

Examining Biblical Sister Cultures & Polygyny in the Torah

INTRODUCTION

For the past decade or more, the topic of polygyny and its present cultural appropriation has intrigued me, to say the least. Over the years I have engaged in countless hours of study, meditation and private/public conversations about this very controversial and sometimes divisive topic. What is polygyny? It is a relationship paradigm that transcends religious or secular bounds. The official definition of polygyny is polygamy in which the man has more than one wife. Various cultures across the globe have laid hold to this marriage strategy for a myriad of reasons from time memorial.

Israelite evangelism has roused thousands of men and women from their slumber with loud proclamations and high ideals about rights and wrongs. This mass resurgence of zealous adherents seeking to apply biblical customs and culture helped to spawn countless doctrines, cultivate worldwide ministries and inadvertently derail many lost souls. Sadly, Israelite's in the west many of whom know nothing about the correct practice of polygyny tend to oversimplify their reasons for wanting to participate in it. Simply, Abraham did it, Jacob did it, David did it, Gideon did it, Solomon did it so on and so forth.

'Nation building' is a term loosely used to refer to the practice of having multiple wives, this very practice in many instances have served to do the opposite, as opposed to building their trial and error version has served as a stumbling block, breaking apart marriages and aiding in the breakdown of many families. Oddly, there was a time that I rarely spoke about my

personal opinions in public yet during the course of this extensive study I took meticulous notes, as I knew one day I would have to share my findings with you. That day has come, there is way too much happening, so much hurt, pain and exploitation and people looking for answers.

Why so long? I have had experiences in my personal life that further gave me clarity that understanding this aspect of our culture is a key element to success as a nation. I had to take the time to wade through the “personal feelings” in order to get to the crux and truth of the matter. You know what’s funny? One of the first things I heard upon entering into Israelite ‘truth’ was literally, “did you know a man could have more than one wife?” From that point on I witnessed the ‘choice’ or ‘option’ become a mandate. Men and women under the influence of these men practically shoving this doctrine of multiple wives down the throats of others.

Women are the prime targets they have been and continue to be coerced into accepting ‘divine marriage,’ if for any reason she isn’t receptive to the idea her reputation could be in grave jeopardy. Among other things, she may be classed as a Jezebel, selfish a westernized wicked women against ‘nation building’ and the Creator. Women are not the only ones browbeaten into this ‘lifestyle choice’ men who are content to dwell with one wife may find himself classified a ‘weak,’ ‘punk’ or someone who is not in control of his household

Why the aggressive campaign for Polygyny?

Personal interpretation of scriptures, population disparity, and the ‘wicked duti Babylon system’ are a few major tools being used to condition newly awakened into acceptance of this relationship paradigm. “Its law,” many proclaim, “it’s in the bible,” all of those statements have validity. It is indeed in the scriptures as are many others practices that the nation of Israel has subscribed to during antiquity.



Today, I will share one aspect of this multiple part report, Keep in mind the information will be presented with a wide angle lens in order to bring into view the older sister cultures that were present contemporary to the birth of the nation of Israel. Multiple wives is not a new concept, neither is it an Israelite invention, let us glean some understanding from the historical records.

PART 1: CROSS CULTURE

Where should we start on such an expansive topic? There are so many elements, the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual. I have chosen to start where I have heard so many who begin when the institution of multiple wives is mentioned; culture.

Now for purposes establishing a common basis of the conversation, we begin with defining the word. So for clarity let's take a look at the word culture.

CULTURE:

: the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time

: a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc.

: a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (such as a business)

So to recap, culture is a set of belief, customs arts of a society. It is a thought process a way of thinking that is an extension of the consciousness of the people in that space and time. Thinking changes and by extension culture does as well. Customs, as stated, is a working part of the definition of culture. Let's look at how custom is defined.

CUSTOM:

: an action or way of behaving that is usual and traditional among the people in a particular group or place

: something that is done regularly by a person

Looking at the two together customs or actions of people that are adapted by a group of others becomes culture once it is woven into that society. Things like food, location, need, availability all of these things affect people's minds to go into what later becomes culture.

I hope you like examples here is one if you look at the culture of food in America you will see that it is the immigrants who brought their foods of which they shared, it became popular and from there was woven into the culture of that place. Take pizza, for example, I once saw a documentary on how pizza came to America. Apparently, the poor amongst the Italian initially eat pizza back in Italy. When the Italian immigrants came to America they brought pizza with In 2015 the pizza industry reported made 38.5 billion dollars, so I guess the rest is history and today you can't imagine American fast food culture without it.

For clarity, culture can be birthed from human decree/actions or as a divine decree. I make this point because a divine decree is something that comes from the Creator as a directive of how the Creator desires his creation to operate.

Now, let us take a look at the practice of multiple wives as it relates to culture in an around the 'middle east.' I will start with Abraham but back track after I have made my point concerning the culture of his time.

Now I will share some information via online sources concerning Abraham.

"Abraham was originally from Ur Kaśdim (Hebrew: כְּשָׁדִים אֹּר 'Ūr Kāśdîm), commonly translated as Ur of the Chaldees. This particular city has many candidates for the actual site, however, the general area is

located in what we know today modern day Iraq. Ur was favorably located for the development of commerce and for attaining political dominance.”

Ur was also an epicenter for Idolatry, as with many ancient cities and places they had their own local deities of whom the residents worshipped. Below is the Ziggurat of ‘house of worship for the principle moon deity within Sumeria “Nanna”

In line with discovering the culture of the time let’s continue to take a look at what the people of ancient Sumeria did as practice. According to world historians, “Ur was the principal center of worship of the Sumerian moon god Nanna and of his Babylonian equivalent Sin. The massive ziggurat of this deity, one of the best preserved in Iraq, stands about 21 m (about 70 ft) above the desert.”

TERAH IN TORAH

In the book of Joshua 24:2 it says this about Abraham’s father Terah.

Joshua 24:2: And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, *even* Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.

This portion in the Torah lets us know that Terah Abraham’s father subscribed to the culture of the day by partaking in the worship of false deities.

TERAH IN THE BOOK OF JASHER

The book of Jasher tells gives further insight on this topic:

Jasher 11:15

And Terah his father was in those days, still captain of the host of king Nimrod, and he still followed strange gods.

Both the text agreed that there was a custom in that time and people chose to follow it. Jasher goes on to let us know that Abraham was not in agreement with Idol worship.

Jasher 11: 16-22

16 And Abram came to his father's house and saw twelve gods standing there in their temples, and the anger of Abram was kindled when he saw these images in his father's house.

17 And Abram said, As the Lord liveth these images shall not remain in my father's house; so shall the Lord who created me do unto me if in three days' time I do not break them all.

18 And Abram went from them, and his anger burned within him. And Abram hastened and went from the chamber to his father's outer court, and he found his father sitting in the court, and all his servants with him, and Abram came and sat before him.

19 And Abram asked his father, saying, Father, tell me where is God who created heaven and earth, and all the sons of men upon earth, and who created thee and me. And Terah answered his son Abram and said, Behold those who created us are all with us in the house.

20 And Abram said to his father, My lord, shew them to me I pray thee; and Terah brought Abram into the chamber of the inner court, and Abram saw, and behold the whole room was full of gods of wood and stone, twelve great images and others less than they without number.

21 And Terah said to his son, Behold these are they which made all thou seest upon earth, and which created me and thee, and all mankind.

22 And Terah bowed down to his gods, and he then went away from them, and Abram, his son, went away with him.

The text goes on to say Abraham did not agree with the Idolatrous practices of Uz. The narrative revealed that Abraham destroyed his father's idols, like Gideon in the Tanak. The Jasher account says that it is this act that started the push for Abraham to leave, his father reported his actions

to the king and for breaking with the customs of that city he was basically a wanted man.

Thus far we are getting a contextual look at the culture of the place from which father Abram later named Abraham was born and raised. We see in this illustration that he differed from his father Terah in his opposition to idolatry. Now let's take a look at some other prevalent customs or culture during that time period.

THE ANCIENT NUZI KINGDOM

According to Biblical Online Sources, "Nuzi was a Hurrian administrative center not far from the Hurrian capital at Kirkuk in northern Iraq. The Hurrians are equivalent to the Horites in the Old Testament, also called Hivites and Jebusites. Excavations were carried out at Nuzi by American teams from 1925 to 1933. The major find was more than 5,000 family and administrative archives spanning six generations, ca. 1450-1350 BC. They deal with the social, economic, religious and legal institutions of the Hurrians."

Now this place was in the same region that father Abraham was from. Let's take a look at its proximity. As you can see in the description it was in northern Iraq and there was some connection drawn between them and the inhabitants of Canaan. Why are they relevant? The Nuzi Tablets is a body of legislation that was excavated that gives insight into the culture that would have permeated the area.

The tablets have recorded their cities history from the dates of 1600-1350 BCE

Now I am going to quote directly from the sources. There is a book titled *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* By Gary A. Rendsburg, In his book Rendsburg outlines striking similarities between the two cultures some of which will be pointed out and paralleled in below.



NUZI: "If Gilimninu (the wife) will not bear children, Gilimninu shall take a woman of Lulluland as a wife for Shennma (the husband)."

TORAH: Sarah provided Hagar for Abraham (Genesis 16:3) for the purposes of bearing children. Should the first wife later bear a son, he would rank over a son born to the second wife. Such was the case when Isaac was born (Genesis 21:1-10)

NUZI: Adoptions were used, a man could adopt a woman as a sister and he agreed to provide a husband for the woman, and a childless couple could adopt a slave or a man lacking property.

TORAH: Possibly applying to the relationship of Abraham to Sarah (Genesis 20:2) and also that of Eliezer (Genesis 15:2) in Abraham's household. The adopted person was obligated to care for the needs, weep over and bury them when they died.

NUZI: Fathers were not required to select the first born son as the heir, they could select any of the sons as they so pleased.

TORAH: Example Jacob's selection of Joseph and then passing this right of inheritance onto the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh as though they were his sons. (Genesis 48:5)

NUZI: A father was required to find a wife for the sons (Genesis 24:4) and arrange marriage contracts for the daughters. If the parents died, the heir

was required to arrange the marriage of his sisters. But in this case the heir had less authority and the sister had the right of refusal.

NUZI: Wills referred to the family gods as symbols of ownership and authority and were highly valued.

TORAH: Possibly explaining why Laban was so concerned that Rachel had taken the images when Jacob was fleeing Laban (Genesis 31). Tablets were also highly valued and passed down from generation to generation.

NUZI: Also there were tablets documenting that a heir could legally sell their birthright to a brother.

TORAH: Example, Esau exchanging his birthright for soup in a time of need (Genesis 25:29-34).

NUZI: Also found were tablets recording blessings pronounced by aging men just before an expected death.

TORAH: As did Jacob in Genesis 48-49, Moses in Deuteronomy 33 and Joshua in Joshua 23-24

The author concludes: Therefore, many of the recorded customs in Genesis are demonstrated to be consistent with the customs of the ancient middle east societies.

(ref. B&S vol. 7, No. 1, Winter 1994)

The days of the patriarchs begin to come into view as some of the practices we read about in their time were also practiced in societies near them as well. So what does all of this have to do with multiple wives? As we see customs are in whole transferred and if something was adopted then it stands to reason that other things were as well. Let me get another witness within the region that culture was shared between near societies.

THE HAMMURABI CODE

Scholars reveal, “The Code of Hammurabi is a well-preserved Babylonian law code of ancient Mesopotamia, dating back to about 1754 BC. It is one of the oldest deciphered writings of significant length in the world. The code is said to consist of 282 laws prescribed by their king Hammurabi.”

According to many separate researchers “The Code of Hammurabi was one of the several sets of laws in the ancient Near East.[The code of laws was arranged in orderly groups so that everyone who read the laws would know what was required of them. Earlier collections of laws include the Code of Ur-Nammu, king of Ur (c. 2050 BC), the Laws of Eshnunna (c. 1930 BC) and the codex of Lipit-Ishtar of Isin (c. 1870 BC), while later ones include the Hittite laws, the Assyrian laws, and Mosaic Law.[10] These codes come from similar cultures in a relatively small geographical area, and they have passages which resemble each other.”

Let us take a look at some relationship laws that existed with the culture that is very similar to some of the activity we see early on in Torah.

HAMMURABI CODES ON RELATIONSHIPS

128. If a man has taken a wife and has not executed a marriage contract, that woman is not a wife.

130. If a man has ravished another's betrothed wife, who is a virgin, while still living in her father's house, and has been caught in the act, that man shall be put to death; the woman shall go free.

131. If a man's wife has been accused by her husband, and has not been caught lying with another, she shall swear her innocence, and return to her house.

134. If a man has been taken captive, but there was not maintenance in his house, and his wife has entered into the house of another, that woman has no blame.

138. If a man has divorced his wife, who has not borne him children, he shall pay over to her as much money as was given for her bride-price and the marriage-portion which she brought from her father's house, and so shall divorce her.

142. If a woman has hated her husband and has said, "You shall not possess me," her past shall be inquired into, as to what she lacks. If she has been discreet, and has no vice, and her husband has gone out, and has greatly belittled her, that woman has no blame, she shall take her marriage-portion and go off to her father's house.

144. If a man has married a votary, and that votary has given a maid to her husband, and so caused him to have children, and, if that man is inclined to marry a concubine, that man shall not be allowed to do so, he shall not marry a concubine.

145. If a man has married a votary, and she has not granted him children, and he is determined to marry a concubine, that man shall marry the concubine, and bring her into his house, but the concubine shall not place herself on an equality with the votary.

146. If a man has married a votary, and she has given a maid to her husband, and the maid has borne children, and if afterward that maid has placed herself on an equality with her mistress, because she has borne children, her mistress shall not sell her, she shall place a slave-mark upon her, and reckon her with the slave-girls.

147. If she has not borne children, her mistress shall sell her.

148. If a man has married a wife and a disease has seized her, if he is determined to marry a second wife, he shall marry her. He shall not divorce the wife whom the disease has seized. In the home they made together she shall dwell, and he shall maintain her as long as she lives.

157. If a man, after his father's death, has lain in the bosom of his mother, they shall both of them be burnt together.

The list goes on but I chose to stop here and take a look at how some of these laws are similar and address some cases that occurred in Torah. My point for paralleling the Nuzi, Hummarabi and Torah Tablets is to illustrate that culture of the time was similar. It must be noted that even if the offense is the same Torah prescribes different judgments of which the Creator decreed for the transgression of laws. Take note that men took addition women on for cases of bareness, disease, and discovering some kind of 'uncleanness' in her.

CULTURE CONCLUSION

Ok, this pretty much does it for the culture illustration; the sources and history show that it was culture and not 'divine decree' that informed the emergence of biblical polygyny during the time of the Patriarchs.

In the next installment, we will take a look at the Torah as it was from the beginning. The subsequent chapters will reveal some hidden gems in scripture, the book of Jasher and recent finding in fragments from the Dead Sea. I have included some references for your further investigation concerning things stated in this chapter.

For those who are saying she didn't prove anything, no worries this is just the first installment of examining the multiple wife customs amongst Israel and neighboring cultures. Feel free to respectfully share your thoughts, comment and share this article.

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SOURCES

- ✓ [King James Version Bible](#)
- ✓ [Book of Jasher](#)
- ✓ [Merriam Webster Dictionary](#)



- ✓ <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2006/02/27/Great-Discoveries-in-Biblical-Archaeology-The-Nuzi-Tablets.aspx#Article>
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