

LEAVING AND CLEAVING: MARRIAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

WHAT IS GOD'S PLAN for marriage? As we have seen in the previous chapter, there is considerable confusion on this point in contemporary culture. To address the prevailing cultural crisis and to strengthen Christian convictions on this issue, we must endeavor to rebuild the biblical foundations of this most intimate of human relationships.¹ The treatment on marriage in the Old Testament in the present chapter will proceed along chronological, salvation-historical lines. Our study of the theme of marriage and of the Old Testament teaching on marriage takes its point of departure from the foundational narrative in Genesis 1–3, which roots the institution of marriage firmly in the will of the Creator and describes the consequences of the fall of humanity on the married couple. This is followed by a survey of Israel's subsequent history with regard to the roles of husbands and wives toward each other and traces several ways in which God's creation ideal for marriage was compromised. The last corpus under consideration is the Old Testament wisdom literature, which upholds the divine ideal for marriage in the portrait of the excellent wife in Proverbs 31 and envisions the restoration of the original husband-and-wife relationship in the Song of Solomon.

As we set out to explore the biblical teaching on marriage, it is important to remember that while this is an *important topic* in Scripture, it is not the *primary focus* of divine revelation. Both Testaments center primarily on tracing the provision of salvation by God in and through

Jesus Christ: in the Old Testament *prospectively* by way of promises and anticipatory patterns pointing to the coming of the Messiah, in the New Testament *retrospectively* by way of fulfillment and realization of God's provision of salvation and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. To this end, the Old Testament follows God's promises to Abraham, the giving of the law through Moses, and the Davidic line.

Yet as the history of Israel unfolds, we see various examples of godly and ungodly marriages, as well as Mosaic legislation concerning various aspects of and aberrations from God's pattern for human relationships. While it is therefore salvation history, not marriage, that is the primary focus of divine revelation, the Scriptures were nonetheless "written for our instruction" (1 Cor. 10:11; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16) and therefore provide fruitful material for study.

ROOTED IN CREATION (GENESIS 1–3)

In exploring the biblical teaching on marriage, there is no more important paradigm than God's intended pattern for marriage presented in *Genesis 1–3*.² Although the book of Genesis was originally addressed to Israel's wilderness generation in preparation for entering the Promised Land, the early chapters of this book provide the parameters of the Creator's design for marriage in every age. This is reflected in Jesus' and Paul's teaching and applies to our own age as well.³ Who was this God who had saved Israel from slavery in Egypt and had given the nation the law at Sinai? What are the foundational teachings on the family, societal structures, and sin?

The first three chapters of Genesis provide answers to these questions, initially from the vantage point of ancient Israel, but ultimately for every person who has ever lived.⁴ In Genesis 1–3, the God whom Israel had come to know as Redeemer and Lawgiver is revealed as the Creator of the universe, the all-powerful, all-wise, and eternal God who spoke everything there is into being. Marriage is shown to be rooted in God's creative act of making humanity in his image as male and female. Sin is depicted as the result of humanity's rebellion against the Creator at the instigation of Satan, himself a fallen creature, and as becoming so much a part of the human nature that people ever since the Fall are by nature rebelling against their Creator and his plan for their lives.

The depiction of the original creation of man and woman and the subsequent fall of humanity in Genesis 1–3 centers around at least three very important clusters of principles, which will be explored in the following discussion.⁵ These are: (1) the man and the woman are created in God’s image *to rule the earth for God*; (2) the man is created first and is given *ultimate responsibility for the marriage relationship*, while the woman is placed alongside the man as his “suitable helper”; and (3) the fall of humanity entails *negative consequences* for both the man and the woman. We will treat each of these topics in turn.

Created in God’s Image to Rule the Earth for God

The fact that both men and women are *created in the likeness and image of their Creator* invests them with inestimable worth, dignity, and significance. Popular notions of what it means to be created in God’s image have often been unduly influenced by Greek concepts of personality.⁶ Thus, God’s image in the man and the woman has frequently been identified in terms of their possession of intelligence, a will, or emotions.⁷ While this may be presupposed or implied to some extent in Genesis 1:27,⁸ the immediate context develops the notion of the divine image in the man and the woman in terms of *representative rule* (cf. Ps. 8:6-8).

In light of the original provenance of this text in an ancient Semitic environment, it may be significant that the erecting of a sovereign’s image in a given location was tantamount to establishing that person’s claim to authority and rule. According to one author,

It is precisely in his [the man’s] function as a ruler that he is God’s image. In the ancient East the setting up of the king’s statue was the equivalent to the proclamation of his domination over the sphere in which the statue was erected (cf. Dan. 3:1, 5f.). When in the thirteenth century BC the Pharaoh Rameses II had his image hewn out of rock at the mouth of the *nahr el-keleb*, on the Mediterranean north of Beirut, the image meant that he was the ruler of this area. Accordingly, man is set in the midst of creation as God’s statue.⁹

By placing his image on the man and the woman and by setting them in a particular environment, therefore, God assigns to them the mandate of *representative rule*. This rule is the joint function of the man

and the woman (note the plural pronouns in Gen. 1:28, “God blessed *them*. And God said to *them* . . .”), although the man carries *ultimate responsibility* before God as the head of the woman.¹⁰ While *substantive* elements of the divine image in man (that is, an analogy between the nature of God and characteristics of humans) cannot be ruled out, a *functional* understanding (humans exercising the function of ruling the earth for God) seems to reflect most accurately the emphasis in the biblical record.¹¹ This appears to be the clear implication from the immediate context of Genesis 1:27, where creation is defined in terms of being fruitful and multiplying and subduing the earth (v. 28). The first man and the first woman were thus charged to exercise representative rule in part by *procreation*.

In this sense, then, human beings are “like God.” Just as God rules over a large domain—the whole universe—so humanity is given charge of the entire earth to rule it for God. This also establishes the principle of stewardship: not the man and the woman, but God is ultimately owner of the created realm; the man and the woman are simply the divinely appointed caretakers. Moreover, this stewardship is a *joint* stewardship shared by the man and the woman. *Together* they are to exercise it according to the will and for the glory of God. *Together* they are to multiply and be stewards of the children given to them by God. And *together* they are to subdue the earth by a division of labor that assigns to the man the primary responsibility to provide for his wife and children and to the woman the care for and nurture of her family. The following discussion will continue to unfold God’s good design of complementarity.

The Man’s Ultimate Responsibility for the Marriage and the Wife’s Role as His “Suitable Helper”

The apostle Paul’s comments on Genesis 1–3 repeatedly root the man’s primary responsibility in the family (as well as in the church) in the fact that he was *created first*. Not only does Paul draw attention to the fact that the man was created first, but he also notes that it is not *the man* who was made *for the woman*, but *the woman for the man* (1 Cor. 11:9; cf. Gen. 2:18, 20) and *from the man* (1 Cor. 11:8, 12; cf. Gen. 2:22). Moreover, the man was the one who received the divine command (Gen.

2:16-17), was presented with the woman (2:22), and named the woman with a name derived from his own (2:23; cf. 3:20), which also implies his authority.¹² These facts follow plainly from a reading of the creation narrative in Genesis.

While Genesis 1 simply notes the creation of man as male and female in God's image, Genesis 2 provides further detail on the exact order and orientation of the creation of man and woman. Paul's comments clearly indicate that he considered this account to be historical (rather than mythical or fictional):¹³ at the beginning of human history God made the first man, endowed him with life, and placed him in a garden (Gen. 2:7-8, 15). Moreover, God addressed to man certain moral commands (2:16-17). Prior to the creation of the woman, the man had already begun exercising the divine mandate to subdue the earth, naming the animals (2:19-20). In order to supply his need for companionship, God created the woman to be Adam's wife.

God's creation of Eve demonstrates that God's plan for Adam's marriage, as well as for all subsequent marriages, involves a *monogamous heterosexual* relationship. God only made *one* "suitable helper" for Adam, and she was *female*. What is more, it was *God* who perceived Adam's aloneness and hence created the woman. The biblical text gives no indication that Adam himself was even conscious of being alone or discontent in his singleness.¹⁴ Rather, God is shown to take the initiative in fashioning a compatible human companion for the man. For this reason it can truly be said that marriage is *God's* idea and that it was *God* who made the woman of his own sovereign will as a "suitable helper" for the man (Gen. 2:18, 20).

But what is the force of the expression "suitable helper"? A contextual reading of the expression in its original setting suggests that, on the one hand, the woman is *congenial* to the man in a way that none of the animals are (Gen. 2:19-20; she is "bone of [his] bones and flesh of [his] flesh," 2:23), and, on the other hand, that the woman is placed alongside the man as his *associate* or *assistant*. On a personal level, she will provide for the man's need for *companionship* (2:18). In relation to God's mandate for humanity to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it (1:28), the woman is a suitable partner both in *procreation* (becoming "one flesh" with him [2:24]) and in the earth's *domestication*

(1:28: “And God blessed *them*. And God said to *them* . . .”). Her role is *distinct* from the man’s, yet *unique* and exceedingly *significant*. While assigned to the man as his “helper” and thus placed under his overall charge, the woman is his partner in ruling the earth for God.

Those denying female subordination as being rooted in the creative order point to the fact that the term “helper” (Heb. *ezer*) in the Old Testament is repeatedly applied to none less than God himself (Ex. 18:4; Ps. 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 115:9-11; 121:1-2; 146:5). If God, who is clearly not subordinate to anyone, is called “helper,” it is argued, how can it be maintained that the term in and of itself establishes the woman’s subordination to the man?¹⁵ Indeed, if the issue were that of *essential* or *ontological* subordination, as to a difference in the nature of a woman’s humanity, such would seem to be excluded.

If the question is one of *functional* subordination in terms of *role distinction*, however, the mere application of the expression “helper” to God in the Old Testament does not obviate the woman’s subordination to the man in terms of being his “helper.”¹⁶ Rather, all that these instances prove is that God, as humanity’s “helper,” may at times choose to subordinate himself and his own interests to those of human beings by caring for them, providing for them, and so on. This does not affect his divinity, however, just as Jesus’ divinity was not diminished by his incarnation.¹⁷ Nor is the Holy Spirit’s divinity compromised by his service to and indwelling of flesh-bound human beings.

Moreover, in the case of the woman, Genesis 2 does not teach that she may merely *act* as the man’s “helper” *when she so chooses*, but rather that serving as the man’s “helper” *sums up her very reason for existence* in relation to the man. Being the man’s “helper” is the purpose for which the woman was created, as far as her wifely status is concerned (as a human being, of course, who shares in the image of God, the woman, like the man, is created to bring glory to God and to serve him, but she is to do so within the God-ordained parameters of the husband-and-wife relationship as far as marriage is concerned). Countercultural as that may sound, this is the message of Genesis 2 confirmed by New Testament apostolic interpretation.¹⁸ Also, the woman is described as a “suitable” helper. In context, this distinguishes her from all the other creatures named by the first man, who were all judged unsuitable com-

plements for him. By contrast, the woman is equal to the man in kind, a fellow human being (cf. Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 3:7); yet she is also different, the man's "helper" (cf. Eph. 5:22).

That this designation is non-reversible is indicated by the fact that nowhere is the *man* called the *woman's* "helper." Thus equality and distinctness, complementarity and submission/authority must be held in fine balance. The man and the woman are jointly charged with ruling the earth representatively for God, yet they are not to do so androgynously or as "uni-sex" creatures, but each as fulfilling their God-ordained, gender-specific roles. Indeed, since these functional differences are part of the Creator's design, it is only when men and women embrace their God-ordained roles that they will be truly fulfilled and that God's creational wisdom will be fully displayed and exalted.¹⁹

The Fall of Humanity and Its Consequences

The Fall witnesses a *complete reversal of the roles* assigned by God to the man and the woman. Rather than *God* being in charge, with the *man*, helped by the *woman*, ruling creation for him, a complete reversal takes place: *Satan*, in the form of a serpent, approaches the *woman*, who draws the *man* with her into rebellion against the *Creator*. This does not necessarily imply that the woman is somehow more susceptible to temptation than the man.²⁰ It does indicate, however, that God's plan for the man and the woman is to have the man, not the woman, assume *ultimate responsibility* for the couple, extending leadership and protection to his female counterpart. Thus the man, by his absence, or at least acquiescence (Gen. 3:6: "her husband with her"; cf. 3:17), shares in the woman's culpability; and she, by failing to consult with her God-given protector and provider, fails to respect the divine pattern of marriage. In the end, it is the *man*, not the woman, who is primarily held responsible for the rebellious act (Gen. 3:9; cf. 3:17; Rom. 5:12-14), though the consequences of the Fall extend to the man and the woman alike, affecting their respective primary spheres.²¹

In the case of the *woman*, recriminations ensue in the realm of child-bearing and the relationship with her husband. Regarding childbearing, the woman will experience physical pain. As far as the woman's relationship with her husband is concerned, loving harmony will be replaced

by a pattern of struggle in which the woman seeks to exert control over her husband, who responds by asserting his authority—often in an ungodly manner by either passively forcing her into action or actively dominating her (Gen. 3:16; cf. 4:7).²² The *man*, in turn, will henceforth have trouble in fulfilling God’s command to subdue the earth (cf. Gen. 1:28). He must extract the fruit of the land from thorns and thistles and eat his bread by the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:17-19). In the end, both the man and the woman will die (vv. 19, 22).

In the closing verses of the third chapter of Genesis, God continues to provide for the human couple, clothing them (Gen. 3:21), and, more significantly, predicting a time when the woman’s seed—the promised Messiah—will bruise the serpent’s offspring on the head (3:15, the so-called *proto-evangelion*, i.e., the good news in seed form of a coming descendent of the woman who would overcome the power of Satan over humanity). In the meantime, however, the couple is expelled from the Garden (3:24) as a sign that their rebellion against the Creator had met with severe sanctions that would cast an ominous shadow on their marriage during their sojourn on earth from that time onwards.

Summary

In our survey of Genesis 1–3 above we have seen how humanity was created in God’s image to rule the earth for him (Gen. 1:27-28). We have also learned that God assigned to the man ultimate responsibility for the marriage (which is evident from several references in Genesis 2 and 3) and that he gave the woman to the man as his “suitable helper” (Gen. 2:18, 20). Finally, we observed how the Fall witnessed a complete reversal of the God-ordained pattern of relationships, with abiding, disastrous results overturned only through the coming and the saving death of the Messiah.

As the following investigation will demonstrate, while the Fall changed the marital relationship forever, God’s ideal for marriage as articulated in Genesis 1–2 nonetheless continued to set the standard for the responsibilities and roles of husbands and wives toward each other in the subsequent history of humanity. However, although Scripture does attest to a significant number of God-honoring love relationships between men and women in Israel’s history, it will be seen that, because

of sin, the divine ideal of marriage was frequently subverted through polygamy, divorce, adultery, homosexuality, sterility, and a dilution of gender roles.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL (PENTATEUCH, HISTORICAL AND PROPHETIC BOOKS)

In the following discussion, we will first look at the roles and responsibilities of husband and wife toward each other from the vantage point of Old Testament Israel subsequent to the Fall. The importance of the creation narrative in the life of ancient Israel will become apparent in the way in which it continues to set the standard in the *rest of the Pentateuch and the Old Testament historical and prophetic books*. After this, we will discuss several ways in which Old Testament Israel compromised God's ideal for marriage: polygamy, divorce, adultery, homosexuality, sterility, and the erosion of gender distinctions. Hence the state of marriage and the family in much of Old Testament Israel presents itself as in great need of redemption and restoration in the Messiah, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Marital Roles According to the Old Testament

Even subsequent to the Fall, God's creation design for marriage continues to provide the norm and standard for God's expectations for male-female relationships. Based on the foundational treatment of Genesis 1 and 2, subsequent chapters of the Hebrew Scriptures provide information on the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives toward each other. While, as will be seen further below, the reality fell often short of the ideal, this does not alter the fact that the standards that were in place for Old Testament couples and believers were grounded in the pre-Fall ideal.

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF HUSBANDS TOWARD THEIR WIVES

The Old Testament does not contain an explicit "job description" for husbands. Nevertheless, it is possible to infer some of the major responsibilities of husbands toward their wives from various portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. Among these are the following: (1) to love and cher-

ish his wife and to treat her with respect and dignity; (2) to bear primary responsibility for the marriage union and ultimate authority over the family; (3) to provide food, clothing, and other necessities for his wife. We will briefly develop each of these areas of responsibility in the following discussion.

First, then, a man is to *love and cherish his wife and to treat her with respect and dignity*. From Genesis 1 and 2 (which we have already discussed at some length) it is apparent that the woman, like the man, is created in God's image and is charged to fill and subdue the earth together with him (Gen. 1:27-28). As his "suitable helper" and partner in filling the earth and subduing it, and as his complement provided by God, she is worthy of full respect and dignity and is to be cherished as his trusted companion and friend. As the foundational creation narrative stipulates, in order to be united to his wife a man is to leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they will establish a new family unit (Gen. 2:24). Part of their marital union will be the procreation of offspring (Gen. 1:28).²³

Second, from the man's creation prior to the woman, later biblical writers (such as Paul, cf. 1 Cor. 11:8-9) rightly infer that his is the *primary responsibility for the marriage union and ultimate authority over his family* including his wife. This is borne out also by several other indicators in the opening chapters of Genesis, including the man's already engaging in his task of subduing the earth by naming the animals prior to the creation of the woman (Gen. 2:19-20); the fact that the man was the recipient of God's command to keep the Garden of Eden and not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:15-17); and the man's naming of the woman (2:23). It may also be inferred from God calling the man, rather than the woman, to account for humanity's sin, even though it was the woman who sinned first (3:9). While the Fall distorted the way in which men exercised their headship in subsequent generations (3:16b), men were not to avoid their God-given responsibility to be in charge of their marriage and family and all that this entailed. The man's primary responsibility and ultimate authority is consistently seen in the Old Testament pattern of male heads of households, a system which is commonly called "patriarchy" but which is better described as "patricentrism."²⁴

Third, a husband was to provide his wife with food, clothing, and other necessities. While the context is that of a man's responsibilities toward concubines or slave wives, the most paradigmatic discussion of the husband's duties in this regard is found in Exodus 21:10, which was the subject of extensive rabbinic discussion and interpretation.²⁵ This passage stipulates that, "[i]f he [the man] takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her *food*, her *clothing*, or her *marital rights*."²⁶ According to this passage, the husband's obligations toward his wife (and concubines or slave girls) are delineated as involving the provision of food, clothing, and marital rights respectively.²⁷ This circumscribes the husband's responsibility to provide his wife with peace, permanence, and security (Ruth 1:9 speaks of "rest").²⁸

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF WIVES TOWARD THEIR HUSBANDS

Wives' roles and responsibilities toward their husbands were considered to be essentially threefold in *ancient Israel*: (1) presenting her husband with children (especially male ones); (2) managing the household; and (3) providing her husband with companionship.

Regarding the first wifely duty, that of *presenting her husband with children* (particularly sons), people in ancient times married in order to have children. In keeping with the belief that fathers lived on in their children, bearing a child was considered to be an act performed by a wife for her husband.²⁹ Bearing a son was the noblest contribution a wife could make to her husband and her household. Failure to do so, on the other hand, was viewed as a disgrace. Hence, in the book of Genesis we see that Rachel is desperate that she has not yet borne Jacob any children, and when God later enables her to conceive, she interprets this as God having taken away her reproach (Gen. 30:1, 23).³⁰

Second, wives were to *manage their household*, fulfilling the divine mandate of keeping the Garden of Eden prior to the fall of humanity (Gen. 1:28; cf. 2:15). The wife's responsibilities in ancient Israel in this regard included cooking, clothing the family, tending the garden, and harvesting grain (*m. Ketub. 5:5*).³¹ Yet while there was a general division of labor along those lines, the boundaries were not rigid, and some of these activities were not limited exclusively to women. Hence,

Abraham (Gen. 18:1-8), Lot (Gen. 19:3), and Esau (Gen. 27:30-31) all are shown to be involved in meal preparations in the Old Testament. Wives also were to supervise household servants involved in domestic chores. We will discuss the example of the Proverbs 31 woman, which features many of these roles and responsibilities, in greater detail below.

Third, in keeping with God's original purpose for creating her (cf. Gen. 2:18), the wife was to *provide companionship* for her husband. While legally his subordinate, ideally the wife served as her husband's confidante and trusted friend (cf. Mal. 2:14). The mutual trust and intimacy characteristic of an ideal marriage is celebrated in the Song of Solomon (e.g., 2:16; 6:3; 7:10) which will be further discussed below.

**The Different Ways in Which God's Ideal for Marriage in Genesis 2:24
Was Compromised in the History of Israel**

BIBLICAL TERMINOLOGY	CREATION IDEAL	HISTORY OF ISRAEL
"a man . . . his wife"	Monogamy	Polygamy
"hold fast"	Durability Fidelity	Divorce Adultery
"a man . . . his wife . . . become one flesh"	Heterosexuality Fertility Complementarity	Homosexuality Sterility Dilution of gender distinctions

Violations of Various Components of God's Ideal for Marriage in Ancient Israel

We now turn to a discussion of several ways in which God's ideal for marriage as articulated in Genesis 1 and 2 was compromised in the history of Israel. Specifically, we will discuss six such violations of God's ideal for marriage, in each of which a sinful pattern compromised an essential element of the creation paradigm: (1) polygamy (or, more precisely, polygyny) violated God's instituted pattern of marital monogamy; (2) divorce ruptured the durability and permanence of marriage; (3) adultery broke the sacred bond between a man and a woman pledged to marital fidelity; (4) homosexuality developed as an

aberrant behavior rebelling against the Creator's design of heterosexual marriage; (5) sterility became a problem which rendered marital relationships devoid of the fertility characteristic of God's original pattern; and (6) the dilution of gender distinctions violated gender complementarity, an essential and foundational aspect of God's plan. We will discuss each of these violations of God's ideal for marriage in the history of Israel in turn.

POLYGAMY

The teaching of Genesis 1–3 that *monogamy* is a foundational part of God's design for marriage notwithstanding, the history of Israel witnesses repeated instances of polygamy.³² While it certainly was within the Creator's prerogative and power to make more than one wife for the man, God intentionally only made Eve, revealing to Adam his plan with the words, "A man [singular] shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife [singular], and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).³³

Indeed, one could argue that from a practical standpoint, perhaps God, especially in anticipation of the fall of humanity and the universal death that would ensue, *should* have provided the man with two or more wives. For what would have happened if Eve had died before having children, or had died in childbirth? Would the human race have perished? If God desired for the earth to be populated (Gen. 1:28), does not logic dictate that this could occur faster if Adam were provided with more than one or perhaps even a large number of wives? Yet, in spite of practical arguments such as these in favor of having more than one wife, the Creator's design is simple and clear: one woman for one man. This is the law of marriage established at Creation.

As could be expected, though, after the fall of humanity, God's ideal of monogamy was not consistently upheld.³⁴ Within six generations, barely after Adam had died, the Bible records that "Lamech took two wives" (Gen. 4:19), perhaps in his presumption seeking to obtain God's primeval blessing (cf. Gen. 1:28) by relying on his own devices—multiplying his wives. While polygamy was *never normative* among the followers of Israel's God, Scripture reveals that it was indeed a recurrent event.³⁵ In fact, the Old Testament reports that a significant number of

individuals in the history of Israel, including many patriarchs and kings, practiced polygamy (or, more precisely, polygyny, marriage to multiple wives),³⁶ though no instance of polyandry (a wife having more than one husband) is reported. In addition to Lamech, individuals who engaged in polygamy include prominent men such as Abraham (Gen. 16:3), Esau (Gen. 26:34; 28:9), Jacob (Gen. 29:30), Gideon (Judg. 8:30), Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:1-2), David (2 Sam. 3:2-5; 5:13), Solomon (1 Kings 11:3), Ahab (2 Kings 10:1), Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:15), Ashhur (1 Chron. 4:5), Rehoboam (2 Chron. 11:21), Abijah (2 Chron. 13:21), Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:14), and Joash (2 Chron. 24:1-3).

While it is evident, then, that some very important individuals (both reportedly godly and ungodly) in the history of Israel engaged in polygamy, the Old Testament clearly communicates that the practice of having multiple wives was a departure from God's plan for marriage. This is conveyed not only in Scripture verses that seem univocally to prohibit polygamy (cf. Deut. 17:17; Lev. 18:18),³⁷ but also from the sin and general disorder that polygamy produced in the lives of those who engaged in the practice. For example, the Old Testament reports disruptive favoritism in the polygamous marriages of Jacob (Gen. 29:30), Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:4-5), and Rehoboam (2 Chron. 11:21). In addition, jealousy was a recurrent problem between the competing wives of Abraham (Gen. 21:9-10), Jacob (Gen. 30:14-16), and Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:6). Moreover, Scripture reports that Solomon's foreign "wives turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings 11:4), a violation of the first commandment, and David's multiple marriages led to incest and murder among his progeny.

In short, the Bible is clear that individuals in the history of Israel who abandoned God's design of monogamy and participated in polygamy did so contrary to the Creator's plan and ultimately to their own detriment. The sin and disorder produced by polygamy, then, is further testimony to the goodness of God's monogamous design of marriage as first revealed in the marriage of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Not only is polygamy nowhere in the Old Testament spoken of with approval (though cf. Ex. 21:10-11; Deut 21:15-17), many passages clearly uphold monogamy as the continuing ideal (e.g., Prov. 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10-31; Ps. 128:3; Ezek. 16:8).³⁸

DIVORCE

Another component of God's design for marriage that Old Testament Israel regularly compromised is the *durability* of marriage. Although a later chapter of this volume will explore the topic of divorce in some detail, a few brief comments are in order here. The opening chapters of Genesis make clear that God designed marriage to be *permanent*. This is evident in the paradigmatic description of marriage in Genesis 2:24: "A man shall leave his father and his mother and *hold fast* to his wife, and *they shall become one flesh*." While there is some debate among scholars regarding the intricacies of what "holding fast" and "becoming one flesh" means, there is no question that God designed marriage to be permanent.³⁹

Just as in the case of other elements of the divine design for marriage, however, the Old Testament indicates that many did not respect that God's plan involved the durability of marriage. Indeed, divorce was a serious problem early on in the history of Israel. In the Mosaic code, it was stipulated that a priest could not marry a divorcee (even if she was not the guilty party; Lev. 21:7: "shall not marry . . . a woman divorced from her husband, for the priest is holy to his God"; cf. Lev. 21:14). In an attempt to bridle sins stemming from divorce, Mosaic legislation prohibited a man from remarrying a woman whom he had divorced and who subsequently had married another man (even if her second husband had died, Deut. 24:1-4). The reason for this was that by her second marriage "she has been defiled" (v. 4), perhaps indicating that illegitimate remarriage after divorce amounts to adultery. Moreover, the Old Testament records several examples of divorces and attests to the general practice of divorce among the Hebrews (cf. Ezra 9-10; Neh. 13:23-31; Mal. 2:14-16).

Despite the presence of divorce in the history of Israel, however, the Old Testament confirms that durability continued to be a component of God's design for marriage. This can be seen in the fact that the Mosaic legislation seems specifically to *forbid* divorce if the wife was a virgin at the time the marriage was consummated (cf. Deut. 22:19, 29). In addition, it is evident that God does not approve of divorce, for the Old Testament on several occasions uses the analogy of divorce to describe Israel's spiritual apostasy (cf. Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8), and the prophet

Malachi makes clear that God does not approve of divorce motivated by hatred (Mal. 2:16).⁴⁰

ADULTERY

Another way in which God's ideal for marriage was compromised in the history of Israel was the occurrence of adultery. While it could be argued that fidelity was his only option, Adam's lack of an opportunity to commit adultery does not diminish the fact that fidelity is an inherent component of God's pattern for marriage: "A man shall leave his father and his mother and *hold fast* to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). As with the principle of monogamy discussed above, however, after the fall of humankind the Old Testament reports that numerous individuals struggled with faithfulness to their marriage partners.⁴¹

Perhaps the best-known incident of adultery recorded in the Old Testament is David's adultery with Bathsheba and the consequent murder of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11). Other instances of marital infidelity abound in the history of Israel. In addition to all of the polygamous marriages discussed above (which in effect involved adultery against the first wife), there is Reuben's adultery with Bilhah (Gen. 35:22; cf. 49:3-4), the adultery of the Levite's concubine (Judg. 19:1-2), Hosea's wife Gomer's adultery (Hos. 3:1), and the adultery committed by a host of other unnamed Israelites at which God took offense (Jer. 3:2; 5:7-8; 7:9-10; 23:10; Ezek. 22:11; 33:26; Hos. 4:2; 7:4). Moreover, the Old Testament reports a number of individuals who engaged in sexual sins that likely involved adultery such as Gilead, the father of Jephthah (Judg. 11:1), or Eli's sons Hophni and Phineas (1 Sam. 2:22).

In addition, the book of Genesis records several occasions of near-adultery, which would have been actual adultery had not the Lord providentially intervened, including Abimelech with Sarah (Gen. 20:2-18), Abimelech with Rebekah (26:7-9), and Joseph with Potiphar's wife (39:7-12). All of these accounts communicate the fact that God's ideal of fidelity within marriage was often not upheld in Old Testament times.

Despite these instances of adultery or near-adultery in the history of Israel, however, the Old Testament reiterates in numerous places the

fact that God's ideal for marriage is *fidelity*. For instance, the seventh commandment directed God's people in no uncertain terms, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). The sexual laws in the Holiness Code plainly stipulated, "You shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife" (Lev. 18:20), setting the penalty for adultery as death (Lev. 20:10; cf. Num. 5:11-31; Deut 22:22).⁴² Moreover, the book of Proverbs repeatedly classifies adultery as both foolish and dangerous (Prov. 2:16-19; 5:3-22; 6:32-33; 7:5-23; 9:13-18; 22:14; 23:27-28; 30:20).

What is more, the Lord frequently used the analogy of physical adultery to depict his displeasure over the spiritual adultery of Israel when they departed from him, their first love, in order to pursue other gods (Jer. 3:8-9; Ezek. 16:32, 38; Hos. 1:1-3:5). In short, then, although many in the history of Israel did not adhere to God's design of fidelity within marriage, the Old Testament is clear that the Lord's standard did not change. God expected his people to be faithful—both to their spouses and to him—and was clearly offended when they were not.⁴³

HOMOSEXUALITY

Heterosexuality is an unequivocal component of the Creator's design for marriage. Yet after the fall of humanity, the Old Testament indicates that the principle of heterosexuality was often violated through same-sex relations. Examples include many of the inhabitants of the cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1-29), the Gibeonites in the days of the judges (Judg. 19:1-21:25), as well as numerous other unnamed lawbreakers in the history of Israel (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14). In spite of these offenses, however, the Old Testament makes clear that the principle of heterosexuality, established at Creation, continues to be an integral part of God's design for marriage. This is testified to by the severity of the punishment prescribed for homosexuality (death, Lev. 20:13), by the presentation of heterosexuality as normative (Prov. 5:18-19; Eccles. 9:9; Song 1-8), and by the fate of individuals in the history of Israel who engaged in homosexual activity.

Since a later chapter of this book will look at homosexuality in detail, it is not necessary to engage in a full analysis of the topic here. However, a few brief comments are in order. The idea of a homosexual

marriage is not only contrary to specific biblical injunctions concerning same-sex intercourse (cf. Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:17), but also runs counter to the Creator's design for marriage. Heterosexuality—not homosexuality—is plainly in view in God's law of marriage: "A *man* [masculine] shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his *wife* [feminine], and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). What is more, this is the *only* possible arrangement for marriage, as the Creator has commanded and expects married couples to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

Since homosexuality involves same-sex intercourse that cannot lead to procreation, it is unnatural and cannot logically entail the possibility of marriage. Indeed, even among the animals, the writer of Genesis repeatedly notes that God made each species male and female, "after its kind," for the express purpose of procreation (Gen. 1:21, 24, 25). Moreover, since an aspect of humanity's representative rule over and subduing of the earth for God is procreation (1:27-28), yet procreation is impossible between two males or two females, homosexuality militates not only against God's design for marriage but against his created order as well.

STERILITY

Fertility is yet another essential part of God's design for marriage of which certain individuals fell short in Old Testament times. Fertility may be implicit in the Lord's description of marriage as a "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) relationship if one understands there to be sexual overtones in this terminology. Fertility is certainly entailed in God's command to Adam and Eve—incidentally, the first command God ever gave to human beings—to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Indeed, in the Bible fruitfulness in marriage is repeatedly described as a virtue to be sought after and is viewed as a blessing once obtained (cf. Ex. 23:26; Deut. 7:14; Ps. 113:9; 127:4-5; 128:3-4).⁴⁴ Moreover, certain elements of the Old Testament law appear to be crafted with the intent of furthering the fruitfulness of marriage. Examples include a newlywed soldier being given a year off "to be happy with his wife whom he has taken" (Deut. 24:5) and the institution of levirate marriage that had as its goal the production of offspring for a deceased relative (Deut. 25:5-10). Conversely,

the Old Testament views barrenness as a reproach (cf. Gen. 30:1, 22-23; Isa. 4:1; 47:9; 49:21).

Despite the importance placed on fertility in the Hebrew Scriptures, the fact remains that numerous couples in the history of Israel experienced difficulty conceiving children. One important difference between one's lack of fertility and one's failure to implement other components of God's design for marriage is that sterility is not usually a conscious choice. Nevertheless, in the Old Testament sterility is sometimes presented as a curse stemming from personal sin, as in the case of Abimelech's wives (Gen. 20:17-18) and David's first wife, Michal (2 Sam. 6:16-23). On other occasions, sterility is presented as a simple fact of nature, as in the case of the three mothers of the Hebrew race—Sarah (Gen. 11:30), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), and Rachel (Gen. 30:1)—as well as Manoah's wife (Judg. 13:2), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:2), and the Shunammite who aided Elisha (2 Kings 4:14). While the Bible gives no explicit directives on how to overcome sterility, a common denominator between many of those in Scripture who were at one time fruitless but later became fruitful is prayer. For example, God answered prayers for fertility offered by Abraham (Gen. 15:2-5; 20:17), Isaac (Gen. 25:21), Leah (Gen. 30:17), Rachel (Gen. 30:22), and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:9-20). These answered prayers, as well as the Lord's general multiplication of his people in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, are further testimony to the fact that fertility is an essential component of God's design for marriage, and is possible for those who seek God regarding it.⁴⁵

DILUTION OF GENDER DISTINCTIONS

Complementarity, too, which includes the notion of equal worth but differing roles for the sexes, is an essential and foundational part of God's design of marriage.⁴⁶ However, as is evident from the other marital distortions mentioned above, the history of Israel features several instances where the principle of complementarity was not observed. Indeed, individuals who engaged in homosexuality or who purposefully avoided fruitfulness (e.g., Onan, Gen. 38:8-10) cannot be described as having behaved in a manner that is fully consistent with the God-ordained pattern of complementarity.

In addition, the Old Testament features a number of individuals who clearly and specifically abandoned their God-ordained gender roles, some without participating in other marital distortions. For instance, men who failed in the leadership of their home (at least on occasion) include Adam, Eli, David, and Ahaz, and examples of women who (at least at times) were not “suitable helpers” within their families include Eve, Bathsheba, Jezebel, and Athaliah, among others.⁴⁷

Despite these examples of distortion of the Creator’s design of gender roles, even after the Fall, the Old Testament repeatedly confirms the fact that complementarity is part of God’s plan for marriage. Equal worth of husbands and wives is seen in a number of different spheres: legal parity in regard to parental obedience (Ex. 20:12; 21:15, 17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 5:16); economic privileges that allowed for daughters and wives to inherit property (Num. 27:1-11; 36:1-9; cf. Prov. 31:13-18, 24); and liberty for both sexes to have personal spiritual encounters (Judg. 13:2-25), experience answered prayer (1 Sam. 1:9-20), engage in public worship (Neh. 8:2), and perhaps even participate in the prophetic office (Ex. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; Neh. 6:14).⁴⁸

At the same time, the Lord’s design for marriage in the Old Testament includes important functional differences for the sexes as well. In addition to the Lord’s specific confirmation of Adam’s headship after the fall (Gen. 3:16), complementary gender roles as established at Creation are evident in the Old Testament narratives recounting the marriages of the patriarchs (e.g., Gen. 18:12, where Sarah calls Abraham “my master”; cf. 1 Pet. 3:5-6) and godly kings of Israel (e.g., David: 1 Sam. 25:40-42; 1 Kings 1:16, 31). King Lemuel’s description of a virtuous wife as an industrious homemaker under her husband’s authority (Prov. 31:10-31) also reflects the complementary pattern instituted in Genesis 2.⁴⁹ As with the other components in God’s design for marriage, then, it is clear that the history of Israel did not alter the Lord’s plan for these institutions.

Summary of Developments in the History of Israel

We have seen that the history of Israel documents several negative patterns that fell short of God’s ideal for marriage as articulated in the opening chapters of Genesis, most notably polygamy, divorce, adultery,

homosexuality, sterility, and the dilution of gender roles. In each case, these patterns constitute a distortion of the God-ordained institution of marriage. While God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman, polygamy involves marital union with more than one wife. Divorce breaks the sacred bond between husband and wife. In contrast to God's intention for marriage to be a faithful, one-flesh union, adultery entails sexual relations with another person who is not one's spouse. Homosexuality stands against the "one man, one woman" principle involved in biblical marriage. Sterility falls short of the fertility invoked in God's command for the human couple to be fruitful and multiply. The dilution of gender roles militates against God's making humanity as distinctly male *and* female. In all these ways, Old Testament Israel fell short of God's creation ideal for marriage.

What is more, not only can these violations of God's ideal for marriage be demonstrated historically in Israel's history, there are important implications for men and women today as well.

GLIMPSES OF THE IDEAL (WISDOM LITERATURE)

While the Old Testament historical books bear witness to the increasing deterioration of the observance of God's plan for marriage, God's ideal is upheld in the *Old Testament wisdom literature*. The two primary examples are the poem praising the excellent wife in the final chapter of the book of Proverbs and the celebration of married love in the Song of Solomon. These passages provide a refreshing counterpoint to the overall pattern of compromise of God's ideal for marriage presented in the historical and prophetic Old Testament books.

The Excellent Wife (Proverbs 31)

The book of Proverbs concludes with an acrostic poem extolling the virtues of the excellent wife, whose worth to her husband surpasses that of great material wealth. Some have commented that this woman must have been phenomenal, since on the one hand it is said that she rises early in the morning (Prov. 31:15) and on the other that her lamp does not go out at night (31:18)! When did this woman sleep?⁵⁰ Indeed, the excellent wife of Proverbs 31 displays many virtues that remain relevant for women aspiring to be godly wives today.

The Proverbs 31 woman:

- is a major asset to her husband (vv. 10, 11);
- is a trusted companion (v. 11);
- is for and not against her husband; she has his well-being and best interests at heart (v. 12);
- is industrious and hardworking (vv. 13, 27);
- procures and prepares food for her entire household (vv. 14, 15);
- rises early (v. 15);
- locates and purchases real estate (v. 16);
- reinvests extra earnings from her home business (v. 16);
- is vigorous and energetic (vv. 17, 25);
- produces clothes for her family and as merchandise (vv. 13, 18-19, 21-22, 24);
- is kind to the poor, reaches out in mercy to the needy (v. 20);
- ensures that she and her children are properly and finely dressed (vv. 21-22);
- contributes to others' respect for her husband and oversees her household so he can devote himself to a role of leadership in the community (vv. 23, 27);
- is ready for the future and prepares for eventualities (vv. 21, 25);
- displays wisdom in speech, and in the teaching of kindness (v. 26);
- is praised by her children and husband (vv. 28-29, 31);
- is God-fearing rather than relying on her physical beauty (v. 30).

While some might find this ideal unattainable, it is a worthy goal to which women today may aspire. Clearly, this kind of woman does not fit the stereotype of a woman who is “confined to the home” or diminished in her personhood.⁵¹ She is a woman of great resourcefulness who is a source of strength and inestimable blessing to her husband and children. Who would not want to have a wife and mother aspiring to such a role model? Fortunately for many of us (including the authors of this book), and by the grace of God, we do.

The Beauty of Sex in Marriage (The Song of Solomon)

In the midst of the deterioration evident during the course of Israel's history, there is one other bright spot in the Hebrew canon: the Song of Solomon. On the basis of the notion that God established marriage,

including the physical union of husband and wife (Gen. 2:18-25, esp. vv. 24-25: “one flesh . . . both naked and . . . not ashamed”), the Song of Solomon celebrates the beauty of marital love including its intimate sexual expression.⁵²

The book of Proverbs, too, includes a section extolling sex within the framework of a faithful, committed marriage relationship and warning against adultery:

Drink water from your own cistern,
 flowing water from your own well.
Should your springs be scattered abroad,
 streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone,
 and not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
 and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
 a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight;
 be intoxicated always in her love.
Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman
 and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? (Prov. 5:15-20)

Together with the repeated injunction in the book of Proverbs for people to guard their hearts (e.g., Prov. 4:23, NIV) and for men to keep far away from adulterous women (Prov. 2:16-19; 5; 6:20-35; 7; 22:14; 23:26-28; 31:3), this constitutes a powerful mandate for married couples to build strong spiritual hedges around their relationship and to nurture their marriage commitment with diligence and devotion.⁵³

The Song of Solomon, for its part, not only contributes to the Hebrew (and Christian) canon a collection of love poems celebrating the strength and passion of married love (including sex) but also anticipates the restoration of the relationship between the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve, which was ruptured by the Fall. Subsequent to the Fall, the judgment pronounced on the woman included that her desire (*ršûqâ*) would be for her husband (Gen. 3:16), which in all likelihood conveys the woman’s sinful desire to manipulate and control her husband rather than to lovingly submit to him. This is suggested by the close parallel in the following chapter, where

it is said that sin's desire is for Cain, clearly in the sense of a desire for control or mastery (Gen. 4:7).⁵⁴

In the third and only other instance of the term translated "desire" in these passages, Song of Solomon 7:10, the woman exclaims, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me." Rather than the woman's desire being illegitimately to control her husband, a restoration of the original state is envisioned in which the husband's desire will be for his wife.⁵⁵ Once again, the woman gladly rests in the assurance that she is her husband's, and the husband does not dominate his wife but desires her. Hence, "[l]ove is experienced as a return to paradise."⁵⁶ As in the original Garden, the man and the woman will be able to be "both naked and . . . not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). Importantly, however, this restoration of human love is predicated upon the coming of the messianic king, the greater son of David and Solomon (cf., e.g., Matt. 1:1; 12:42).⁵⁷ The parallels in symbolism between the Song of Solomon and Genesis 1–3, the typology involving male-female love, and the messianic thread running through Scripture from Genesis 3:15 to the figure of Solomon, the son of David, in the Song of Solomon, and beyond, and the idealized portrait of love in the Song of Solomon all favor this messianic, end-time orientation of the Song of Solomon.

The Three OT Uses of the Hebrew Word for "Desire" (*רָשָׁאָה*)

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	TRANSLATION	COMMENTARY
Genesis 3:16	"Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."	Reference to the woman's sinful desire to manipulate and control her husband
Genesis 4:7	". . . sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."	Reference to sin's desire to overpower Cain, exhortation for him to master it
Song of Solomon 7:10 (Hebrew 7:11)	"I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me."	Woman's glad assurance that her husband's desire is for her

Contrary to the world's notion that truly exciting love must be outside of the confines of marriage, Scripture makes it clear that it is the very security provided by an exclusive, lifelong marriage relationship that

allows for the sexual satisfaction and fulfillment of both the man and the woman. Liberated from the self-centeredness of sin and from the desire to manipulate one's spouse to have one's own needs met, the marriage partners are free to love their spouse in a spirit that is completely self-giving and hence able to love and enjoy the other person without fear of rejection, abuse, or domination. Married love thus turns out to be the fulfillment of every man's and every woman's dream, but it proves elusive to those who have not been renewed and transformed by the Holy Spirit upon repentance and faith in Christ.

INSIGHTS FROM OLD TESTAMENT MARRIAGES

Having examined the theme of marriage and the teaching on marriage in the Old Testament, it is an interesting exercise to now scan the pages of the Old Testament in order to glean insights from specific Old Testament marriages.

Adam and Eve

The first marriage in biblical history, which we have already discussed from the standpoint of important abiding patterns and principles above, was that of *Adam and Eve*, whom God brought together (Gen. 2:23-24) and gave joint stewardship over the earth (Gen. 1:28), which included the mandate of procreation.⁵⁸ One assumes that the two, prior to the Fall, enjoyed a season of marital bliss never again experienced in human history (Gen. 2:25: "The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed"). Beyond this, Scripture does not provide a record of the marital life of Adam and Eve, other than to indicate that Adam was the one ultimately responsible for the union before God and Eve was to serve as Adam's "suitable helper" (Gen. 2:18, 20).

What is clear is that this divinely intended pattern was subverted at the fall of humanity (Genesis 3), where Eve went beyond her role as Adam's "suitable helper" and acted independently from her husband when yielding to Satan's temptation. The reference to Adam being "with her" (Gen. 3:6) immediately after Eve's forbidden act may indicate that Adam failed in his responsibility to provide responsible leadership in the relationship (see also 3:17: "Because you listened to the voice of your wife . . ."). In any case, life subsequent to the Fall was never

the same. The woman's giving of birth to children is now marked by intense pain, and because of her sin nature she will no longer accept her role alongside the man as his "suitable helper" (3:16). The man, for his part, will experience pain in his struggle to subdue the earth (vv. 17-19), and in the end both the man and the woman will die (v. 19).

Abraham and Sarah

Scripture records several interesting incidents in *Abraham and Sarah's* relationship. When Abraham went to Egypt, he concocted a plan to identify his wife as his sister, fearing that the Egyptians would otherwise kill him in order to take Sarah as their own on account of her physical beauty (Gen. 12:10-20; an incident later repeated with Abimelech, Genesis 20). Sarah apparently complied with Abraham's plan and was promptly taken by Pharaoh as one of his wives before the scheme was discovered, suffering the consequences for her husband's cowardice and dishonesty in this instance (even though at many other junctures Abraham was a man of great integrity and courage).⁵⁹ Sarah's experience here teaches the lesson to wives that they are under no obligation to follow their husbands into sin but, to the contrary, must make every effort to resist it.

Later, Sarah, who up to that point had borne Abraham no children, sought to remedy the situation by encouraging Abraham to secure offspring through her maidservant Hagar. When the latter conceived and began to despise her mistress, Sarah complained to Abraham and mistreated Hagar (Gen. 16:1-6). After Sarah had given birth to Isaac, she rejoiced, but when Ishmael, Hagar's son, was disdainful toward Isaac, Sarah went to Abraham and told him to get rid of "that slave woman and her son" (Gen. 21:10). In keeping with God's word (v. 12), Abraham complied and sent Hagar and Ishmael away.⁶⁰ This series of events illustrates that a couple must not seek to remedy a situation out of unbelief, or the consequences of sin will further complicate their situation.

Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel

Both Abraham's son Isaac and his grandson Jacob are scriptural examples of great love for their respective wives. When a wife had been pro-

cured for *Isaac*, the biblical record comments at the occasion of his marriage to *Rebekah*: “So she became his wife, and he loved her . . .” (Gen. 24:67). In due course, Isaac and Rebekah’s son *Jacob*, in turn, fell in love with *Rachel*, who was “lovely in form, and beautiful” (Gen. 29:17, NIV), and worked to receive her as his wife for fourteen years, evidence of his great love for her.

Despite Jacob’s great love for Rachel, marital tensions subsequently arose when Rachel was unable to bear Isaac children. Rachel demanded that Jacob give her children, and he replied, “Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?” (Gen. 30:1-2, NIV). Later, God graciously did enable Rachel to conceive (30:22-24), doubtless reducing the tension that had built up in Jacob’s and Rachel’s marriage.⁶¹ Their example can teach us that a married couple must face difficulties (such as the wife’s infertility) together in prayerful reliance on God rather than being drawn into marital arguments and discord.

Samson and Delilah

Another Old Testament love story, albeit of a less positive overall nature and outcome, is that of *Samson and Delilah* (Judges 16). Unfortunately, Samson serves as an example of someone who did not properly guard his heart and who was seduced by a woman who robbed him of his strength and, eventually, his life. This serves as a warning that even a man as strong, capable, and powerful as Samson is not immune to the lure of a seductive woman and can be brought down by her wiles.

Ruth and Boaz

A much more positive example of a godly love relationship is that of *Ruth and Boaz* as recounted in the book of Ruth. Ruth, a young Moabite widow, who had followed her mother-in-law Naomi back to Judah after the death of her husband, is noticed by Boaz, who shows kindness to her and does not rest until he secures her hand in marriage. Ruth’s story (which also has salvation-historical significance in that she was the great-grandmother of King David, Ruth 4:22) is a wonderful example of a (widowed) woman’s trust in God in the midst of adverse circumstances.

Hannah and Elkanah

The first book of Samuel opens with an account of the relationship between a man named *Elkanah* and his wife *Hannah*, mother of the prophet Samuel. The dynamic between Hannah, her rival Peninnah, and their husband mirrors the above-told story of Rachel, Leah, and Jacob. Hannah desperately implores the Lord to give her a son, despite her husband's efforts to comfort her: "Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" (1 Sam. 1:8, NIV).

In her godliness and persistent prayer, Hannah serves an example for future generations of hopeful or expectant mothers. Also exemplary is her initiative in consecrating her son to the Lord. It is apparent that her husband trusts in her, because when she tells him of her plans regarding Samuel, he responds, "Do what seems best to you" (1:23). Hannah's subsequent prayer speaks of deep devotion to God (1 Samuel 2; cf. Mary in Luke 1:46-55).

David and His Wives

The life of *David* holds several lessons regarding marriage. It should be noted at the very outset that David's taking of several wives cannot be condoned and constitutes a violation of God's creation standard of monogamy. Nevertheless, certain lessons can be learned from David's relationships with his wives. David's first wife was Saul's daughter *Michal*, who fell in love with David and was given to him in marriage (1 Sam. 18:20, 27-28). When Saul sought to kill David, Michal warned David and let him down through a window, and he escaped (19:11-12). Later, Michal told Saul's servants who had come to capture David that he was ill (19:14). In these actions, Michal serves as an example of wifely loyalty and solidarity with her husband (without condoning the means—lying—by which she did so), even at the cost of alienating her own father (v. 17).⁶²

Later, David married *Abigail*, the beautiful and discerning woman who successfully appeased his wrath after her first husband Nabal had rudely rebuffed David (1 Sam. 25:3, 14-42).⁶³ Abigail serves as an example of the wife of a great man and leader who treats him in a sensitive and respectful way and is loved by him in return. Her wisdom and humility make her a prime example of the virtues extolled in women in the Old Testament (cf. Prov. 31:10-31).

David's adultery with *Bathsheba* is well-known (2 Samuel 11). The incident ought to warn married men not to compromise their devotion to their wives and cautions married women (such as Bathsheba) to be discreet and modest in their dress and conduct. The importance of this issue in God's eyes is underscored by the fact that two of the ten commandments address it: "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14) and "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Ex. 20:17).

Solomon's Foreign Wives

Despite his wisdom, *Solomon's* downfall came when he "loved many *foreign women*," to whom Solomon "clung . . . in love," despite God's command not to enter into marriage with them, and "his wives turned away his heart." Solomon built high places for all his foreign wives and even joined them in worship of their false gods (1 Kings 11:1-8). This provides a powerful warning for men not to get involved with women who are not believers. It is an illusion to think that we will not be affected by being "unequally yoked" with a non-Christian spouse.⁶⁴

Ahab and Jezebel

King *Ahab's* marriage to *Jezebel* may well rank among the worst in Israel's history. At one point Jezebel helped her husband take over Naboth's vineyard by producing false witnesses against him and having him put to death (1 Kings 21). In the entire story, Jezebel controls and domineers Ahab and tells him what to do, and he complies, in perfect illustration of the verdict pronounced by the Lord on Adam and Eve subsequent to the Fall (Gen. 3:16).

Esther and Ahasuerus

Queen Esther endeared herself to her husband, *King Ahasuerus*, so much that he loved her more than all other women, and she won his grace and favor (Est. 2:17; cf. 5:2). God providentially used Esther's trust relationship with the King to save her people, the Jews, from Haman's sinister plot. Like Ruth, Abigail, and other Old Testament women, Esther serves as an example of wifely wisdom and sensitivity toward her husband, which made him tender toward her and her requests.

Summary

While there may be occasional references to marriages worth investigating in the Old Testament wisdom and prophetic literature, the above survey is sufficient to illustrate the considerable range of marriages of salvation-historical significance in ancient Israel. While the Fall forever affected marriage by introducing sin into spouses' dealings with each other, there remain many beautiful examples of love and devotion, such as Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, or Ruth and Boaz. We also learn how women became the source of temptation and led to the demise of men like Samson, David, and Solomon. We will continue our study of marriages in the following chapter on marriage in the New Testament.

CONCLUSION

We started our survey of the Old Testament teaching on marriage with a close look at the Genesis creation narrative, which grounds the institution of marriage in the will of God the Creator. We also explored the consequences of the Fall on this most intimate of human relationships. This was followed by a survey of Israel's history as presented in the Old Testament historical and prophetic books. We saw that this history witnessed several ways in which God's creation ideal for marriage was compromised, including instances of polygamy, divorce, adultery, homosexuality, sterility, and a dilution of gender distinctions. The last corpus of literature under consideration was the Old Testament wisdom literature, which presents a refreshing counterpoint to this overall pattern of decline. The book of Proverbs extols the virtuous wife who is devoted to her husband and family, and the Song of Solomon envisions a restored love relationship between the man and the woman in and through the Messiah. In the following chapter, we will seek to complement these insights by a study of the teaching on marriage found in the New Testament.

NO LONGER TWO,
BUT ONE:
MARRIAGE IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT

WE HAVE SEEN THAT marriage was divinely instituted by the Creator. Subsequent to the Fall, sin led to distortions of this divine institution. Marriage turned into a struggle for control in which husbands frequently dominated their wives while wives sought to manipulate their husbands. Divorce broke up marriages even for the most trivial of reasons. Polygamy was practiced (though not widely), and extramarital affairs violated the sacred trust of marital fidelity. Hence, while the divine ideal was set forth clearly and permanently in the creation account, there was a great need for restoration and renewal in the days of Jesus and the early church.

The present chapter, which is devoted to a study of the New Testament teaching on the subject, will attempt to derive a distinctly Christian theology of marriage from the teaching of both Testaments (the Old Testament informed now by the New Testament).¹ After discussing Jesus' view of marriage, we will study Peter's message for husbands and wives as well as Paul's pronouncements on this subject, with special focus on his first letters to the Corinthians and Timothy and his letter to the Ephesians. The chapter concludes with a brief survey of marriages in the New Testament.

NO LONGER TWO, BUT ONE: JESUS' HIGH VIEW OF MARRIAGE

Jesus' teaching on the requirements of discipleship regularly subordinated one's kinship ties to the obligations of the kingdom.² However, while our Lord had much to say about people's need to give first priority to Jesus' call to discipleship, he provided comparatively little instruction on marriage. Doubtless the major reason for this is that Jesus, as did his contemporaries, assumed the validity of the divine pattern for marriage set forth in the opening chapters of Genesis.³ For this reason it would be fallacious to assume that, because Jesus emphasized people's higher spiritual calling and requirements for Christian discipleship, he held a low view of marriage or now viewed this divine institution as dispensable or superseded by a higher, nobler calling, perhaps involving singleness in light of the imminent end of the age.⁴

Quite to the contrary. When questioned about divorce, Jesus affirmed the permanent nature of marriage in no uncertain terms. Adducing both foundational Old Testament texts, Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, he asserted, "So they [husband and wife] are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:6, NIV).⁵ This makes clear that Jesus considered marriage to be *a sacred bond between a man and a woman, established by and entered into before God*. As John Stott aptly notes, "The marriage bond is more than a human contract: it is a divine yoke. And the way in which God lays this yoke upon a married couple is not by creating a kind of mystical union but by declaring his purpose in his Word."⁶

While Jesus held a very high view of marriage, however, as mentioned above and as will be discussed more fully in the following chapter, his teaching on natural family ties provides important parameters for its overall significance and places it within the larger context of God's kingdom.⁷ The culmination of this development will be reached in the eternal state, where people will no longer marry but will be like the angels (Matt. 22:30 par.). Thus, Jesus lays the groundwork for Paul's teaching that "from now on those who have wives should live as if they had none . . . for this world in its present form is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:29, 31, NIV). While *remaining the foundational divine institution* for humanity, which should be nurtured, cared for, and protected, marriage

should not be viewed as an end in itself, but should be *subordinated to God's larger salvation purposes*.⁸ We will deal with this at greater length in our discussion of Paul's teaching on the nature of marriage in Ephesians.

SUBMISSION AND SENSITIVITY: PETER'S MESSAGE TO HUSBANDS AND WIVES (1 PETER 3:1-7)

Peter's comments on the marriage relationship are penned in the context of believers suffering at the hands of unbelievers, in the present instance believing wives called to live with unbelieving husbands. Peter's general rule of conduct is submission "for the Lord's sake to every human institution" (1 Pet. 2:13), including government (vv. 13-17), authorities at work (v. 18) and at home (3:1). In the case of work relationships, submission is urged not only to superiors who are "good and gentle but also to the unjust" (2:18). Wives "likewise" are to be submissive to unbelieving husbands (3:1).⁹

In all of this, Christ has set the example (1 Pet. 2:21), all the way to the cross (2:24). Marriage, as well as other human relationships, is thus set in the larger framework of a believer's Christian testimony in the surrounding unbelieving world. While there is no guarantee (cf. 1 Cor. 7:16), believing wives are to work and pray that their husbands "may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct" (1 Pet. 3:1-2; cf. 1 Cor. 7:12-14). Such wives are to cultivate inner, spiritual beauty (described by Peter in 1 Pet. 3:4 as "adorning . . . the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit"), being submissive to their husbands as Sarah was to Abraham, even when their directives are not informed by a regenerate mind and heart, as long as this does not involve sin (1 Pet. 3:3-6; cf., e.g., Genesis 20).¹⁰

The general principle issuing from Peter's counsel is that leading unbelievers to Christ is a greater cause than insisting on justice in human relationships. Believers are to defer their craving for justice until the last day, trusting God as Jesus did (1 Pet. 2:23). While Paul enjoins believing wives in his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians to submit to their believing husbands, here Peter raises the bar further still. Wifely submission to an unbelieving husband—and any resulting

suffering—is beautiful in the sight of God if borne reverently and with hope in God.¹¹

In the context of the third chapter of Peter’s first letter, there seems to be an almost imperceptible shift of focus from marriages between a believer and an unbeliever to those between believers. While verses 1-4 appear to apply primarily to the former, verses 5-6 evoke “the holy women” of the past, including Sarah, whose husband Abraham, while occasionally sinning against Sarah, is hardly the prototype of the unbelieving husband. Thus Peter, like Paul, envisions marital relationships between believers that are characterized by wifely submission (“wives, be subject to your own husbands,” 1 Pet. 3:1) and husbands’ considerate treatment of their wives (“husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman . . . , since they are heirs with you of the grace of life,” 3:7).

In the sole verse addressed to husbands, Peter admirably balances the recognition of distinctions between the marital partners and the notion of their equality in Christ. On the one hand, wives are called “the weaker vessel” with whom husbands are to live in an understanding way.¹² Yet on the other hand, wives are called “heirs with you” together with their husbands of the gracious gift of life (1 Pet. 3:7). The reference to removing any obstacles for joint marital prayer likewise presupposes that the initial focus on marriages between a believer and an unbeliever has now given way to those between believers.

ALL THINGS UNDER ONE HEAD: PAUL’S VISION FOR MARRIAGE

Of the New Testament writers, it is Paul who provides the most thorough treatment of marriage. We will first look at the apostle’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Timothy before turning to Paul’s most extended discussion of marriage in his letter to the Ephesians.¹³

Fulfilling One’s Marital Obligations (1 Corinthians 7:2-5)

Paul’s pronouncements on marriage in his first letter to the Corinthians are part of his response to a letter sent to him by the Corinthians, in which they had requested that the apostle rule on several controversial issues (1 Cor. 16:17; cf. 1 Cor. 7:1: “Now concerning the matters about

which you wrote”). In the first instance, Paul takes a strong stand against a false *asceticism* that values singleness as more spiritual than marriage (7:1). Suppressing their physical functions for the sake of spiritual advancement, the proponents of this teaching called on those who were married to refrain from sexual intercourse with their spouse or even encouraged them to divorce their spouses in order to pursue an allegedly higher, sexless spirituality.

While 1 Corinthians 7 is often discussed in the context of Paul’s high valuation of singleness, it is worthy of note that the same chapter also contains a very strong affirmation of marriage. According to Paul,

. . . each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Cor. 7:2-5, NIV).

Paul’s concern in the present passage, then, is that the husband and wife not withdraw from normal marital sexual relations but that they fulfill their sexual obligations toward their marriage partner.¹⁴ This reveals Paul’s respect for and high view of marriage and contradicts both the misguided spirituality promoted by some in the original Corinthian context and the later asceticism and imbalanced accentuation of virginity in the patristic period.

Marriage an Honorable State (1 Timothy 2:15; 4:1-4)

Similar to 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy contains a very strong reaffirmation of the centrality of marriage in the age of Christ. As in Corinth, there were some in the Ephesian context (to which 1 Timothy is addressed) who taught that Christians ought to abstain from marriage. Paul counters this teaching with extremely strong language, contending that those “who forbid marriage” (1 Tim. 4:3) were “devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (4:1). In contrast, he

maintains that “everything created by God [including marriage] is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (4:4).

Earlier in the letter, Paul affirms “childbearing” (i.e., a woman’s devotion to her domestic and familial duties, including childrearing) as a vital part of women’s life of faith (1 Tim. 2:15) and calls candidates for both overseer and deacon to be faithful to their wives (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; cf. Titus 1:6) and to manage their households well, keeping their children submissive (1 Tim. 3:4; cf. Titus 1:6). In the former passage, Paul adduces both the Genesis Creation and Fall narratives (cf. 1 Tim. 2:13-14), which indicates that he views marriage as a divine creation ordinance, which has been affected by the Fall but is in no way superseded in the age of Christ.

The Roles of Husband and Wife (Ephesians 5:21-33)

The most detailed Pauline treatment of marriage is found in his letter to the Ephesians.¹⁵ It will be important to study the passage on marriage (Eph. 5:21-33) in the *context of the entire letter*. We will see that marriage is set within the larger context of God’s end-time restoration of all things under the headship of Christ, which includes the bringing together of all things, including believing Jews and Gentiles, in the body of Christ, the church. Christ’s relationship with the church, in turn, provides the pattern for a Christian marriage, in which the husband is appointed as the head (as Christ is the head of the church) and the wife is called to submit to her husband (as the church is to Christ). We will explore this at some length in our discussion of Ephesians 5:21-33 below.

At the very outset Paul affirms God’s overarching purpose for humanity (including married couples) in the age of Christ: “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head (*anakephalaiōsasthai*) even Christ” (Eph. 1:10, NIV). This establishes *Christ* as the focal point of God’s end-time program, and more particularly, Christ *as head* (Eph. 1:22), not only over the church (v. 22), but over every authority, in the present as well as the coming age (v. 21). Clearly, Christ’s headship here conveys the notion of supreme authority, not merely that of provision or nurture, as is sometimes alleged.¹⁶ As the exalted Lord, Christ is the head (*kephalē*), and all things are subjected to him (*hypotassō*; cf. Phil. 2:9-11).

The first important lesson for marriage from Paul's teaching in Ephesians is therefore that *the marriage relationship must be seen within the compass of God's larger salvation-historical, end-time purposes, that is, the bringing of "all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ"* (Eph. 1:10, NIV). This includes spiritual powers who will be fully submitted to Christ (1:21); the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles in one salvation-historical, end-time entity, the church (2:11-22; 3:6-13); the restoration of creation (cf. Rom. 8:18-25), which men, as divine image bearers, are currently working to subdue (Gen. 1:28); and, most relevant for our present purposes, *the restoration of the male-female marriage relationship as realized by Spirit-filled, committed Christian believers, who overcome the cursed struggle of manipulation and dominance (cf. Gen. 3:16)¹⁷ in the power of Christ, and relate to each other in proper submission and Christ-like love.* While God's purposes therefore are greater than marriage or male-female roles, they significantly include this relationship (see 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

Paul continues to develop these important truths in the following chapters of his letter. In Ephesians 2, he affirms that believers (and hence also Christian husbands and wives) were once in the realm of Satan, but now they have been made alive in Christ, by grace (Eph. 2:5). They have been raised and exalted *with him*, participating in his victory over Satan (2:6). God's end-time plan to bring together all things in and under Christ is nowhere more evident than in his inclusion of the Gentiles in the community of believers together with believing Jews (2:11-22; 3:6).¹⁸ This is termed by Paul a salvation-historical "mystery," hidden in the past in God's own purposes, but now brought into the open and unpacked by the apostle himself.¹⁹

At the close of his discussion of believers' spiritual blessings in Christ, Paul prays for all believers that Christ would live in their hearts by faith and that, rooted and established in love, they would know the love of Christ in their lives (Eph. 3:17, 19). The fact that Paul begins his prayer with a reference to God as "the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (3:14-15) underscores the relevance of Paul's prayer not only for believers in general but *for married couples and families in particular.* By Paul's calling God the Father from whom every family *on earth* is named, the Creator is identified as the one who

both established marriage and has rightful jurisdiction over it. By Paul's linking God's rule over families *in heaven and on earth*, his end-time purposes of uniting all things under Christ's headship are shown to encompass earthly families as well as heavenly realities. And since Christ is shown to have supreme authority over all supernatural as well as earthly beings, the husband's headship (affirmed in Eph. 5:23 below) by analogy is seen as connoting the exercise of authority over his wife as well.

The second half of the letter is given to an exposition of the new life in Christ that believers are to enjoy in the unity of the "body of Christ," the church. They are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling, give preference to one another in love, and preserve spiritual unity in peace (Eph. 4:1-3; cf. 4:4-6). God has given spiritual gifts and instituted various ministries in the church to equip believers for ministry of their own. In all this, his goal is the "perfect man" (*andra teleion*, Eph. 4:13, NKJV) who speaks the truth in love and in all things grows into Christ, who is the head (4:13-16). Paul then contrasts the old self, with its independence, lack of submission to authority, rebelliousness, and bondage to passions and lusts, with the new self, which is characterized by proper submission, a respectful attitude toward authority, and love. Becoming a Christian is like putting off old clothes and putting on new ones (Eph. 4:22, 24; cf. Col. 3:9-10): there must be a marked, noticeable change in spirit and behavior—including behavior enacted in the context of marriage and the family.

In the context immediately preceding Paul's teaching on marital roles, he exhorts believers to live lives of love in keeping with the love of Christ, who gave his life as a sacrifice for them (Eph. 5:1-2; cf. 5:25). Conversely, there must be no sexual immorality (*porneia*; 5:3; cf. 1 Cor. 6:15-16). As God's end-time community, the church (and hence every believer) ought to be filled with the Spirit (5:18) in correspondence to God's filling of the Old Testament sanctuary with his spiritual presence.²⁰ In the first instance, this Spirit-filling refers to congregational worship (and is thus corporate, rather than merely individualistic, in import; 5:19-20).²¹ Still continuing the same sentence in the original Greek, Paul then relates Spirit-filling also to the marriage relationship (5:21-24). *Being properly submitted* (*hypotassō*, 5:21, 22) is thus a mark of Spirit-

filling, in contrast to believers' previous lifestyle, which was characterized by rebellion toward authority.

The second important lesson for married couples, then, is that the instructions for wives and husbands (as well as those for parents/children and slaves/masters later on) are *directed to Spirit-filled believers rather than to those outside of Christ*. It should therefore surprise no one that Paul's words are foolishness to those who do not follow the path of Christian discipleship. This does not mean, however, that Ephesians 5:21-33 contains instructions on male-female relationships that are merely private in nature. Rather, these injunctions set forth the Creator's divine ideal and abiding will for *all* married men and women, rather than merely believers in Jesus Christ.

In the following verses, Paul, using the format of the ancient household code, cites models for both wives and husbands to emulate: for wives, the church in her submission to Christ (Eph. 5:24); for husbands, Christ's sacrificial love for the church, resulting in her cleansing, holiness, and purity (5:25-28). Later, Paul will add a second, commonsense analogy from the nature of things, appealing to self-interest: everyone loves one's own body; therefore, in light of the one-flesh union between husbands and wives, if husbands love their wives, this is tantamount to husbands loving themselves (5:29-30).

On the basis of Ephesians 5:21 ("submitting *to one another* out of reverence for Christ"), some argue that Paul does not teach the submission of wives to their husbands *only* but *also* that of husbands to their wives in "mutual submission."²² Admittedly, this is what Ephesians 5:21, read by itself, might suggest, but we must not stop reading at 5:21 but glean from the following verses what is Paul's definition of "submitting to one another." It is clear that the answer is (our third important principle on marriage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians) that *wives are to submit to their husbands* who are called the "head" of their wives as Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:22-24) while *husbands are to love their wives with the sacrificial love of Christ* (vv. 25-30). This runs counter to the notion of "mutual submission" within the context of identity of gender roles.²³ As a noted commentator contends, "mutual submission coexists with a hierarchy of roles within the [Christian] household. . . . there is a general sense in which husbands are to have a

submissive attitude to wives, putting their wives' interests before their own. But this does not eliminate the more specific [role] in which wives are to submit to husbands."²⁴

A comparison with Ephesians 1:22 and 4:15 further supports the notion, fourth, that "*headship*" entails, not merely nurture (though it does that, see Eph. 5:29), but also a position of authority. This authoritative position of the man is a function, not of intrinsic merit or worth on his part, but of God's sovereign creative will (and is perhaps reflective of God's authority in light of his revelation of himself as Father). Hence the husband's leadership, as well as the wife's submission, is to be exercised within the orbit of grace rather than legalism or coercion. It should also be noted that the abbreviated Colossian parallel, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col. 3:18) sums up the entirety of Paul's counsel to Christian wives with regard to their marital disposition (no word about "mutual submission" here).²⁵

The fact that wives are called to recognize and respect proper authority over them is not unique to them. Men, too, must submit to Christ, local church leadership and discipline, the civil authorities, and their employers. Nevertheless, as mentioned, this does not alter the fact that there is a sense in which wives are called to submit to their husbands in a way that is *non-reciprocal* (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-6 in the context of 2:13, 18). Husbands' exercise of authority, in turn, must not be an arbitrary or abusive one, but should be motivated by love.²⁶ Again, Peter's teaching is found to cohere with that of Paul: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life" (1 Pet. 3:7, NIV).

It must also be pointed out, fifth, that it is thus manifestly *not* true that wifely submission is *merely a result of the Fall* as is at times erroneously claimed.²⁷ To the contrary, as we have seen in chapter 2 above, Genesis 2 contains several indications that headship and submission were part of God's original creation: God created the man first (Gen. 2:7; noted by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:8 and 1 Tim. 2:13) and laid on him a dual charge (Gen. 2:15-17); and God made the woman from the man and for the man (2:21-22; cf. 1 Cor. 11:8-9) as his suitable helper (Gen. 2:18, 20). God's post-Fall judgment in Genesis 3:16 does not alter the fact that male head-

ship is part of his design of the husband-and-wife relationship prior to the Fall; it merely addresses the negative consequences of sin on the way in which husband and wife now relate to each other.²⁸ That wifely submission is not merely a result of the Fall is further supported by the present passage, where it is *Christian* women, that is, those who have been redeemed and regenerated in Christ, who are nonetheless enjoined to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22). As mentioned, this is consistent with Paul's message elsewhere, where he stresses, with reference to Genesis 2:18, 20, that it is not the man who was made for woman, but the woman for the man (1 Cor. 11:9), so that "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man" (1 Cor. 11:3, NIV).

For this reason it must be concluded that the understanding that the restored pattern for marriage in Christ *transcends* that of submission and authority is not borne out by the New Testament, be it here or elsewhere. Notably, Paul refutes as heretical the understanding (as advocated by some in his day) that "the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim. 2:18), that is, that the future has so invaded the present that believers' present lives no longer need to heed principles built into the fabric of creation by the Creator. Contrary to the false teachers, God's created order continues to provide the framework for human relationships (cf. 1 Tim. 4:3). While subverted by the Fall, this order is not to be set aside by Christians. Rather, it is God's redemptive purpose in Christ to counteract the effects of sin in human relationships (and other spheres) by believers' new life in the Spirit. Only in heaven will people no longer be given in marriage but be like angels (Matt. 22:30 and parallels). Currently, they still marry, have children, and are to fulfill the cultural mandate of subduing and cultivating the earth in keeping with the male-female roles established at Creation.

Paul rounds out his discussion with a familiar allusion to Scripture: ". . . and the two will become one flesh" (Eph. 5:31; cf. Gen. 2:24: "they"). Some believe that this reference to the creation narrative draws a connection between the marriage union and Christ's relationship with the church by way of typology, that is, a "typical" correspondence along salvation-historical lines, with Adam prefiguring Christ, Eve foreshadowing the church, and Adam and Eve's relationship typifying the union of Christ and the church.²⁹ This is possible, though it is important to

note that Paul's focus here lies on the union of Christ and the church (cf. Eph. 5:30-32) and no longer on marriage (which dominated the discussion in Eph. 5:21-29).³⁰ Hence Paul's appropriation of Genesis 2:24 may be best described as an analogy or illustration (whereby the marital "one-flesh" union illustrates the union between Christ and the church) rather than typology.

In any case, Paul's major point seems to be that marriage has the honor of embodying the "one-flesh" principle that later in salvation history became true spiritually also for the union of the exalted Christ with the church, which is described by Paul in terms of "head," "members," and "body." This, too, like the inclusion of Gentiles in God's salvific plan, is a *mystērion*: it was hidden in the divine wisdom in ages past but now has been given to Paul to reveal. Marriage is thus shown to be part and parcel of God's overarching salvation-historical purpose of "bringing all things together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10, NIV). The lesson to be drawn from this is that marriage in Christian teaching, rather than being an end in itself, is to be subsumed under Christ's rule. Just as Christ must rule over all heavenly powers (Eph. 1:21-22) and over the church (4:15), he must also rule over the marital relationship (5:21-33), the family (6:1-4), and the workplace (6:5-9). A married couple is part of the church (understood as family of families, cf. 1 Tim. 3:15), and it, too, is part of that spiritual warfare that resolutely resists evil (Eph. 6:10-14) and seeks to promote God's purposes in this world (foremost the preaching of the gospel, 6:15, 19-20).³¹ Thus the marriage relationship should also be viewed in the context of Christian witness in an unbelieving environment, both directly by the husband's and the wife's living out God's purposes for the Christian couple, and indirectly by being part of a biblical church that actively propagates the gospel message.

Finally, not only is marriage part of *God's end-time purposes in Christ* (Eph. 1:10) and part of the *Spirit's operation* (5:18), it is also part of one other important larger reality that is often overlooked, namely that of *spiritual warfare* (6:10-18).³² This means that marriage ought not to be viewed merely on a horizontal, human plane but understood as involving spiritual attacks that require husbands and wives to "put on the full armor of God" in order to withstand those attacks. Since spiritual warfare pertains not merely to the marriage relationship but to fam-

ily life at large (cf. 6:1-4), we will return to this issue more fully under the heading “Marriage and the Family and Spiritual Warfare” in chapter 8, where we will discuss several important issues related to marriage and the family.

Principles of Marriage from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians

PRINCIPLES OF MARRIAGE	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE
Marriage is part of God’s larger purposes in Christ	Eph. 1:10
Paul’s instructions are directed to Spirit-filled believers	Eph. 5:18
Wives are called to submit, men to love (not “mutual submission”)	Eph. 5:21-33
Headship entails authority (not merely nurture)	Eph. 5:23-24 (cf. Eph. 1:22; 4:15)
Submission is still required of Christian women (not merely a result of the Fall)	Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18 (cf. Gen. 2:18, 20; 1 Cor. 11:3, 9)
To teach that Christian marriage no longer involves submission is to exaggerate the redemptive scope of Christ’s work in this life	Eph. 5:22 (cf. Matt. 22:30 par.; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:18)
Marriage involves spiritual warfare, which requires that husbands and wives put on the “full armor of God”	Eph. 6:10-18

Summary and Application

We close our discussion of Paul’s teaching on marriage in Ephesians with several points of application. First, while some may view submitting to one’s husband’s authority as something negative, a more accurate way of looking at marital roles is to understand that wives are called to *follow their husband’s loving leadership* in their marriage. This leadership and submission is to take place in the context of a true partnership, in which the husband genuinely values his wife’s companionship and counsel and the wife sincerely values her husband’s leadership. It is one of the unfortunate legacies of radical feminism that many tend to view male-female relationships in adversarial terms. This is contrary to God’s desire and design and to the biblical message.

Second, there is a *difference between traditional and biblical marriage*. Traditional marriage may be understood as the type of division of labor by which women are responsible for cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry, and so on, while men are at work earning the family income. While Scripture does specify work outside the home as men's primary sphere and the home as the center of women's activity (e.g., Gen. 3:16-19; Prov. 31:10-31 [though the woman's reach is not *limited* to the home]; 1 Tim. 2:15; 5:10, 14), the Bible is not a law book and does not seek to legislate the exact division of labor husband and wife ought to observe.³³ Hence within the biblical parameters outlined above, there remains room for the individual couple to work out their own distinctive and specific arrangement. This may vary from couple to couple and ought to be considered a part of Christian freedom. For example, some women may be more gifted in the area of finances than men. In certain families it may be advantageous for the woman to keep the family finances if the couple is agreed as long as the husband maintains ultimate responsibility over this area. Conversely, some men may be better at cooking than their wives. Again, there seems to be no good reason why in certain families men could not contribute in this way as long as the couple is agreed. Problems may arise only if the pattern were to be so completely reversed that a given husband is focusing primarily or exclusively on the domestic sphere while the wife is part of the labor force. However, even this may not be problematic if for a *limited* time a couple, say, while the husband is pursuing an education, agrees on this type of arrangement.³⁴ There will also be exceptional cases where the wife needs to assume the role of primary provider on a *permanent* basis (such as when a husband's physical disability does not allow him to maintain gainful employment). Nevertheless, such couples should also strive prayerfully to emulate the biblical pattern of headship and submission, to the extent that this is possible. Even these unusual circumstances do not alter the pattern in Scripture for husbands and wives in general.

Third and last, *improper caricatures* of the biblical teaching of wifely submission and the husband's loving leadership (which includes the proper exercise of authority) must be *rejected* as either deliberate or unwitting attempts to discredit such a model as unworthy of a woman's

human dignity or our modern, “enlightened” times. The kind of submission Scripture is talking about is not akin to *slavery* where one person owns another. It is not *subservience* where one person is doing the bidding of another without intelligent input or interaction. It is not even truly *hierarchical*, since this conjures up notions of a military-style, top-down chain of command in which the soldier is asked to obey, no-questions-asked, the orders of his superior. None of these labels constitute an accurate description of Scripture with regard to the roles of men and women nor do they fairly represent the understanding of gender roles set forth in the pages of this book.

Rather, the biblical model for marriage is that of loving complementarity, where the husband and the wife are partners who value and respect each other and where the husband’s loving leadership is met with the wife’s intelligent response. If Christ chooses to submit to God the Father while being equal in worth and personhood, there seems to be no good reason why God could not have designed the husband-and-wife relationship in such a way that the wife is called to submit to the man while likewise being equal in worth and personhood. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3).

Analogous to the previous chapter, we will seek to glean insights from several specific examples of marriages before concluding our discussion of marriage in the New Testament.

INSIGHTS FROM NEW TESTAMENT MARRIAGES

Compared with the Old Testament, the New Testament provides less material on examples of marriages.

The Gospels

Little information is given about the marriage of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Joseph (the accounts of the virgin birth precede their marriage union). The Gospels focus mostly on Jesus’ call to discipleship and contain few examples pertaining to the marital relationship of particular couples. Many of Jesus’ followers are featured as individuals who have benefited from his ministry and have been called by him to a spiritual

commitment. Some of his most devoted followers, such as Mary of Bethany, were apparently unmarried. If they were married, little or no information about their marriage is given.

The Book of Acts

The New Testament provides a bit more information regarding marriages in the early church. As in the case of the Gospel evidence, some followers of Christ in the book of Acts either are unmarried (such as Lydia; Acts 16:11-15) or little specific information is given about their marriage relationship (such as the Philippian jailer, who believed with his entire household, 16:25-34). Beyond this, the book of Acts features a handful of examples of marriages, both positive and negative. We will briefly discuss one negative and then one positive example.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

A negative example is provided by Ananias and Sapphira, who conspire to lie to the apostles about their giving and are both judged severely for their dishonesty (Acts 5:1-11). The lesson from this is that even if one marriage partner chooses to sin, the other ought to make his or her own decision and do what is right, regardless of the consequences. God does not expect one marriage partner to follow the other into sin.³⁵

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

A very positive example of a marriage committed to Christian ministry, even missionary service, is provided through the account of Aquila and Priscilla. Paul first meets this couple in Corinth and works alongside them as a tentmaker (Acts 18:2-3). Later, they join Paul on his journey to Ephesus (18:18-19), where they are left by the apostle while he continues his travels. Sometime after this they hear the gifted preacher Apollos in the synagogue and, observing his need for further instruction, take him and explain to him the way of God more accurately (18:26). The two are mentioned again in Romans 16:3, where both are called Paul's "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" who risked their lives for him. Apparently, Priscilla and Aquila had returned to Rome by that time (cf. Acts 18:2, which refers to the original expul-

sion of all Jews from Rome by Claudius). The final reference to this couple is found in 2 Timothy 4:19, where Paul sends greetings to the couple (back in Ephesus?) from his Roman prison.³⁶ This noted missionary couple was among Paul's most strategic allies in his Gentile mission (cf. Rom. 16:4), playing important roles in such major centers as Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. Together they hosted house churches wherever they went, instructed others such as Apollos, and even "risked their necks" for Paul.

One delicate aspect of the New Testament's portrayal of this couple is that Priscilla seems to have had a leading role in their relationship. This is borne out by the fact that in four of the six instances where she is mentioned in the New Testament, Priscilla's name appears before that of her husband (Acts 18:18-19, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19; Aquila is mentioned first in Acts 18:2 and 1 Cor. 16:19). Scholars have speculated that the reason for this is that Priscilla was converted before her husband, perhaps having led him to faith in Christ, or that she played a more prominent part in the life and work of the church than her husband.³⁷ Alternatively, it has been conjectured that "Prisca [the shortened form of her name] was the more dominant of the two or of higher social status, and she may either have provided the financial resources for the business or have been the brains behind it."³⁸ Regardless of the reasons (none of which are specifically stated in the biblical texts), we observe that here is perhaps one of the most outstanding New Testament examples of a married couple fully committed to serving Christ together in the cause of Christian mission.

The Rest of the New Testament and Conclusion

Neither the epistolary nor the apocalyptic genre easily lends itself to a more detailed portrayal of marital relationships, so that the New Testament letters and the book of Revelation do not provide significant material in this regard. However, together with our survey of marriages in the Old Testament above and our discussion of examples of parenting in both Testaments below, the above-mentioned instances in the book of Acts (not to speak of didactic material on marriage and the family in Scripture) add up to a significant resource for the study and application of God's will in these areas.

CONCLUSION

The above survey of the New Testament teaching on marriage showed that marriage is uniformly affirmed as the foundational, divinely appointed institution for humanity in the age of Christ.

Jesus' major pronouncement on the subject was made when he was asked by some Pharisees about his views on divorce (Matt. 19:3). This became an occasion for our Lord to reaffirm God's ideal of *monogamous, lifelong, and heterosexual marriage*, with reference to both foundational Old Testament texts on the subject (Matt. 19:4-6; cf. Gen. 1:27; 2:24). According to Jesus, "what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:6, NIV, par. Mark 10:9). This makes clear that Jesus did not view marriage as a mere social institution or convention. Rather, according to Jesus, marriage is a sacred bond between a man and a woman instituted by and entered into before God.

Apart from this major marriage-affirming pronouncement, many of Jesus' statements address the critical importance of following him in *discipleship*. While discipleship in Jesus' teaching is not set in *contrast* with valuing marriage, it is presented as the *indispensable requirement* for any true, committed follower of Christ, transcending and encompassing even his or her familial obligations. The fact that Jesus considered singleness to be a kingdom gift for the select few (Matt. 19:11-12) indicates that he clearly assumed marriage as the norm in this life (though not in the life to come, Matt. 22:30).

Among the New Testament writers, Peter, in his first letter, teaches wifely submission even to unbelieving husbands (1 Pet. 3:1-7). As models, he holds up the "holy women of the past" such as Sarah, who treated her husband Abraham with respect (even though he was not always the perfect husband, as the book of Genesis attests).

Paul, too, his positive comments regarding singleness notwithstanding, strongly affirmed marriages and sought to strengthen them. When writing to Corinth, he defended marriage against those who elevated singleness as a superior state that allowed for greater spirituality (1 Cor. 7:2-5). When writing to Timothy in Ephesus, likewise, he defended marriage against those "who forbid marriage" (1 Tim. 4:3), which he denounced as "teachings of demons" (4:1). For women, Paul affirmed the central role of "childbearing," that is, their domestic and

familial duties (2:15), and for men who would lead the church, he required marital fidelity and diligent parental discipline of children.

Paul's teaching on marriage is given its fullest expression in the letter to the Ephesians. At the very outset, he set marriage within the larger framework of God's plan of bringing "all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10, NIV). Just as Christ has been made head over every human and heavenly authority (1:21), so the husband was put in charge over his wife (5:22-24). This was done by "the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (3:14-15). According to Paul, this *headship* implies both the *wife's submission to her husband's authority* and the *husband's loving, sacrificial devotion to his wife*. Paul also teaches that it is an indispensable prerequisite for a Christian marriage that both spouses are *believers* and that they are *Spirit-filled* as they fulfill their marital roles and obligations.

Hence the New Testament builds on and further elaborates on the Old Testament teaching on marriage while cohering with the divine ideal of marriage presented in the book of Genesis.