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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Answering Atheists: Does the Bible Endorse Polygamy?

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching argues that the Bible does not endorse polygamy. It begins with the creation account, where a man and his wife become one flesh, and explains that Yeshua and Paul appeal to this pattern when speaking about marriage.

The teaching interprets Leviticus 18:18 as a prohibition against taking an additional wife. It examines the Hebrew expression translated as a woman to her sister, arguing that its usage can refer to one woman in addition to another rather than only literal sisters.

The stated concern about rivalry supports this reading. The teaching also considers the passage's literary setting and argues that the absence of a specified civil punishment does not make a commandment optional. It presents monogamy as the standard reflected in apostolic instructions.

Accounts of Abraham, Jacob, Gideon, and Solomon are examined for the conflict and destructive consequences associated with plural marriages. The teaching distinguishes the Bible's recording of these relationships from its approval of them, and applies similar concerns to concubinage.

Several apparent counterexamples are addressed. The teaching reads Exodus 21 as protection when marriage arrangements fail, distinguishes firstborn inheritance protections from approval of polygamy, and considers kings, levirate marriage, Moses, David, and the imagery in Ezekiel.

The conclusion emphasizes that God's mercy toward imperfect people does not approve everything they do. According to the teaching, God can protect those affected by wrongful choices and fulfill His purposes while still calling His people to repentance and His design for marriage.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Genesis establishes the pattern of a man and his wife becoming one flesh.
- Yeshua and Paul appeal to the creation account when discussing marriage.
- The teaching understands Leviticus 18:18 to prohibit an additional wife.
- The Hebrew expression about a woman to her sister is examined as an idiom.
- Rivalry is central to the teaching's explanation of the prohibition.
- A command does not need a stated civil penalty to express God's will.
- The narratives are read as portraying polygamy negatively through its consequences.
- Protecting a firstborn son's inheritance does not endorse his parents' situation.
- God's giving of Saul's household to David is interpreted as a transfer of care.
- God's grace toward fallen people does not remove His call to repentance.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. Genesis describes a husband and wife becoming one _____.
2. The teaching begins its case for marriage with the account of _____.
3. The king whose many wives turned his heart toward other gods was _____.
4. The teaching identifies _____ between wives as a concern in Leviticus 18:18.
5. The inheritance law protects the right of the _____ son.
6. God is merciful, but He calls His people to _____.

Challenging

1. The Hebrew word discussed for a concubine is _____.
2. The difficult Hebrew term translated as marital rights is _____.
3. The teaching presents _____ as an alternative translation for onah.
4. The marriage duty involving a deceased husband's widow is called _____ marriage.
5. The teaching identifies the Cushite woman as most likely being _____.
6. The two kingdoms in Ezekiel's allegory are promised reunification in Ezekiel chapter _____.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the teaching use Genesis, Yeshua's words, and Paul's instructions to establish its view of marriage?
2. What reasons does the teaching give for reading Leviticus 18:18 as more than a prohibition concerning literal sisters?
3. How do the family narratives support the distinction between describing a practice and approving it?
4. Why does the teaching distinguish protecting a firstborn son from endorsing polygamy?
5. How does the teaching respond to the claim that God gave Saul's wives to David as approval of polygamy?
6. How does the conclusion hold together God's mercy toward imperfect people and His call to repentance?

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. flesh
2. Creation
3. Solomon
4. rivalry
5. firstborn
6. repentance

Challenging

1. piylegesh
2. onah
3. shelter
4. Levirate
5. Zipporah
6. 37