7. Should a believer agree to become the wife of a believer who already has another (living) wife?
8. Is a woman allowed to have more than one husband?

QUESTION: (1) Should an unmarried believer in Yahweh stay single?

A **celibate** is a person who remains single and refrains from sexual intercourse. **Celibacy is not a divine law.** To be sure the celibate state does release a believer - male or female - to work more effectively for God. But, do remember, that celibacy is not a divine law. According to Scripture, all believers (including the priesthood) should be allowed to marry if they wish.

Genesis 2: 18: **“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a help meet for him.”**

And so the Almighty provided a wife for Adam. I will not however conclude that because marriage is “**good**” that the single state is inferior. The single state has certain advantages. The Bible says:

1 Corinthians 7: 32: *“But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord:*

33: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

34: There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

35: And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.”

1 Corinthians 7: 7: *“For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.*

8: I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.

9: But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.”

3. Celibacy ... A Manmade Rule!

One can see from these passages that the single believer can serve the Master with less family distraction than a married believer. **But the single state (celibacy) admirable though it may be, is not for all, and the Scriptures recognize this fact. The mandatory requirement for priests and nuns to be celibate is a MANMADE RULE! It is the very opposite of what the Bible teaches. This rule has caused untold problems and evils in the church and in society.** Remember the Almighty's opinion is: **“It is not good for a man to be alone.”**

QUESTION: (2) Is it a sin for a married man to take a second wife?

No one can read the Scriptures without realizing that Yahweh's ideal is that each man should have only **one wife**. God's directive to kings, those most likely to have more than one wife, is:

Deuteronomy 17: 17: **“Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away:”**

Having said this, however, we are still faced with the question: Is it a sin for a believer to take unto himself a second wife, especially in view of situations where barrenness, war, sickness or a **declining male birth rate** etc., throw the fine balance of 50 males to 50 females out of line? What do the Scriptures tell us of this delicate issue? In the Scriptures, even though the ideal state is one man to one woman, it was not condemned as sin for a man of Israel to have two wives at the same time. Some famous men in Scripture had more than one wife and, to our knowledge, they were not condemned as sinners. Examples are: **Jacob, Gideon, Elkanah** (the father of the prophet Samuel) King **Rehoboam** and King **David**. I do, however, find instances where the Almighty strongly condemns **divorce** or the **putting away** of a wife.

Malachi 2: 14: *“Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.*

15: And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

16: For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away:”

In some countries a man is still allowed by civil law to have more than one wife. In Canada, and Britain this practice is against the civil law. If a man in the west wants to marry a second wife, he is obliged to **divorce** (put away) the first before he can take the second. **This practice of divorcing one's wife is strongly condemned in the Scriptures. God hates it.** But back to the question. Is it a sin for a believer to take a second wife?

Answer:

Strictly speaking, polygamy is not classified as a sin: but most certainly it is not meeting Yahweh's original plan of

one man to one wife. In other words, **men with two or more wives are NOT following the Almighty's plan and ideal of one wife to each man.**

Mark 10: 4: *“And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.*

5: *And Jesus answered and said unto them, **For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.***

6: ***But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.***

7: *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;*

8: *And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.*

9: *What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”*

True believers should, therefore, attune themselves to follow **Yahweh's original standard of one man to one woman** and not program themselves into thinking that if they are unhappy with the first partner they can freely put her away and marry a second. That course - **all too popular these days** - leads to untold misery in the household and is a recipe for family and social disaster. Believing men, in short, should aim to have only one wife and only take a second in very exceptional circumstances. If in those **exceptional circumstances** a second marriage is entered upon, the first wife should not be put away or divorced. The following conditions must also be met before the second union can be recognized as a proper marriage.

- The woman must either be a widow or an unmarried girl - not a divorcee.
- The marriage ceremony should not be performed in secret. The taking of a second wife in Bible days was always preceded by a ceremony - however small - and it was performed before witnesses.
- **There was nothing secret about it.**

The requirement that the second marriage be performed openly causes untold complications for people living in countries where it is illegal for a man to have two wives at the same time. A man living in ancient Israel for example, could quite readily take a second wife and not be condemned by the state, the community or the church. But a man living in modern Israel would face condemnation for bigamy. In view of the complications brought about by the marriage laws of countries where polygamy is not allowed, we are led to the following conclusions:

- That in countries where polygamy is forbidden, a believer should only have one wife: **a perfectly suitable arrangement I can assure the reader and one which Yahweh intended in the first place.**
- But in countries where polygamy is permitted, a Christian - **in exceptional circumstances** - may be allowed to have a second wife, provided he continues to keep and care for the first wife and her children. Scripture says: **“If he take him another wife; her (the first wife's) food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.”** (Exodus 21: 10)

Incidentally, a believer with two wives or more is not allowed to hold a position of elder, bishop, minister, pastor, deacon or youth leader in the church.

1 Timothy 3: 1: *“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*

2: *A bishop then must be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;”*

Titus 1: 5: *“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:*

6: *If any be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.*

7: *For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;*

8: *But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;*

9: *Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”*

QUESTION: (3) Should a man with two wives divorce one of them when he becomes a believer?

As stated above, the advice given in this article is based on the Scriptures. It goes beyond the conflicting civil laws of many nations and deals with the subject of marriage from the vantage point of Holy Writ; taking for its examples Bible characters whose lives are commented on for all to examine. To the question which heads this section my answer is no. A man with two wives should not be required to put away or divorce one wife when he

becomes a Christian. The reasons are as follows.

1. Yahweh, the Almighty God of Israel hates divorce or putting away.
Malachi 2: 16: ***“For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away...”***
2. A woman who is divorced simply because she is a second wife is thereafter open to the risk of marrying again: an act which is classified in Scripture as **adultery**.
3. There are several examples in Scripture of men who had more than one wife and nowhere were they required to put away one or the other.

In view of these **three** reasons I do not consider it advisable for a man living in, say, Nigeria or a Muslim country, with two lawfully wedded wives to put away one of them when he becomes a Christian. But remember, he must **NOT** be allowed to officiate as a leader in the church.

QUESTION: (4) Should a married believer separate from an unbelieving partner?

Again the answer is **no**: not merely because God hates divorce or **“putting away,”** but because of the amazing spiritual considerations referred to in this passage of Scripture.

- 1 Corinthians 7: 10: *“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:
11: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.
12: But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: **If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.
13: And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.
14: **For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.**
15: But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.”***

This passage teaches us that an unbelieving partner is sanctified by his/her believing partner. Divorce breaks this spiritual link and its accompanying blessing. There are, of course, occasions where a total breakdown of the marriage occurs; when life has become a living hell for the wife or husband. In these cases a separation is permitted: but not a separation in order to remarry another partner.

- 1 Corinthians 7: 15: *“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.
16: For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?”*

QUESTION: (5) Should a married woman who is the second (or subsequent) wife of an unbelieving husband leave her husband when she becomes a believer?

Once again our answer is, **No she shouldn't**. She may be the second or third wife of the unbelieving man - it matters not: if he wants to keep her as his wife, she should stay with him for the reasons given above. There is no Scripture that requires her to leave him for another. If, however, because of **unbearable conditions** imposed on her, she chooses to leave, she may do so: but she will thereafter need to stay single or be reconciled to her husband. She is not allowed to marry another man as long as her former husband is alive.

Romans 7: 1: *“Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?”*

2: For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.”

- 1 Corinthians 7: 10: *“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:
11: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.”*

The above instructions were penned to believers in Rome and Corinth where (as at the present in most countries) capital punishment was not meted out for adultery. Examples of women who were one of two or more wives are:

- **Rachel** - she was one of four wives of Jacob.
- **Hannah** - she was one of two wives to Elkanah.
- **Esther** - she was one of many wives to the Persian King Ahasuerus. (Xerxes)
- **Abigail** - she was one of King David's four or more wives.

All these were women of renown, believers in Yahweh the God of Israel. **Esther**, as we well know, was married to an unbeliever; but in spite of that fact she wrought a great work for the people of God. No believer will doubt but that Yahweh worked a mighty miracle through her. Her example clearly proves that a God-fearing woman need not leave her husband even if he is an unbeliever with other wives.

QUESTION: (6) Should a Christian girl agree to become the wife of an unbeliever?

Believers should choose partners who are believers; partners who are as near to their own spiritual grade as possible. Marriages of believers with unbelievers is not recommended in the Scriptures. Untold trouble and frustration will be avoided if this single guideline is followed.

- 2 Corinthians 6: 14: ***“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?
15: And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?
16: And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”***

Young believers often worry about the shortage of Christian partners of their age. **Their fears are groundless.** He who rules all heaven and earth knows exactly how to organize partnerships. Marriages as amazing as **Isaac's** and **Rebekah's** - and every bit as happy - are possible today. (See Genesis chapters 23 & 24) Yahweh has advised that believers should marry believers, and you may be sure that He is well able to implement His will in the lives of those who are eager to obey Him. Christian girls should, therefore, not rush into marriage with unbelievers. **On the other hand they should not expect perfection from the men they meet when they themselves are far from perfect.** Rest assured that the Almighty knows each one's need and He will meet it in His time; and far more effectively than the young imagine.

QUESTION: (7) Should a believer agree to become the wife of a believer who already has another (living) wife?

The answer is **No**. This question/answer is included here for the benefit of Christian girls in countries where polygamy is accepted by civil law. To become the second or third wife of **any man**, however good he may appear to be, is asking for trouble. As a second wife you may be the favourite for a few years: but sooner or later you will find yourself scrambling for attention.

QUESTION: (8) Is a woman allowed to have more than one husband?

The answer is **No**. According to divine law a woman is not allowed to have two husbands at the same time. In other words she must wait till her first husband is dead before marrying a second. Nor is there a single example in the Scriptures of a godly Israelite woman who had two husbands at the same time.

- Romans 7: 1: ***“Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?
2: For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.
3: So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.”***

4. Summary

- Marriage is a divine institution and though a single believer may serve the Almighty with more freedom than his/her married counterpart, it is, nonetheless, good that men and women get married and raise families in accordance with the Almighty's plan.
- **Celibacy as a mandatory requirement for priests and nuns is a manmade rule!** Its evils are incalculable and it's time the rule was jettisoned by the **Catholic Church**. As the Saviour once said: **“Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.”** (Matthew 15: 13)
- Married men should not take second wives, though to do so in countries where polygamy is permitted and where the service is not secret, the taking of a second wife is not a sin. **But men with two or more wives are not allowed to officiate as leaders in Yahweh's church.** (1 Timothy 3: 1-12, Titus 1: 6)
- Men with two or more wives should not be required to put away any of them on joining the church. They should continue to keep their wives, treating each with the respect and consideration the marriage union requires. (Deuteronomy 21: 15-17)
- Believers should not separate from unbelieving partners unless life has become intolerable and there has been an irreconcilable breakdown of the marriage. If a separation occurs then the believer should remain single, or be reconciled. (1 Corinthians 7: 10-16)
- A woman who is the second or third wife of a man should not leave her husband when she becomes a believer.
- Young Christians should not marry unbelievers and should aim at Yahweh's perfect standard of one man to one woman. (2 Corinthians 6: 14)
- A Christian girl should not agree to become the second or subsequent wife of a man, however good he may appear to be.
- A woman is not allowed to have a second husband whilst the first is alive. But she is free to marry again when he dies. **Marriage is till death.** (Romans 7: 1-3)

A Voice In The Wilderness - Canada puts out this information with much prayer hoping that it will help settle the confusion that exists in many countries on these delicate issues. For more information see **A Voice In The Wilderness - Canada** articles concerning: **Fornication, Christian Marriage, Adultery, Homosexuality, Divorce & Remarriage.** They tell of how the nations of the world have drifted far from the teachings of the Bible. These articles have been produced because of the numerous and urgent requests received in Canada from home and abroad. They should be studied prayerfully and not used as an excuse to multiply wives. **Yahweh the Almighty God of Israel** has given us definite laws concerning the way we should live: **and no one breaks His laws without suffering the consequences.**

AMEN!

In the Son's Name - For the Father's glory.
Elder: *Max W. Mader*

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