

# Is Polygamy Biblical?

An in-depth look at what  
the Bible has to say about  
plural marriage

by Doris Hanson







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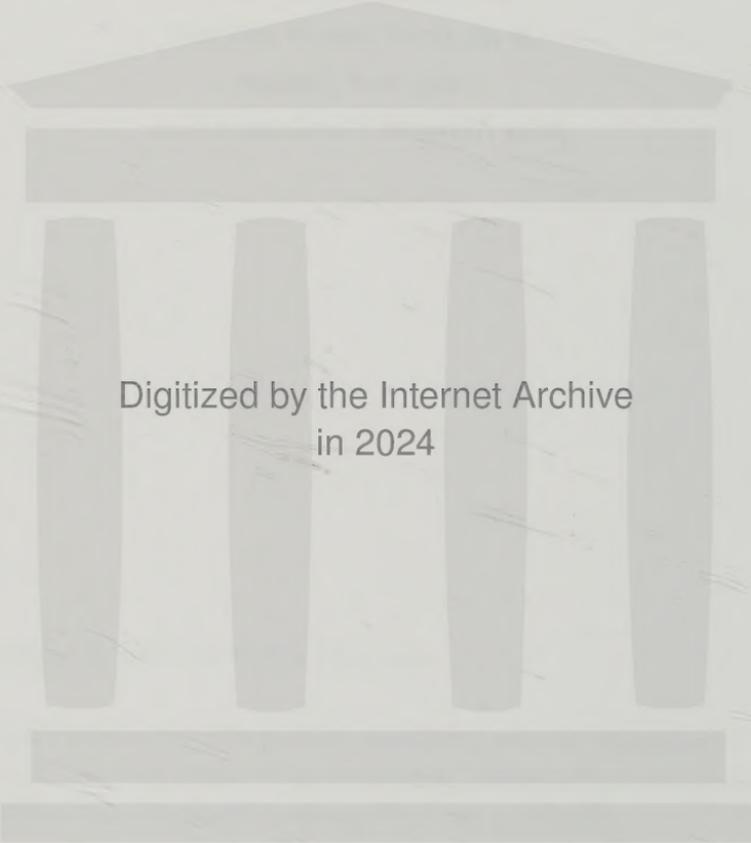
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*This booklet is dedicated  
to the brave women and men  
who seek freedom  
from Mormon Fundamentalism.*



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# INTRODUCTION

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## Polygamy.

What is polygamy?

When did the practice first begin historically?

Is it moral? Is it evil? Is it either?

We read about biblical figures and others who have practiced polygamy throughout the ages, but does that mean that this is something that God requires or desires for us?

I was born and raised in a Mormon Fundamentalist group in Utah. Mormon Fundamentalists uphold the principles of early Mormonism, most notably the doctrine and practice of polygamy. They frequently try to use portions of the Bible to justify this practice. However, as an adult, I began to question polygamy because deep down I sensed that something was not right with this so-called “principle”. Although all of the leaders, women and people whom I trusted, even my own mother, taught that polygamy was God’s will and essential in order to be accepted into heaven, I still could not shake the conviction that there was something dreadfully wrong with the practice.

Most polygamous Mormon Fundamentalist groups teach dogmatically that God has commanded this “principle” as a foundational part of their religion and necessary in the “plan of salvation.” Because of this, it is important that we examine the subject of polygamy thoroughly from a biblical perspective.

What does the Bible really say about the practice of polygamy?

Does it condone it? Does it condemn it? Is polygamy something that God requires? Is it something that He detests? The purpose of this booklet is to examine these questions in depth.

## WHAT IS POLYGAMY?

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Perhaps we should begin by stating what polygamy *isn't*. The definition of “polygamy” is itself an oxymoron. The term is usually said to mean *plural marriage*—specifically, a marriage between one man, and more than one woman, at the same time. However, the term *marriage* itself represents the union of *two* people, and is a covenant between those *two* people. Plural marriage cannot be a marriage in the true sense of the word, because it involves more than two people.

A biblical covenant was between *two* parties. In plural marriage, the marriage covenant is between many individuals; it does not correspond with the biblical pattern of a legal covenant. Those who practice polygamy will often argue that the covenant that one man makes with each of his wives is simply that—a covenant between two people. However, this is not the reality, because each new plural wife must be received and accepted by the man's other wives.

When God created mankind, He created Adam first, and then Eve. He created two people; one man and one woman. He brought them together in the first God-ordained marriage:

*...and the two shall become one. (Genesis 2:24)*

This is the original marriage—the one where God Himself gave away the bride! This is the marriage Jesus talks about in Matthew:

*And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he*

*which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Matthew 19:4-6)*

The word “twain” means “two”. God joins together two in a marriage - a male and a female. No more, no less.

Centuries later, during Jesus’ ministry, He reaffirms this original design and purpose of God in Matthew 19:4-6. Anything outside of, other than, or in addition to that which God has decreed is not from Him, and is therefore a violation of His original purpose. Notice that the man is to cleave to his “wife”—not to his “wives”.

Jesus goes on to say that what God has made, man should not “put asunder”. That is, should not separate, break apart, or divide. If God made a marriage between two people only—one male and one female, then no human being has the right to destroy or change what God has done; nowhere in the Bible do we find that God has made any changes, or altered His original design for marriage. The very addition of a new wife to the marital relationship puts asunder the intimate relationship between the man and his original wife. Suddenly his time, his affections, his resources, and his love—are divided.

If God’s original design for marriage had been for one man to have many wives, wouldn’t the first marriage, have reflected that desire and plan? God did not take many ribs from Adam to make many wives for him; He took *one rib* to create *one wife* for *one man*.

## WHERE DID POLYGAMY COME FROM?

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The first case of polygamy in the Bible is found in Genesis 4:19, in which Lamech married two women. Lamech was not from the righteous lineage of Seth, but was rather from the lineage of Cain, who was a murderer who had been cursed by God!

So, polygamy first came into being through the cursed line of Cain! Cain had gone out from the presence of the Lord (Genesis 4:16). His offspring in the succeeding generations were born and raised away from the presence of God. Lamech was the seventh generation from Adam. In biblical reckoning, the number seven represents completion. This interesting little detail is given as though the completion of the cycle of evil culminates in Lamech.

The Bible focuses first on Lamech's lawlessness! It is interesting that the first incident of polygamy came out of the family that had been cursed by God. This story provides us with the "source" of the practice of polygamy – polygamy is *never* given as a holy and righteous commandment by God; instead, the opposite is true—an arrogant murderer in the line of Cain is the one who first practiced polygamy.

In Genesis 6, we see earth's population growing, and men beginning to lust after all the beautiful women:

*And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God*

*saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. (Genesis 6:1-2)*

This verse states that men were taking “all the wives” that they chose—clearly implying multiple wives. There is a strong indication in these verses that polygamy had become rampant. It is significant that this is the first sin mentioned in the chapter that describes God’s grief over the sinful, corrupt and violent ways of mankind. See verses 5,11,12,13.

*And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)*

*The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.*

*And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Genesis 6:11-13*

Several times the words “*wickedness*” and “*corrupt*” are used to describe that society. All of mankind had become hopelessly corrupt, and one aspect of that corruption was polygamy; a corruption of God’s initial design in the Garden of Eden, and one of the reasons God flooded the earth in Noah’s day.

Biblical scholars have suggested, and the evidence indicates, that this is most probably when harems first became a part of society.

God subsequently flooded the earth to destroy all the evil, saving only the righteous (and monogamous) Noah and his family. Cain's lineage, from which polygamy first began, was destroyed in the flood!

Noah and each of his three sons had only one wife each. If polygamy were a requirement for righteousness, as many polygamous groups teach, then why was Noah's family monogamous? And more to the point—if polygamy was instead a significant part of the evil that prompted God to condemn and flood the earth, then what does God think of polygamy today? This suggests that there is nothing godly or spiritual about the practice of polygamy - it only hurts and brings great pain to those caught up in its practice.

Throughout humanity's wicked history, there have always been wars and tribal hostilities. Often, many of the men in a tribe or nation would be killed off, which left many helpless women and children. The women and young girls would often be taken captive by the conquerors as slaves and concubines. These men would populate their harems from captive or abducted women.

Therefore, the woman was no longer the “help mate” that God had created her to be; instead, she became a sexual slave, something to be used and treated as property, one of many, with no special treatment as a wife. The man has not left his father and mother and cleaved to his wife, but has instead corrupted his home, his family and his God-given heritage by his lustful immorality. The thing is, once a man seeks to obtain satisfaction from multiple women, no amount of women will ever be enough to satisfy him.



# POLYGAMY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Most polygamist groups use the Biblical account of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar to justify polygamy, or even to suggest that polygamy was God's idea. Some go so far as to call it "the Law of Abraham." Because Abraham is frequently upheld in the Old and New Testaments as God's friend and an example of faithfulness and righteousness, many incorrectly presume that because Abraham and Hagar cohabitated, God must have condoned the practice. But if we take a closer look at the story, we'll see that the opposite is true.

God's original plan for redemption of mankind was to create a special group of people through whom He would eventually bring forth the Messiah. This Messiah would save people from their sins. This people from whom the Messiah would be born would become the nation of Israel.

Abraham was the father of the Israelite nation that God would create for His redemptive purpose. God promised a child specifically to Abraham and Sarah—one born miraculously in their old age. But when God's promise wasn't immediately fulfilled, Sarah pushed Hagar into Abraham's arms and his bed - God had nothing to do with this faithless scheme; in fact, it was in contradiction to his plan:

*Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may*

*obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. Genesis 16:1-4*

However, when Hagar got pregnant and gloated about it to her mistress, Sarai chased Hagar off. Nevertheless, God met Hagar in the desert and sent her back “to Sarai to submit to her...” It is interesting that God did *not* send Hagar back to Abram to submit to *him*. Wouldn't that be what one would expect if God considered her to be Abram's wife? No, Hagar was subject to Sarah.

God sent Hagar back to Sarah because of His care and concern for a helpless, pregnant *victim* of Sarah, and of Abraham “who harkened unto his wife” rather than trust God and His promise. Later, when Hagar's son Ishmael was older and they were able to care for themselves, God told Abraham to send Hagar and her son away, which he did!! Genesis 21:8-14.

It never mentions that Hagar had children other than Ishmael and she is never referred to as Abraham's wife but always as the bondwoman (maidservant) of Sarah. I repeat: the Bible *never* recognizes Hagar as a legitimate wife of Abraham! Abraham did not take another wife until after Sarah died.

It is also interesting to note that not only is Hagar never referred to as Abraham's “wife” but Ishmael is never referred to as the son of Abraham, but rather as the son of the bondwoman. In fact, in Genesis 22, when God tells Abraham to offer up Isaac

as a sacrifice, He calls Isaac “Abraham’s *only* son”.

*And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

Genesis 22:2

God often uses the New Testament as a commentary on the Old Testament. Galatians 4:28-31, compares Hagar and Sarah. Hagar is referred to as a slave and Sarah as a freewoman. In fact, verse 30 says: “*Cast out the bondwoman and her son*”.

A final point about the Hagar and Abraham story: The Bible is very clear about God’s opposition to divorce. Since God hates divorce, why would He tell Abraham to be rid of Hagar unless God did not consider their union a true marriage? It is becoming more and more obvious that God does not command polygamy, He does not condone polygamy, and does not recognize polygamy as legal marriage in His sight.

With these Biblical facts in mind, how can Abraham be used as an example *supporting* the practice of polygamy? God never instructed Abraham, Sarah or Hagar to participate in a polygamous affair, but instead instructed Hagar to leave the situation just as soon as Ishmael was old enough to travel away with his mother. God’s original intent was to bring about his purposes through Abraham and Sarah’s offspring, and theirs alone. So if the polygamists were to truly follow in Abraham’s footsteps, they would first provide for their other wives and children, and then send them away, and then remain married to only one wife—their original wife—until her death.

Isaac, Abraham's son, did not have more than one wife—Rebekah. But both of his sons, Esau and Jacob, however, lived polygamy. Jacob's original intent was not polygamy, but treachery and trickery brought Jacob into a polygamous marriage, and his life became miserable, with four bickering, jealous wives. If you ever want to find an example of a dysfunctional family, look no further than Jacob's family! But such is the case with families with multiple wives. The man's affections are divided, and he can't help but show favoritism. Each woman is then left to do her best to protect her children and her own marital rights. Jealousy runs rampant among the wives and the children. There is no domestic tranquility.

Mention needs to be made about Esau. In Genesis 26:34-35 we are told that Esau took to himself two wives and they were a source of grief to his parents, Isaac and Rebekah. In Genesis 28:8-9 we read that Esau took even another wife making three known wives for him. That is all we know about Esau's sex life. Now let's piece this together with what the New Testament tells us about Esau:

*Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.* Hebrews 12:16

The word "fornicator" means one who practices sexual immorality. So we learn that Esau was a sexually immoral person. Since the only thing the Bible mentions about his sex life is that he had three wives, it is clear that God considered Esau's polygamy to be immoral, and commands people not to live that way!

Polygamy can rightly be blamed for disastrous results. Many people believe and teach that God has ordained polygamy so that they can learn not to be jealous, harbor hard feelings, and other strong negative emotions that naturally occur when a woman shares her husband with other women. But THAT is exactly how God created women to react. He said to Eve that “*her desire shall be for her husband*” (Genesis 3:16). **Every woman desires her own husband exclusively because that’s the way God created her.**

Another piece of evidence against the idea that polygamy is God’s plan is seen in nature itself—in particular, the ratio of males to females that are born to humans. Statistically, there are slightly more males born than females. If polygamy were God’s plan, wouldn’t He create more female babies than males? Polygamy is a crime against God’s laws of nature.

It is also important to note that just because the Bible discusses certain things that people did, does *not* mean that God condoned it nor commanded people to do what they did. Let’s revisit Jacob. Jacob over time *became* a man of God, but early on he often lived outside of God’s will. When Jacob began accumulating wives for himself, it was ALL the doing of human beings, not God. Genesis 29:16-30. Genesis 30:1-4, 9.

As you read the account, Jacob was hoodwinked by his father-in-law into the marriage with Leah. Jacob’s first and only love, however, was for Rachel. Then, as these two women bickered and argued trying to win Jacob’s favor, in their fits of jealousy and rivalry, they gave their own maidservants to Jacob in order to have children through them. In other words, they used their

maidservants as surrogate mothers, just as Jacob's grandparents Sarah and Abraham had done before him. And so we see women being victimized, not just by men, but also by other women. Put all of this together, and it is *not* a suitable foundation on which to base a favorable doctrine of polygamy.

In studying the life of Jacob, we learn that:

1. He cheated—God didn't tell him to.
2. He lied—God didn't command him to.
3. He manipulated people and circumstances—God didn't condone this behavior
4. He took four wives—God didn't tell him to, nor did He approve of it.

In Genesis 44 there is a genealogical record of Jacob's family. In 44:27 Jacob says: "...*my wife bore me two sons...*" Jacob is referring to Rachel, his precious sweetheart, the only one he truly loved, the only one he ever wanted. He did not refer to her as "one of my wives" or even as his favorite wife. He himself said he had *a* wife. One.

In Genesis 46, verses 15, 18, 19, and 25 the Bible lists Jacob's children and the mother of each. In this passage, no one is referred to as Jacob's wife except Rachel. The Bible clearly spells out Jacob's preference for Rachel as his only true wife; the other three women were unfortunate victims thrust upon him as a result of another's personal agenda.

Just because Jacob had four women, and children from all four, does not mean that polygamy was a good idea or God's idea..

But why did God allow this behavior? Why didn't He come right out and condemn the practice loud and clear? Why might it seem that He gave tacit approval by His apparent silence on the subject before the men who practiced it?

When God gave the nation of Israel His laws, He was very particular about how His chosen people should conduct their lives. In Leviticus 18:24-30, God warns Israel *not* to partake of the sexual sins that the other nations practiced. To do so would result in their being vomited out of the land (verses 25 and 28). Eventually, this became their fate, because they disobeyed God in every way.

In Deuteronomy 17:17, God specifically gave a command for the future kings of the nation of Israel: *that he not multiply wives to himself*. This is an explicit command from God against polygamy. The king is the representative of the people and the model and example for the people.

Nevertheless, both King David and King Solomon disobeyed this directive of God. Yet these two kings are often used by proponents of polygamy as “proof” that God approved of the practice. Nothing could be further from the truth. God does not say something is wrong and then later contradict Himself by saying that wrong is right after all. Nor do God's standards change. He did not approve of David's polygamy any more than He approved of the other sins of David that are mentioned in the Bible.

David was a king and military leader. He practiced what the leaders and kings of the earth did in those days - collected harems.

However, he and his family paid dearly for his lifestyle of sexual immorality. Families often suffer because of the sins of the parents. If a parent follows a foolish path of behavior, the children will likely follow closely in their footsteps. David's sexual escapades and appetite were observed and practiced by his sons. His son, Amnon, raped his sister. Another son, Absalom, killed Amnon in revenge. Then he later tried to take the kingship from David and ended up raping his father's concubines on the palace roof in view of all the people (2 Samuel 13 & 16).

A careful study of the life of David will show any honest reader that David did not have a happy or emotionally healthy family.

- David sinned every time he took an additional wife—Deuteronomy 17:17
- David sinned when he committed adultery with Bathsheba.
- David sinned when he ordered Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to be killed in battle.
- David sinned when he took Bathsheba as one more wife.

In spite of all these sins, God loved David. Just as in spite of all *our* sins, God still loves us!

We cannot conclude that God approves of polygamy just because He didn't immediately punish David and others for their polygamous lifestyle. Often the *natural consequences* of our sin are what God uses to discipline and correct us. We must remember that God's patience toward us gives us time and opportunity to

repent of our sin and avoid perishing.

Titus 3:4-6 tells us that God is full of kindness, love and mercy toward us. He wants everyone to repent and come to the knowledge of the truth, waiting patiently for each of us to respond to His love through repentance.

God tolerated, and continues to tolerate, the sin of polygamy—in the sense that he does not bring immediate judgment upon those who practice it. However, not once did He command it as a doctrine. He loves women and children too deeply for that. God has always been against polygamy; in fact He calls it sexual deviation.

You may wonder why David wasn't punished with death, since murder and adultery were sufficient cause for execution according to Old Testament Law. But David exhibited *genuine* repentance for his sin with Bathsheba, as recorded in Psalm 51, the kind of repentance that God requires for forgiveness.

David's sin was bad, but the grace of God was more than sufficient to forgive and restore him. God's grace is sufficient for anyone's sins and His forgiveness is available to anyone who will repent from the heart as David clearly did. We find that David's repentance was complete because he never took another wife after that.

Many people also come to the wrong conclusion when they read 2 Samuel 12:8, which states that God "gave" David "thy master's house and thy master's wives into thy bosom..."

It was customary for an incoming king to “inherit” the deposed king’s property. The palace, the harem, the stables, the horses, everything the deposed king owned became the legal property of the new king. God *gave* Saul’s Kingdom to David. What God is saying in this passage is that David had a legal right to Saul’s harem; so why lust after another man’s wife? This account is not advocating polygamy, nor is God saying that polygamy is okay with Him. To the contrary, in subsequent chapters, after the affair with Bathsheba, we see that the illicit sexual behavior by David eventually resulted in incest and violent sexual deviation in David’s sons. (See 2 Samuel 13, and 16:21-22; and Solomon in 1 Kings 11.)

*2 Samuel 12:7-8 Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.’*

God allows good as well as hard things into our lives. When God says He gave Saul’s wives into his arms, He is referring to His sovereignty in all situations—that David’s kingship is granted by God’s will and consent alone. This cannot be used to suggest that God is advocating harems or polygamy. God allows the devil to prowl and cause evil in the lives of people; this does not mean that God is the author of evil, nor does it mean that He condones it. Nevertheless, He does allow it to continue—for the time being. Someday however, God will have had enough of rebellious human beings. He will destroy all evil, and that includes polygamy.

David left the kingdom of Israel to his son Solomon. Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived.

*1 Kings 10:23-24 King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.*

*2 Chronicles 1:12 therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.”*

*1 Kings 11:1-11 King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, “You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.” Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods. The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned*

*away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command.*

Despite all of Solomon's wisdom, women—his multiple wives—were his downfall. It should be noted that not all the women in a harem were necessarily sexual partners. Women were often used as property to be traded back and forth between kings and despots to confirm and guarantee covenants of peace between nations. This is abuse and misuse of women and was something God never intended nor planned for women to endure.

Polygamy is unnatural in that the women who are held in harems like Solomon's, are withheld from the rightful pursuit by eligible men who are looking for a wife. In polygamous societies, not only are other males deprived of their natural right to have a wife, but also the women are deprived of their rights and privileges of having their own husband.

*1 Corinthians 7:2: Each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.*

Solomon is the one who wrote most of the Book of Proverbs. Ironically, although Solomon is the Bible's most flagrant polygamist offender, in Proverbs all reference to the marriage relationship is always monogamy, never polygamy.

It is interesting that men are always the *leaders* of the polygamy groups and they are the ones insisting and preaching that God has designed the practice of polygamy. In many cases, they threaten the girls, using the emotional tools of guilt, fear,

eternal destruction and damnation if they don't comply with their demands. What chance do these innocent and naive girls have under such heavy-handed pressure? They teach and threaten that God's only provision for heaven is that these girls submit to the leaders' authority and the practice of polygamy. The girls are warned that the only way that they can ever reach celestial glory is by living polygamy. Hell and damnation are threatened for those who turn away from this "holy" command.

So much for "free agency." So much for freedom of choice.

The Bible tells us that polygamy was practiced in the Old Testament. But was it commanded by God as His preferred lifestyle for us? Simply because several righteous men practiced it, it is taught by some that God willed and commanded it. They even go so far as to say that it is a "higher command" and not everyone is righteous enough in God's eyes to have the privilege of living it! But nowhere in the Bible can that teaching be found.

Many Biblical men lived polygamy, but that cannot be construed as God's design, any more than it was his design for them to sin in the ways that the Bible describes it. The Bible simply "tells it like it is," sin and all. Nowhere does the Bible excuse or require polygamy or any other sin.

Isaiah 4:1 is often used as a Biblical verse condoning polygamy. However, no matter how one twists this verse, one cannot squeeze out a doctrine favoring polygamy. The context of this verse isn't polygamy—it is war. It is God's judgment on the arrogant women

of Israel. War always kills off men, leaving more women per man.

*Isaiab 4:1 In that day seven women will take hold of one man and say, "We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name. Take away our disgrace!"*

*Isaiab 3:25-26 Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle. The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground.*

Israel was a patriarchal society; all the military men were gone. This was God's judgment against wickedness, not a means of fostering polygamy.

Note that this passage speaks of God's judgment upon the women of Israel. If you read verses 3:13 through 4:1, you will see that the chapter break does not conclude the thought. The whole message is about judgment against the people, and particularly the women, of Zion. The passage is judgment and sorrow for women, not the blessings of the doctrine of polygamy. The judgment against the women is an awful and fearful judgment. Part of that judgment is that they will be forced to seek out men for protection and provision because they are left destitute, stripped of health, husbands, family, provision, homes and apparel. This is hardly a compelling description of the blessings of polygamy.

The evil deeds of humanity are prophesied in the Bible, but predictions are hardly the same thing as commandments. God

has already said NOT to multiply wives unto themselves (Deuteronomy 17:17); it is never right to disobey God!

There are several other passages in the Old Testament that those who advocate polygamy use to justify living the “principle”. They claim that because there are laws governing it and that great men of God also lived it, therefore, it must be Gods will. Some of these passages are:

*Exodus 21:7-11* ‘If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do. If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her. If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter. If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.

The above passage is not speaking in favor of polygamy. The context is that of a slave or servant girl whom the master may wish to marry; but if he ends up marrying someone else instead, he must provide for the woman he acquired as a servant, whether he marries her or not. “Depriving her with her marital rights” could mean he is either keeping her from marrying someone else, or he has married her but rejected her because he had married someone else with whom he is more satisfied. In this passage God made laws to “protect” women in the context of a sinful and corrupt society.

**Leviticus 18:9** *“Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere.*

**Leviticus 18:11** *“Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father’s wife, born to your father; she is your sister.*

**Leviticus 18:18** *“Do not take your wife’s sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living.*

These verses are identifying wrong marriages, and they are warning against incest. They are NOT saying its okay to live polygamy; rather, they are teaching proper behavior in case polygamy is part of the family lifestyle. For instance if a son has a father who lived polygamy, God is telling the son not to have sex with a half sister, or if a son has a living father but the mother had died and his father remarried and had children, the son is not to have sex with his half-sister.

Leviticus 18:18 is not teaching that taking a second wife is acceptable. It merely prohibits the marrying of a wife’s sister. By the same token, the New Testament regulates a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever; but that is not the same thing as condoning such a marriage. Rather, it is recognizing the reality of a situation, wrong though it may be, and instructs on how to act in the best interest of all parties involved. God knows that humans will not be obedient to His perfect will for their lives, but He always gives hope to those who repent after being disobedient. He isn’t approving disobedience in doing this.

**Deuteronomy 21:15-17** *If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.*

This passage in Deuteronomy is not teaching that it is all right to live polygamy; rather, it recognizes that polygamy is an unfortunate component of the culture, and it is teaching about the rights of the firstborn. God is simply protecting the rights of the unloved woman and her children in such a marriage.

In the following verses of Scripture, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel rebuked and warned the men of the nation of Israel concerning their extra-marital affairs. In each case the singular word *wife* is used.

**Jeremiah 5:8** *They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife.*

**Ezekiel 18:6** *He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor's wife*

**Ezekiel 18:11** *He defiles his neighbor's wife.*

**Ezekiel 18:15** *He does not defile his neighbor's wife.*

**Ezekiel 22:11** *In you one man commits a detestable offense with his neighbor's wife, another shamefully defiles his daughter-in-law, and another violates his sister, his own father's daughter.*

**Ezekiel 33:26** *You rely on your sword, you do detestable things, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?' (NIV)*

These prophets of old were addressing the entire nation, and none of these verses indicate multiple wives as a lifestyle among the people. If it were, wouldn't you expect to see the word *wives* instead of the singular *wife*? Polygamy was neither the norm, much less God's intent, throughout Biblical history.

Solomon's wisdom is extolled in the Bible (although he did some very unwise things). He wrote much of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, books that are filled with godly wisdom.

**Proverbs 18:22** *He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.*

**Ecclesiastes 9:9** *Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love.....*

Isn't it interesting that the man who took more wives than any other man recorded in the Bible, wrote about the joys of taking "a *wife*" not the joys of taking "many wives"?

Malachi 2:10-15 is sometimes twisted among proponents of polygamy to try and justify plural marriage:

*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. 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.*

Nevertheless, if you study the passage, you will see that polygamy is not even implied. God is *not* trying to draw a distinction between a man's "wife of his youth" and "his other wives"; the passage is speaking solely about his wife, *singular*, whom he married in his youth, and whom he should continue to cherish. Nothing is being said, or implied, about additional wives.

In summary, while the Old Testament stories, teachings, and people are frequently twisted and stretched by proponents of polygamy to try and support a doctrine of plural marriage, the fact of the matter is, when these passages are taken at face value, and in their proper context, we learn that:

- Polygamy did exist, but it was not God's plan, purpose, or preferred arrangement.
- Polygamy was in no way, shape, or form *ever* commanded by God; at best it was endured patiently by Him, in the same way he showed patience with other sins.
- Polygamy resulted in a great deal of unnecessary grief and heartache for everyone involved.
- God's purpose for the marital relationship from the very beginning until now is one man, and one woman, in a loving covenant.



# POLYGAMY in the NEW TESTAMENT

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**W**hile the Old Testament describes the polygamy of its day, as well as God's distaste for it, the New Testament is even more explicit about God's design and desire for the marital relationship.

Jesus is recorded as frequently discussing and interpreting the Old Testament, including the plan and design for marriage. Since Jesus is the One we can depend upon for all truth, He should be the One to whom we turn first for answers.

**Matthew 5:31-32** *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*

**Matthew 19:1-11** *The Pharisees also came unto him [Jesus], tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto*

*you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*

The question I would ask pro-polygamists is this: Since Jesus said that Moses gave the law about divorce because of the hardness of their hearts, could it possibly be that God tolerated polygamy for the same reason, because the hearts of the men were hard?

If God refers to any subsequent marriage following a divorce as “adultery,” how can polygamy be considered holy? Even when the man sought a divorce (except for marital unfaithfulness) it was considered adultery (and therefore unlawful) to remarry another woman. How then, could marriage to another woman while his first wife still lived, be considered holy? Would God have a double standard? Would he call one thing “right” in one situation, and “wrong” in another?” By no means! He is not that kind of God. His word and his standards are consistent.

Jesus is confirming that monogamy was God’s original plan for marriage, and it remains His perfect plan. If polygamy were something God allowed, much less commanded, Jesus would have taken this opportunity to make it clear. But we do not find this—quite the contrary! He distinctly tells us that it is two in a marriage that makes one. A man married to two or more women is guilty of adultery; just as a married woman sleeping with two or more men is guilty of adultery.

There are several other passages in the New Testament that clearly teach that monogamy is God’s only acceptable style of marriage.

Some of these verses clearly teach the leaders of the churches that they may have only one wife. The leaders are to be the examples for the flock to follow.

1 Timothy 3:2: A bishop of the church was to *only have one wife*.

A bishop is a leader of the people and is an example for the others to follow.

1 Timothy 3:12: The deacons were to have *only one wife*.

Deacons are also leaders and need to be the example.

Titus 1:5-6: Directions and instructions are again given to church leaders and the elders are to have only one wife.

While there is no specific mention of polygamy within the church, presumably any polygamy that may have existed would have been patiently tolerated by God, much as it was in the Old Testament. But it was never condoned, encouraged, or commanded; and men with more than one wife were disqualified from positions of leadership within the church. This makes God's attitude toward polygamy extremely clear.

In Romans 7:2-3 Paul teaches us:

*For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even*

*though she marries another man. (NIV)*

The context of the above passage is the “law”. (Paul is talking about the law of marriage and is NOT referring to any gender based teaching. God does not show favoritism, but considers men and women equal. He doesn’t hold one moral standard for the man and a different moral standard for the woman.) Just as a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, so a man is bound to his wife as long as she is alive, (and this is also made clear in other passages of scripture). Therefore should either marry another while the spouse is still living, God considers it adultery!

Any sex outside of the marriage covenant is considered fornication. Jesus even goes further by teaching that even if a man *looks* at a woman lustfully he has already committed adultery in his heart. How much more so if he entices her into an unlawful polygamous marriage, into his bed, and has several children by her!

**Matthew 5:27-28** *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Finally, we have 1 Corinthians 7:1-2: *Every man is to have **his own wife** (not wives) and every woman is to have **her own husband** (not share her husband).*

God blesses sinners. Certainly not because of their sin, but in spite of it. Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon all committed the sin of polygamy—against God’s plan. They were also liars,

deceivers, and guilty of all sorts of other sins. But God is merciful, good, kind and patient; He is the One who waits for sinners to repent and turn to Him for salvation. When they do, He freely forgives their sins—and His blessings will multiply in their lives.

However, anyone who remains stubborn, who refuses to admit he or she is a sinner and needs the Savior, who continues on in sinful ways, will one day be judged accordingly. At that time, God's patience will come to an end, and He will no longer show mercy to unrepentant sinners. The day will come when His wrath will prevail, rather than His grace and mercy.

The Bible is full of warnings and curses for disobedience, and blessings for obedience. Isaiah particularly issued some WOES to those who go against God's will:

***Isaiah 5:20:** Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. (NIV)*

Polygamy is evil; it is a fruitless deed of darkness, it is a bitter way for women to live their lives. Woe unto those who cause others to sin because of the lusts of their flesh and unhindered sexual desires.

Within various polygamy groups today, the men use women to breed children, and to put them to work for their own personal benefit. The leaders use guilt, fear and threats of the wrath of man and of the wrath of God to bring about the female's subjection to the heartbreaking practice of polygamy. The "benefits" of the polygamous communities are enjoyed only by

the groups' leaders. They are withheld from the poor women and young, naive girls who are enslaved by the web of fear and threat of damnation if they do not submit to the men's decrees.

If I could clearly and successfully get across one message through this article it would be this:

**Women and girls:** God does not want you in polygamy! He does not require you to live "The Principle." God will not love you more if you live it, nor will he reject you or love you any less, if you do *not* live it.

Living polygamy is in no way connected with going to heaven or any eternal reward. Nowhere in the Bible is there a single word, phrase or passage that teaches that a person must live polygamy in order to go to heaven. If you are currently living in the awful tangle of polygamy, you **can** leave. God, who specially looks out for the downtrodden, the hurting, the orphan, the alien, the widow will help you if you seek Him and His help. There are people outside of your group who are aching to help polygamists escape. There is hope. If you desire relief and release from the bondage of the life of polygamy, just ask God to provide you a way for a safe escape - and then take it when He provides it!! You can use the contact information at the end of this booklet for help and advice to begin your journey to a new life.

*Psalm 119:45 I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.*

Jesus Said:

**Luke 4:18-19** *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

**Romans 8:21** *that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

God came to set us free – do not be yoked any longer in the bondage of polygamy and its burden of rules and regulations from the doctrines of men.



## THE PLAN OF SALVATION... ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

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As we come to a close of this Biblical study on polygamy, the most important thing of all is to provide you with the *biblical* plan of salvation—the way the *Bible* tells us that we must be saved, the *only* way we can be saved.

1. **Isaiah 57:12** *“I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you.”*

Our own righteousness and works will not help us in any way to get to heaven. They are utterly useless for obtaining God’s favor; God will expose them as if they were shameful, as in fact, they are.

2. **Isaiah 64:6** *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all of our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”*

God doesn’t say our sins are like filthy rags but it is *man’s attempts at righteous acts*; our good works, despite our best efforts, are as filthy as rags in God’s eyes. In the original Hebrew of the Old Testament, the word “filthy rags” literally refers to a menstruation-stained cloth. That is what the best deeds of a guilty person are compared to. The word for “rags” is a covering, clothing or garment, from the filthy clothing of the leper to the holy robe of the High Priest.

3. **John 6:28-29** *“What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in*

*the One He has sent.”*

The only “good work” a man can do is to believe in Jesus as his Lord and Savior; man cannot contribute to the saving of his soul. It is what God has done for us through Jesus that gets us into heaven, not what man can do for God.

*4. Acts 16:30-31 “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”*

The Philippian jailer asked the same question as the crowd asked in John 6, and again the scripture is clear, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” If good works were required to be saved, surely Jesus or Paul would have declared that to the people and to the jailer. There is no other way to be saved than to simply believe, putting all your faith and trust in Jesus for salvation, and in Him alone.

*5. Romans 3:28 “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”*

Observing the law is doing good works—earning one’s way into heaven. But good works are never to be relied on as a means of justification. Man could never, through any works of his own, gain acceptance with God; it is only through faith in Jesus.

*6. Romans 4:5, “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as*

*righteousness.”*

The justified man is the one *who does not work for it*. The faith that is counted as righteousness is the faith that does not work for righteousness. Righteousness comes through faith in Christ alone.

*7. Galatians 2:16, “Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”*

Three times this verse states that man’s justification, his right standing before God, does not come by observing the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. The word “justified” is a legal term that means, “to declare righteous.” It is the opposite of “to condemn.” Since God is holy and mankind is sinful, how can people be justified? Only by faith in Jesus Christ. Compare with Genesis 15:6.

*8. Ephesians 2:8-10, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

The Bible is absolutely clear on this point: that good works will not save a man or help him into heaven. This passage states that

a Christian is *created* to do good works, not that the person creates good works to become a Christian. Also, God is the one who prepares in advance the good works for His children to do. Man's works become an outpouring, a *result of* God's work of salvation, not the cause of it.

9. **Philippians 1:6**, *“Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

God begins the work in the believer; He carries it on and finishes it. Man never begins by doing good works; how could he ever know when he has performed enough good works to save him?

10. **Philippians 2:12c**, *“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”*

Paul says to work out your salvation, not work for it. The work comes after salvation.

11. **Philippians 2:13**, *“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.”*

God is the one who works in us after we're saved to do the good works that please Him.

12. **2 Timothy 1:9**, *“Who has saved us and called us to a holy*

*life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace.”*

It is not anything man has done to earn salvation but it is because of God’s own purpose of goodness and grace that we can be saved. This verse says we are saved *first*, and then we are called to live a holy life. We cannot try to be holy in order to be saved.

*13. Titus 3:5-6, “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us by the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”*

Man is saved because of God’s mercy alone, and more specifically, by the washing of rebirth through the Holy Spirit; being born again is the only way to obtain salvation.

**There is only one way to heaven.** It’s not through a group - but through Jesus.

It’s not through doing good works - but through the works that Jesus has already done for us.

It’s not through obedience to the law - Jesus accomplished that for us too.

If you want to go to heaven when you die, there is only one thing you must do: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. When you believe in Him, you are trusting Him, by faith, to do what He came to do—be your Savior.

If you want Him to save you, He will do so right now—just ask Him to! All He asks is that you say, “yes” to his invitation. Tell Him you would like Him to come into your heart and life. Recognize before him that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness and a personal Savior. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins and lead you to eternal life. If you do this in faith—believing in Him to do what He has promised to do—you will be saved from that moment.

Jesus died on the cross for your sins. That means He has paid your penalty for your sins - that’s what the cross was all about. The Cross proves to us that God hates sin. The Cross proves to us that God loves us.

If you have decided to pray and ask Jesus to become your personal Savior, please let us know by contacting us at the address below. If you have questions or would like further information, we will be happy to help.

***All responses will be held in strict confidence.***

For More Information contact:

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Post Office Box 651292  
Salt Lake City, UT 84165-1292

Check out our web page at:  
[www.shieldandrefuge.org](http://www.shieldandrefuge.org)

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**IS POLYGAMY BIBLICAL?** Mormon Fundamentalists who uphold Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's revelations on plural marriage also draw from biblical examples to support the doctrine and practice of polygamy. But what does the Bible really have to say about this practice? Was it ever commanded by God? Is it even condoned by Him?

*IS POLYGAMY BIBLICAL?* examines both what the Old and New Testaments say about the practice of polygamy, and what God's true intent for marriage really is...and most importantly, what the Bible says is God's plan of salvation.



### About the Author

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Doris Hanson was born and raised in a Mormon Fundamentalist group; however as a young adult she fled the group in order to escape a polygamous marriage to a much older man.

A number of years later, Doris became a Christian, and since then, she has had many opportunities to minister to women who are, or have been, trapped in polygamous marriages.

This booklet is a result of her own difficult journey out of Mormon Fundamentalism, and her learning of God's Word, and His *real* plan for marriage and salvation.

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