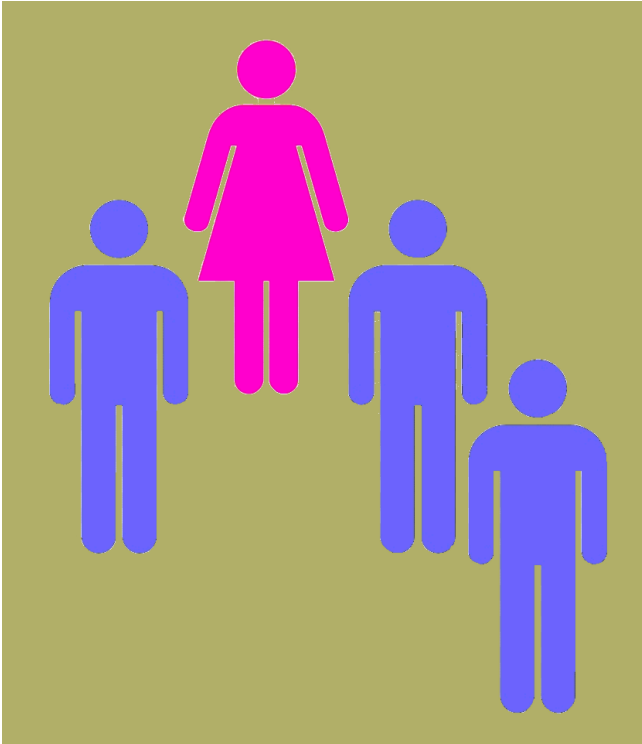


This document is offered for discussion of basic Christian views and does not represent policy or officially agreed views of Anglican Essentials Wales or any of its member organisations.

Does the Bible say polygamy is right?

There are people in the Bible who were polygamous, but does the Bible say Polygamy is right?



The Old Testament of the Bible contains the history of Israel and God's part in the history. It certainly does not follow that everything that happened in Israel's history was always what God wanted.

The Bible tells us just as often what God didn't want to happen as the times when it tells us what God did want to happen.

So it is that the Prophet Samuel got very upset because Israel wanted a king but Samuel knew that wasn't God's intention for Israel at all.

In 1 Samuel chapter 8 we read:

When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. ² The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. ³ But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵ They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

⁶ But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. ⁷ And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.

In this one passage you can see that the people of Israel were ignoring God and God has to remind Samuel that *it is not **you** [Samuel] they have rejected, but they have rejected **me** [God].*

So just because it is in the Old Testament of the Bible does not mean that God agrees with it. So, in this example, the kings of Israel were not something that God wanted.

Polygamy is being married to more than one person at the same time.

There are indeed people in the Old Testament who had more than one wife. This is certainly true of the kings of Israel and Judah, even King David eventually took more than one wife and certainly King Solomon onwards had multiple wives. Yet as we have seen God was not supportive of having Kings of either Israel or Judah. Even the prophet Nathan was sent by God to reprimand King David for having gone with another woman. King David's sorrow for his wrong-doing is openly there for you to read in the Bible.

Therefore, if we are to identify what God supports, from what God does not, then this question goes to the heart of "What is God's intention for marriage?"

To be a Christian means that we believe in Jesus Christ and so that is what the word "CHRISTian" means. So any Christian needs to start by seeing what Jesus Christ says.

What is clear in the Bible is that marriage is from God and not from the State. Now Jesus also tells us that Jesus Christ did not come to change anything in the law and so there is a context for understanding the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Matthew's gospel at chapter 19 it says:

³ *Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"*

⁴ *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'*

⁵ *and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?*

⁶ *So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

It is true that the Pharisees were trying to nit-pick about divorce. Jesus Christ stopped them in their tracks by reminding them and telling them what marriage actually is.

This reminds us that Jesus is referencing the Bible from the very beginning (the book of Genesis) showing that the intention is to be together always and even if it doesn't quite always work it is, nonetheless, the intention.

God takes two people, male and female, and unites them together as one in an exclusive relationship. Commitment within marriage, like commitment to God, is exclusive. Marriage is designed to reflect the exclusive relationship between God and his people and polygamy cannot reflect that. So marriage is between ONE woman and ONE man.

Polygamy is against the exclusiveness of marriage, so it is outside of God's ideal. It is true that many of the Patriarchs and Old Testament kings took more than one wife, and they are not explicitly and openly condemned for doing so. However, it is also true that there

was often conflict in their lives, including jealousy between their wives, which caused great difficulty in the family environment. When we step outside of God's ideal, there are often serious consequences to our actions.

Even in the Old Testament of the Bible, in Deuteronomy chapter 17 at verses 14 to 20, God says that the kings were not supposed to take multiple wives (or horses or gold).

Deuteronomy chapter 17 verse 17 says, simply and clearly:

"He [a king] must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray."

While this cannot actually be interpreted as anything like a law, it can be understood as declaring that having multiple wives causes problems for everyone involved. This can be clearly seen in the life of Solomon (1 Kings 11:3-4).

Throughout the New Testament of the Bible, in which we read about our Lord Jesus Christ amongst us and his impact on everyone, marriage is always between one woman and one man.

Even in the letters of the New Testament, in 1 Timothy chapter 3 at verse 2, and again at verse 12. Both verses talk about a leader and his wife [leader – singular, wife - singular]. Similarly in Titus chapter 1 at verse 6 we are told a leader should be "*the husband of one wife*" in a list of qualifications for spiritual leadership.

Even in the letter to the Ephesians at chapter 5, verses 22 to 33 speaks of the relationship between husbands and wives. When referring to a husband (singular), it always also refers to a wife (singular). If polygamy was expected, included, or in any way correct, then the entire illustration in Ephesians of Christ's relationship with His body (the church) and the husband-wife relationship falls apart.

So marriage, between one woman and one man, is what God asks of us.

November 2019