



**QUESTION:** Was it ok with God for his choicest men (couple examples: David, Solomon) to have several wives and concubines at once? If so, is it ok with him still today?

**ANSWER:** The Creation order in Genesis gives us our cues for God's ideals for marriage. And there God is not ambiguous: "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:18) and "a man leaves his father and mother" and "two shall become one flesh". So we see in Adam and Eve, one man, one woman, in a life long, covenant bond. God's safety limits around his gift of sex are clear from the beginning: permanent, heterosexual, monogamy.

Now, it's interesting that when the fall and sin come and ruin this picture, one of the first things the author of Genesis notes is that polygamy comes along (Gen 4:19) in Lamech. This is not an endorsement of his action, this is the author telling us how fall and sin immediately play out, because Lamech is also the guy who starts vengeance killings and the increase of murders which lead directly to the flood (Gen 6:11). Much later, the law comes to reduce the disastrous affects of the fall. The law is not God's good creation order, the law is God's gracious provision to subdue and limit the sinful nature until the Spirit will come to "write his law on our hearts".

So in the law you get rules for polygamy (Deut 21:15). Yet this is not an endorsement of polygamy per se, so much as a limit to sinful man's sexual brokenness. Left without limits, he would tend to take any woman he pleased without any obligation (he could populate a small village in a year!). The law's rules about marriage curbs this horrible tendency, even if it allowed for lawful marriage to more than one women. Also, as a result of the brutality of fallen man, there were far fewer men than women due to economic hardship, slavery and war. So there was a practical concern in ancient civilizations, to have a legitimate marriage for every woman, polygamy was demanded. But note in the law where polygamy is mentioned it never prescribes it and it actually serves to mitigate the hardships and injustices and jealousies of polygamy rather than promote it as some sort of ideal order (Deut 21:15ff).

When Jesus shows up, he takes people back past the law to God's good creation designs, to restore faithful, heterosexual monogamy as his ideal order (Matt 19:4-6). In the early church, polygamy was not allowed in the leaders and so God's ideal order was restored as normative for God's people (1 Tim 3:2). So polygamy is not OK for Christians today (though in some pagan culture where the gospel has gone there's a transition period needed as a culture slowly adopts God's ways. A new convert who puts away his many wives may be sentencing them to a life of prostitution in some cultures).

David and Solomon are living under the Law and therefore, their marriages are technically lawful... however, even in their period, their polygamous lives were clearly not totally God lawful or God pleasing. Deut 17:17 tells God's kings specifically to NOT multiply wives, but both David and Solomon do so in direct contradiction to God's wisdom and they reap a terrible harvest in their own households.

Rick Thiessen  
Senior Pastor  
Allen Creek Community Church