Marriage and Marital Disputes in the Old Testament

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Abstract

In the introduction, the author emphasizes the significance and the importance of the narrative nature of the Old Testament text. This is with the purpose of emphasizing the directness and openness of the Old Testament narrative, where realistic life issues are openly and unapologetically discussed in the form of a story. Consequently, this raises the issues of understanding marriage and the marital union in the text and context of the Old Testament. The vocabulary and the language are analyzed. In the second part of the paper, the author focuses on the problems pertaining to marital and family communities; to marital disputes as we see them in the OT, using several Biblical marriages and the challenges they faced as examples.

Key words: *Bible, Old Testament, marriage, marital disputes*

Narrativity of the Old Testament Text

The thing that characterizes the OT text in terms of literature and contents, and also distinguishes it from the NT text, is its narrativity and the unsparing usage of life's realities in stories. The distinctiveness of personal stories in the OT goes into some tense life stories. And while the New Testament text has a message, the Old Testament text has both the message and the story. The center of OT is a

story with a message. The salvation message in the NT uses story and narrativity only partially and occasionally, and with the purpose of conveying the message. Furthermore, in the OT, narrativity is characteristic even of the poetic literature.[1] If we focus more carefully and read the Biblical Psalter - as well as Psalms that are outside of the Psalter - more analytically, we will easily establish that some of the most intense and most thrilling "stories" have been told in the Psalter, or other OT passages which were written in the form of poetry, in the poetic genre.[2] So as we read the poetic parts of Biblical text exclusively as Scripturally inspired poetry, we inadvertently end up missing the story which the Scripture writer intended to tell us.

The Old Testament provides us with many, sometimes quite ruthless, realistic life stories. There are no holds barred, they are open and usually contain no euphemisms or embellishments. Such complete and open talk without any restrictions is actually a literary genre of sorts. Such type of talk is called, *parrhesia*.[3] Although many consider parrhesia to be a figure of speech, it would be more accurate to interpret it as a sort of a literary genre. Namely, these are not just rhetoric figures, but the overall tone that a literary work gives off. It should be noted that parrhesia is not a kind of talk similar to babbling or saying gibberish "without discerning the important from the unimportant; and the valuable from the petty" (Brnčić 2014, 181). It is a way of expression when a (Scripture) story brings up all those uncomfortable truths that the individual or the entire society are facing. Scriptural examples of such talk included Job's lamentations, which are seen throughout the book, so we cannot just talk about figures of speech, but an entire genre. Namely, Job is very open, free, and maybe even a bit harsh in speaking about the unpleasant things that befell him, which were by no means unimportant or trite.

As we will see, we find a similar Biblical discourse in those Scripture passages and stories which deal with family life, marriage, and marital union. At that point, Biblical stories become ruthlessly real, realistic, and bereft on any sentimentality or spiritualized romanticism. It will then be evident that, if the OT speaks out about some unpleasant truths from family or marriage life, such talk

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1 This particular form, where poetic material contains the story is called *narrative poetry*.

2 Narrative poetry is an unjustly disregarded literary genre. Robert Alter's contribution (*The Art of Biblical Poetry*) to this topic is extremely valuable. Alter lays out the entire 'narrative momentum' within the poetic material in Scripture (cf. Alter 1985, 76 ff). The importance of narrative poetry in OT text is also discussed by this author (D. Berković) in his (unpublished) doctoral dissertation (pgs. 211, 249).

3 The term, parrhesia, is a compound from the Greek, *pan* (= everything) + *rhsis* (talk), which would literally mean, *'to talk of everything'* (to speak freely). As a rhetoric literary expression or type of speech, parrhesia dates back to the 5th century BC, in ancient literature.

has elements of parrhesia. Such passages and stories do not exclude the intimate, sensual, or erotically charged stories (David and Bathsheba, The Song of Solomon), nor certain uncomfortable episodes from married people's lives (Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel).

One of the witnesses to the directness in talking about marriage and the marital union is the very vocabulary used in the Hebrew text. When talking about marital union, the phrase, "take (for oneself) as wife" (לקח לי לאשה), is used, where לקח (*laqah* = "to take") denotes intimacy and it emphatically implies the consummation of marital union. Therefore, the establishment of the marital union ("take as wife") directly points to and includes the fact that laying with a woman also implies the establishment of the marital union.[4] Of course, not every intimate relationship implied marital union. We see an example of this in the story of the marriage between Abraham and Sarah. Sarah the barren woman told her husband Abraham to lay with the servant girl Hagar, in order to secure descendants for their family. Sarah instructed her husband, "Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." (נא אל שפחתי בא) (Gen 16:2), which ended up causing a serious marriage dispute. Here, the phrase, בוא אל ("to go in") really means "go and lay with" (the woman). Abraham and Sarah got themselves in quite some trouble when Abraham presented his wife Sarah to the Egyptian Pharaoh as his sister, only for the Pharaoh take Abraham's "sister" as wife for himself, thus committing adultery without even knowing it. Abraham barely managed to save his life in this story. When the Pharaoh realized that Sarah was no sister, but in fact Abraham's lawful wife, he said: "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? (לאשה אקח אתה לי)? Now then, [a]here is your wife, take her and go" (Gen 12:19). The Scripture holds no punches in indicating the challenges and problematics in marriages back in the day. In the Book of Wisdom, when it comes to problems in marriage it also warns about religious disorder and about those who "err concerning the knowledge of God" (Wisdom 14:22, CEB), so "people stop keeping their lives and their marriages pure" (Wisdom 14:24) and "Marriage is thrown into confusion" (γάμων ἀταξιά) (Wisdom 14:26).[5] Before we begin to analyze some of the marriage problems and disputes in OT, we need to see how some OT world terms and concepts pertaining to marriage relate to each other. This particularly relates to the triad of faithfulness, monogamy, and monotheism.

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4   For example: Lev 20:14: *'And if a man take a wife'* (איש אשר יקח את אשה) (KJ21) or, as translated in NASB: *'If there is a man who marries a woman'*

5   γάμος (= wedding, marriage)

MARRIAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Faithfulness, Monogamy, and Monotheism

One of the foundations of Old Testament and Biblical view on the marriage union is this inseparable triad of faithfulness, monogamy, and monotheism. In this combination of interactions, the reader will be prone to questioning monogamy first, having in mind the polygamous practice in the OT world. By reading the Scripture passages attentively, we notice the clear contours of monogamy, which will be mentioned in this paper. However, first we need to set up some basic anthropological and religious presuppositions that are necessary for discussing the suggested triad of faithfulness, monogamy, and monotheism.

Biblical anthropology shows a fundamental twofold determination of human sexuality and gender as the distinction between the male and the female (cf. Gen 1:27). Man's such described sexual duality also implies a marital form between two persons of different sexes or, as is described when talking about the first marriage vows: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother (ודבק באשתו), and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (אחד בשר)" (Gen 2:24).

It needs to be noted here that man's anthropomorphic bipolarity, as is described in the Scripture text, is not a reflection of certain cosmological and religious relationships, as we will see them throughout religious history. The Judeo-Christian religious milieu neither reflects nor does it illustrate a celestial pantheon, where a god or deity would imitate the male-female relationships, as can be found in most religions. In polytheist religions, the gods live the lives of "earthlings." Those gods get married, they bear children, their sex lives are rather tumultuous, and they imitate human lives in most every aspect. In his works and in his public appearances, Dennis Prager (1993) regularly emphasizes a fact that comes from Judaism, and later on from Christianity, as well. He emphasizes that Judaism, and then Christianity as its religious successor, in the very beginning of the religious history of Judaism desexualizes God, "the first thing Judaism did was to desexualize God."[6] In Judeo-Christian religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) man and

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6   „the first thing Judaism did was to desexualize God. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" by his will, not through any sexual behavior. This was an utterly radical break with all religion, and it alone changed human history. The gods of virtually all civilizations engaged in sexual relations. In the Near East, the Babylonian god Ishtar seduced a man, Gilgamesh, the Babylonian hero. In the Egyptian religion, the god Osiris had sexual relations with his sister, the goddess Isis, and she conceived the god Horus. In Canaan, EI, the chief god, had sex with Ashera. In Hindu belief, the god Krishna was highly sexually active, having had many wives and pursuing Radha; the god Samba, son of Krishna, seduced mortal women and men. In Greek beliefs, Zeus married Hera, chased women, abducted the beautiful young

woman are not a reflection of some cosmic pantheon, nor is the eventual pantheon a reflection of some human, anthropological reality. The only potential indication of such reflections between the anthropological and celestial can be found in the passage about creating man in Genesis 1. There it says that God created man, "in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). However, in spite of such a passage, in the overall text of the Bible and in its representations of the relationship between heavens and the earth, there is no indication whatsoever that this "image" refers to the anthropologically physical likeness between man and Creator God (cf. von Rad 1961, 58).

Faith and Faithfulness

The basic terms of marriage and marital unity as based on the OT usage are faithfulness and faith. Here we see a parallel of relationships between man and woman, God, and people.[7] By following these Biblical usages we get the impression that, without the support, i.e., "faith"; there is not much chance of marital faithfulness or faithfulness in general. The term, "faith," i.e., "faithfulness," in Hebrew original points out to the semantic field of the verb, אמן (*'mn*). In its basic meaning, as well as in its wider semantic field, אמן has the meaning of "being firm, trustworthy, and steadfast."[8] From this verb and its semantic field we derive some other terms, such as, אמת (*truth*), but also, אמונה (faithfulness) (cf. Višaticki 2004, 99-106). Isaiah 7 provides us with a first-class pun based on the verb, אמן, in the sense of, faith, faithfulness, and a reliable support, "If you will not believe, you surely shall not last" (אם לא תאמינו כי לא תאמנו) (7:9). When talking about the Covenant between the God of Israel and His people, Israel, it says that the Holy One of Israel, the God of Israel, will make firm His Covenant with David. It will be a Covenant that is steadfast, firm, and faithful: "My loving kindness I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall be confirmed to him" (ברית נאמנת) (Ps 89:28). That's why faith, faithfulness, and steadfastness remain as reference points, both for relationships between heaven and earth, as well as earthly ones.

Monogamy and Polygamy

The story of creation (Gen. 2) leads us to conclude that marriage, as the Creator intended it, was meant to be a monogamous union and mutual faithfulness

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male, Ganymede, and masturbated at other times; Poseidon married Amphitrite, pursued Demeter, and raped Tantalus. In Rome, the gods sexually pursued both men and women (Prager 1993).

7   We'll reflect on this in the section Monotheism and faithfulness.

8   This is where we get our word, "amen" from, which is used to ascertain and to confirm something, in the sense of 'so be it'.

between one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24). It seems that the monogamous characteristics of marriage have, in their own way, been preserved even during the times of polygamy in Israel. It is evident from the story of the global Flood (Gen. 7) and entering the ark that we are seeing the monogamous marriages of Noah and of his sons: "Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him entered the ark because of the water of the flood" (Gen. 7:7).

Polygamy is first mentioned in Genesis 4, in the context of the Cainian lineage, when Lamech "took to himself two wives" (Gen. 4:19), Adah and Zillah (Gen. 4:23). It seems that the Bible author (editor) purposefully placed Genesis and Noah in a monogamous context. Namely, Genesis 4 and Lamech (polygamy) is an illustrative example of various human activities, including marriage as an influence and the consequence of alienation from God (i.e., sin), from the stories of general disharmony in Genesis 3 (cf. Wenham 1987, 112). Here we have two worlds bearing witness to this; one is the world of the righteous Noah, while the other is the world of Cain the murderer.

As for monogamy further in the Bible text, we have the example of Abraham and Sarah. The patriarch Abraham seems to have been supposed to have just one wife, Sarah (Gen. 12:5). Due to Sarah's barrenness and because of her urging, she gives her servant girl Hagar to her husband Abraham as a "wife": "Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her" (Gen. 16:2). We can't talk about the tradition of polygamy in Abraham's case. Only after the death of his wife Sarah (Gen. 23) did Abraham marry Keturah (Gen. 25). In this case, and since he has taken Keturah as his wife after Sarah's death, Keturah would be considered his lawful wife. Besides, Hagar never enjoyed the same rights and privileges as Sarah, Abraham's lawful wife. This is a typical example of surrogate motherhood. Namely, Sarah is aware that Hagar will conceive and have a child with Abraham, and she states that this is a way for herself to "have children." We have the same exact case in the example of Rachel and Jacob (Gen. 33). Rachel, who is barren, instructed her husband Jacob: "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children" (Gen. 30:3).

It seems like even the polygamous situations still aim to maintain the characteristics of monogamy. And when polygamy became usual practice, there were clear instructions regarding how many wives a man should or needs to have. However, with everything else, there were exceptions here as well, which we will show shortly. We get an impression that the OT text is fully dominated by the culture of polygamy. The number of wives and concubines that some men in the Bible had, if we were to count them all, would be quite impressive. However, we should not remain uninformed or naïve in reading the Bible narrative. Although polygamy has been a legitimate *de jure*, it was *de facto* and not truly functional, at least not among the common people in Biblical times. We need to bear two things

in mind in regard to this when we speak of the culture of polygamy on the one hand and of monogamy, which was the Creator's original intention.

First, it was a matter of social status. All of the virtuous Biblical husbands who supported smaller or larger harems, according to Biblical accounts, came either from the ruling caste (David, Solomon) or from affluent families (Abraham, Jacob). However, an average Israelite at the time barely made ends meet and could not even dream of supporting a larger, polygamous family.

The second is the question of the very functioning of such a polygamous marriage and family. In this case, this aspect is even more important than the status and the economic position of the husband in a polygamous marriage union. In the Biblical polygamous family unit and marriage, there was always one woman who was the *femme fatale,* and also the *mater familias*. She was the one who held "three corners of the house." Just like we have alpha-males, this was the alpha-female in the marriage. The Bible text talks about this in a whole slew of examples of marriage unions where the woman assumed an important, in a sort of insidious way, and even a leading role.

Let us repeat this once again, with some passage references. These are only some examples of "polygamous-monogamous" marriages where the *mater familias* has the last word, Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 16:6); David and Bathsheba (1 Kings 1:17; 1:28-30); Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 30:1-2). From these examples we see that the husband was actually monogamously tied to his wife, he was obligated to the one who had assumed the role of the *mater familias*, and in this way he really only belonged to one of his wives.[9]

In the historical legacy of marriage monogamy from the OT days until today it is important to note that the idea of marriage has been linguistically and etymologically determined in the Hebrew original. For a better understanding of Jewish marriage and monogamy, there are two terms and root words which are crucial for this.

One of these terms is, *nisuim* (נישוים) (= wedding), and the other is, *qidushin* (קידושין) (= engagements). The first of the two terms (*nisuim*) comes from the verb root, *nasa* (נשה), which means to bring, to lift, or to carry a burden. The second term (*qidushin*) comes from the word, *qadosh* (קדש) which means, holy, wholesome, separate. Irun Cohen (2017, 46) makes this conclusion:

> "*Kadosh* means 'to be marked, different, consecrated, separated, special.' *Kadosh* is special. "Wedding" is *kidushin*, a mark of an exclusive relationship between a particular man and a particular woman. In Hebrew, we make a

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9   The marriage union between Abraham and Sarah is an illustrative example where Sarah indubitably takes the position of the *mater familias* in the family (cf. Post 16:5-6), which will be repeated throughout the OT narrative.

thing holy by establishing a relationship with it, by giving it a positive distinction in relation to everything else, and by individualizing it with special rights and obligations."

The term, *qadosh* (= holy) in Biblical and Jewish religious and linguistic history has always signified the special nature of mutual relationships, both between individuals in the human community, as well as between the individual and God. In this sense, the marriage union *qadosh* or *qidushin* between one man and one woman. Outside of this kind of relationship and other or different intimate relation between a man and a woman is just a matter of concubinage. [10]

Monotheism, Faithfulness, and Marriage

How are the terms, monotheism, faithfulness, and marriage, connected and how do they relate to each other? Where's the connection between monotheism and faithfulness in relation to the understanding of marriage in the Old Testament? Let us assume that these terms - monotheism and faithfulness – are presented as two lines meeting at the intersection of vertical and horizontal lines. The vertical line represents the relationship between the heaven and earth, between God and man. The horizontal line, on the other hand, represents the "earth-level" relationships, i.e., those between humans. At the intersection of these two lines are the terms, monotheism and faithfulness. On the vertical, they extend in the relationship between God and man, and on the horizontal, from man to his neighbor. Both of these relationships require faithfulness, both towards God and man.

The vertical, ascending line shows man's faithfulness to God whereas the descending line represents God's faithfulness to man, and particularly, toward his elect. In order to be full and effective, this vertical needs to work two-ways, both ascending and descending. God is faithful to man, and man is faithful to God. This descending vertical, i.e., God's faithfulness to man, is expressed in the New Testament through God's salvific outreach. In the OT context, this descending vertical represents the faithfulness of the God of Israel to his elect people. On the horizontal, this is also a two-way and mutual communication of man towards his neighbor, whereas in the marriage union, this refers to the faithfulness of one man to one woman. This intersection of relationships, the vertical and the horizontal, has experienced its disintegration and breakdown in a general disharmony, as seen in Genesis 3, both in man's relationship to God (the vertical),

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10 It should be noted that, in Biblical historical practice, man has been privileged. Adulterous women were tried by stoning, whereas the adulterous man would rarely be subjected to the same treatment.

and in man's relationship to his fellow man (the horizontal) (cf. Gen 3:14-19).[11] We need to look closer into how these two lines and their intersection in monotheism and faithfulness point to the understanding of marriage. We need to have these two things in mind for a better understanding of this parable.

First, in the vertical (relationship between God and man) God was unequivocally faithful and steadfast to his only "chosen one" (i.e., the people He had elected), which points toward a monogamous marital union. Second, in both these lines, both the vertical and the horizontal, man often expresses his unfaithfulness both to God (vertical), as well as his fellow man (horizontal). The divine "chosen one" shows her unfaithfulness in the Israelites' polytheistic idolatrous practices, in earthly realities, and this is unfaithfulness in the marital union as well as the corrupt practices towards their fellow man (cf. Is 1:16-17).

God is Faithful

Faithfulness cannot be divided into parts. If we were to express this in modern ownership terms using geodesic and real-estate language, faithfulness is fully owned; it cannot be divided on multiple "owners." Therefore, two warnings have been issued as the Israelites were preparing to enter the Promised Land. One of the warnings is about not engaging into political and strategic alliances with the peoples they would find there (Deut. 7:2b), as well as not entering marriage unions with them (7:3). This passage (Deut. 7:2-9) ends in such a way as to make it seem like a marriage union. In this sense, the Almighty comes out and is recognized as the one who is "yours" and "faithful":

> "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His loving-kindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deut. 7:9).

After expressing his undivided faithfulness in a reciprocal relationship, there comes an invitation like that of a fiancée: "You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God" (Deut. 18:13, NRSV).

God is a Husband

According to the aforementioned vertical pattern of the relationship between the heaven and earth, this relationship is, in Scripture, regularly compared to and based on the marital and engagement relationship. God is the fiancé or husband to his earthly bride, Israel. Such analogies are especially emphasized and thematically outlined in the prophetic literature. In Hosea (Hos. 1), the heavenly fiancé feels cheated and compares His earthly bride to a harlot, and thus instructs the

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11 The first marriage union (Adam and Eve) experiences the first dispute, which characterizes other OT marriages, that is caused by mutual blame-shifting between partners.

prophet, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry" (Hos. 1:2). However, despite this huge disappointment, the heavenly fiancé is not giving up so he vows, "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in loving-kindness and in compassion" (Hos. 2:19). Unlike such a disappointing experience with Hosea, the prophet Isaiah shows God as a husband who is consoling a disgraced and deserted woman, i.e., widow:

> "Fear not, for you will not be put to shame; and do not feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; but you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the Lord of hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 54:4-5).

The parable of the deserted woman, her widowed life and the new marriage, where the Almighty takes the woman as her new husband, requires further analysis. In this marriage parable, the "husband" had patriarchal authority. However, in the same passage and in the same person of the husband also emerges the character of the Redeemer. What is intriguing in this metaphor is the fact that the Redeemer does not have the same authority as the Husband, but he does have the obligation to care and provide for the deserted woman. To the heavenly "husband," the bride is Israel; in the NT text, Christ is the fiancé who has an earthly bride, the Church (John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 18:23; Rev. 21:9). In both cases, marriage and the marriage union are a reflection of both lines of relationships, both the vertical (heaven-earth), and the horizontal (earth-earth). In both cases, the common denominator is monogamy.

God is a Redeemer

The monotheist context of God's faithfulness (Husband and Redeemer) is particularly emphasized in the first commandment of the Decalogue. Husband and Redeemer from Isa. 54:5 in the first commandment of the Decalogue is again defined as the Redeemer. Here, He is the one who "who brought (Israel) out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deut. 5:6). In such a husband-redeemer tone, this commandment from the Decalogue proceeds in a monotheistic key, which shares the common denominator in the form of a comparison with the marriage union, and therefore: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (5:7). Here, the phrase "gods" can be easily replaced with the word "husbands." Significantly, the marriage language continues. The God of Israel, is a "jealous God" (אל קנא) (Deut. 5:9). Despite this fact and the jealousy, this Husband's and Redeemer's jealousy is not expressed through pathological aggression or vindictiveness. In fact, it is seen in the love for His people and the land in which they dwell. Namely, "the Lord will be zealous for His land and will have pity on His

people" (Joel 2:18) (ויקנא יהוה לארצו).[12]

It all points to the conclusion that, even in the OT, marriage is based on a monogamous union that is based on the undivided and firm faithfulness between husband and wife - just as it is expressed in the monotheistic pattern of faithfulness of the one true God towards his people; his chosen one.

Marriage in the Context of Bible Narrative

What did God Join Together?

In the OT and NT Biblical narrative and context, marriage is sacramental in nature and is considered to be a union where man and woman have been divinely joined together (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:6), which is the "visible sign of God's invisible divine mercy." This means that the establishment of the marriage union is ascribed to the consent between the spouses, but under the divine seal of approval. Here is how the Bible text defines it: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Mt. 19:6). The problematics of marriage, shall we call it, *the book of marriage* from the Judeo-Christian angle, seems to be a closed one.[13] If we follow the Bible text carefully, it seems undoubtable that marriage is a joined union between a man and a woman.

On the other hand, there are some open issues as well, which make it seem like the book may be open just a little bit. This pertains particularly to the issue of marriage and divorce.

Besides being doctrinally determined, getting married and getting divorced are also a cultural phenomenon. If the Almighty is the one who joins people in the marriage union, it becomes evident in times of cultural and religious turmoil that God was not exactly always the one who had "joined" some people in marriage. For example, it is not easy to conclude from the Biblical narrative that the marriage between David and Bathsheba was exactly a marriage joined by God, having in mind the way this marriage union came about. Also, what do we say to the people in all those prearranged marriages, who have maybe been joined without God necessarily joining them? Later on during history, the Church took upon itself the divine jurisdiction of marrying people and divorcing them. So where is the jurisdiction for the responsibility of the consequences of marrying people or divorcing them?

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12 Cf. Jas 4:5, *Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?"*

13 Judaistic views on marriage (OT), the Christian view (OT), as well as Islam (Quran), usually agree regarding the nature of the marriage union as being divinely appointed and unbreakable.

The Vocabulary of Marriage

The thing that makes OT accounts even more intriguing is the marriage vocabulary in the original Hebrew. In those passages, we cannot even find the noun or pronoun forms of "marriage" or "marital."[14] The closest thing to the word "marriage," is found in Genesis 34, in relation to the account regarding the incident which happened to Jacob's daughter, Dinah.[15] Shechem the Hivite raped Dinah, which caused a great altercation and a potentially serious conflict between the Israelites and the Hivites. In order to calm things down, Hamor the father of Shechem suggests the following,

> "But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. *Befriend us* (התחתנו); give your daughters to us and take our daughters for yourselves (Gen 34:8-9, *italic part paraphrased*)"

The word התחתנו (*hithatenu*) translated here as "befriend us" (paraphrase), is translated in most English versions as, "make marriages with us" (NRS, RSV). This construct, התחתנו, comes from the noun, חתן (= wife's father; father-in-law), appears in this way and in this form (*hitpael - imperative*) only in this passage. Besides the formal marriage union, the erotic part is also ascribed to marriage, and we can see that in the Song of Solomon.[16] In that book, which is a very particular one due to it being erotically charged, we find the word "wedding," which comes from the same root, חתן. Wedding day is, יום חתנה (*yom hatanah*) (Song 3:11):

> "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding (חתנה יום), and on the day of his gladness of heart" (3:11).[17]

Aside from this noun root, חתן, which points to the marriage union, the only other form which implies a marriage union comes from the gerund, בעל (*ba'al*) (= to lord over; master). *Ba'al* is the one who is the "master" of his home or his pro-

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14 Apart from SS 3:11 in the noun, חתנה (wedding). This noun (חתנה) is a deverbed verb, חתן, to be or to become the daughter's husband (= son-in-law), or, to "be the wife's father." Regarding denominatives and deverbals cf. Jouon 1993, 34c.

15 Dinah was Jacob's daughter born to him by Leah (Gen 34:1). Even though Jacob was throughly in love with Laban's younger daughter Rachel, Laban had tricked Jacob into marrying Leah (Gen 29:21-26) instead of Rachel. 16 NAB (New American Bible) translates this as: *'Intermarry with us'*.

16 In truth, eroticism and the erotic charge in the Bible narrative are not ascribed exclusively to marriage and the marital union.

17 This is also the only appearance of the noun, חתנה (= wedding). For the etymology of this unique appearance of חתנה see Keil and Delitzsch 1983, 6:69.

perty (cf. Gen. 31:35), which is the vocabulary of submission. In fear for his own life, Jacob will call his brother Esau, "my lord" (Gen. 32:5; Gen. 33:14).[18] So in Isaiah 54:1, a woman who is married is simply called, a married woman (בעולה) (b^eulah), i.e., the one who is under "lordship" of her husband.[19]

MARITAL DISPUTES

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When it comes to marital disputes, their causes and consequences, we are massively and often reminded of the realities of life by the proverbial Biblical motto: "there is nothing new under the sun," as well as "what has been shall be again." Many Biblical accounts of family life and marriage unions revive for us our own modern reality, in a slightly ruthless way. When it comes to family and marital disputes, ancient Biblical times are almost identical to our times. The patterns of behavior in marital disputes have already been quite well known and current. These patterns can be summarized according to the following patterns of behavior between marriage partners:

–   shifting the blame on the other spouse ("it was not me, but...")
–   jealous outbursts ("where have you been?")
–   children as the cause of marital problems ("she/he cannot ever amount to anything")
–   husband's of wife's infertility ("we are on our own")
–   the macho man and the good wife ("wise wife and stupid husband")

All this and more can be found both in Biblical accounts and the marriage accounts of today. We have selected a number of typical Bible accounts relating to marital disputes, which have left a deep trace in the Bible narrative and in history. Many of these passages are actually etiological in nature, which is to say that the stories have been told in order to describe the future consequences.

We have chosen some Biblical married couples with a sort of "motto" for the type of conflicts which occurred in their marriages: Adam and Eve ("it was not me"); Sarah and Abraham ("we are on our own"); Isaac and Rebecca ("big kids,

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18   As the synonymous form of בעל (master) we also have אדון (sir/lord).

19   The etimology of the word, marriage, in ivrit (= the modern Hebrew language of the state of Israel today) is very interesting, where the terms, 'marriage', 'marital', 'married' etc., etymologically come from the verb, נשח (nasa) (= to lift a burden, to carry a load). Therefore, we have, 'to take a wife' (נשוי) or, 'to be given into marriage' (נשואה), 'the married ones' (נשואים).

big problems"); Rachel and Jacob ("I have had it"); Nabal and Abigail ("the beauty and the fool").

Adam and Eve: "It was not me, it was her/him"

One of the most common causes of marital disputes is blame-shifting between the spouses. It usually boils down to the common denominator in the pattern of responsibility: "it was not me, it's her/him…" The first marital dispute recorded in the Bible text is the one between Adam and Eve. Their marital bliss culminated in a very unusual mutual blame-shifting, and an even more unusual judgement of the heavenly arbiter in this dispute.

In the center of this dispute we see an important Biblical motif, which has caused a marital dispute in this case. It's the eternal motif of lust or desire; in the center of which we always find that which is "a delight to the eyes" (Gen. 3:6). Both in Gen. 3 and in Gen. 6, the thing that is a "delight to the eyes" is the desire, the object to be grabbed. Just like in all stories about lust, we have the verb, לקח (*laqah*) (= to take, to make one's own), which often appears in the context of fleshly desires or acts. After the desires or the lusts which boil in a man's mind, what follows is the action, the outstretched hand, reaching out, and taking. Indicative of this is the passage in Gen. 6:2 from the account of the so-called "sons of God," whoever they are. The passage shows and unites these two inseparable components of lust.

First, the act is preceded by the lust of the eye, or in common vernacular, when one has one's eye out for something. Following is the act, which is the outstretched hand and acquiring the object of lust; again in vernacular, it is "self-service." When the first married couple was supposed to face the consequences of this act, which went against God's instruction (Gen. 2:16-17), what followed were disputes and blame-shifting between the first married couple and God the Creator.

The wife (Eve) tries to justify herself and shifts the blame on the beast, which was "more cunning than all other beasts: 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate'" (Gen. 3:13). In this blame-shifting in the style of Pilate's washing of the "innocent" hands, the husband (Adam) musters the courage to shift the blame on the Creator Himself, and he justifies his [ir]responsibility by saying: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12).

The result of this first marital dispute was described in the words of the heavenly arbiter, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed" (Gen 3:15). This etiological account points to the lasting consequences and the overall disharmony which dominated the foundations of a marital dispute, along with refusing to accept responsibility. A question arises for another discussion: should not have the fateful "tree of knowledge" been fenced in with a barbed-wire fence?

Sarah and Abraham: "The Times of Laughter Have Passed"

Some idyllic marriage stories begin with harmonious and relaxed relationships, which are easily complicated through some incidental event or rash decisions. A slightly cynical Bible writer says that there is a time for everything: "A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Eccl. 3:4). Abraham and Sara may not have danced all that much, but they did have some quite serious concerns regarding their posterity, since Sarah was, (a) barren, and (b) she has already been in her old age (Gen. 16:2). However, in comes the divine intervention and the promise of Sarah's pregnancy, which makes her scoff cynically (Gen. 18:12).

Following the account from Gen 16, after all the frustrations caused by her barrenness, Sarah makes a decision and takes responsibility. If we carefully follow the passages which talk about their marriage stories, Sarah was evidently the *mater familias* (see above: Monogamy and Polygamy). Through this decision, Sarah sends her husband Abraham to her maid-servant Hagar: "Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her" (Gen. 16:2); and without a second thought, an objection, or suggestion, Abraham obeyed her (Gen. 16:2c). The very fact that Hagar conceived (16:4b) became the cause of jealous marital disputes between Sarah and Abraham. Sarah comes down on her husband by saying, "May the wrong done me be upon you" (16:5), but what is the logic behind this? The marital dispute keeps culminating when Sarah starts calling upon the name of God: "May the Lord judge between you and me" (Gen. 16:5c). In the given situation, where Hagar was looking down on her with scorn, Sarah demands that her husband protects her (cf. von Rad 1961, 193). When Abraham realized how far this family conflict has gone, he distanced himself from Hagar by saying this to his wife Sarah: "Behold, your maid is in your power"; (Gen. 16:6), i.e., do with her as you please. Although, it should be noted that Abraham was not a least bit pleased when his wife Sarah drove away Hagar and their (?) son Ishmael (cf. Gen. 21:11). This marital and family incident confirms once again that the Old Testament polygamy is a relative term. This marriage union and Sarah's role illustrate the fact that marriage and the marital union were essentially monogamous in nature.

Isaac and Rebecca: "Big Kids, Big Problems"

One of the causes of marital and family tensions are often children, just like the folk proverb says, "small kids, small problems; big kids, big problems." In challenges involving the "big kids," Biblical family stories are intriguing and educational. They point to the situations when "big kids" are allowed to do whatever they please, so they turned into a cause of many problems, and not just for their parents and family. A large number of Biblical dignitaries (Eli, Samuel, David)

have not raised their sons well (cf. 1 Sam. 3:13; 1 Kings 16). Some of them have even spoiled their sons so much, which ultimately backfired on them, that they became a threat to national security. This is what the Bible says about David's son Adonijah, who intended to appoint himself as king:

> "Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king.' So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him. His father had never crossed him at any time by asking, 'Why have you done so?' And he was also a very handsome man, and he was born after Absalom" (1 Kings 1:5-6).

As a result of such upbringing, Adonijah then becomes the cause of marital disputes. And as his father lay on his death bed (1 Kings 1:4-5), Adonijah narcissistically prepares himself to become the future king.[20]

The children are not born in *vacuuo*; they come into the world as innocent and pure beings, entering the existing context of their paternal and family home. Even if the father and mother were ideal parents, the family circle is broader than the family home. We see an illustrative example of this in Isaac being married into the family of Rebecca and her brother Laban, which turned out to be a dysfunctional family. This will become especially evident in the life of Rebecca's son Jacob, who will be mercilessly abused and cheated by his mother's brother Laban.

In the example of the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca, the maxim, "big kids, big problems," proved to be true in every respect. Some of the actions of their son Esau become the source of aggravation for his mother and father, and they cause disruption in the family. If we put aside the etiological and theological aspects of this Biblical account for a moment and if we focus only on the family circumstances, we can see marital and family tensions. In the prenatal phases and during pregnancy problems, Rebecca sensed there would be problems in the future, so she cries out: "If it is so, why then am I this way" (Gen. 25:22)? She was sensing even then that the relationship between her twin sons will be difficult, problematic, and riddled with conflict in life, since the children "struggled together within her" (25:22). So the future relationships between these twin brothers will have a significant impact on the relationships in their parents' marriage.

Von Rad (1961, 265) correctly notices that the story surrounding this family is completely realistic, with no idealization of either Jacob or Esau. Even though the account is etiological in nature and it points to the division in the national history, the question is if the parents were aware of this. In this aspect of differences between Jacob and Esau, von Rad (1961, 265) makes an interesting comment

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20 *"So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him."* (1 Kings 1:5)

regarding certain details in the Biblical description of these two brothers (Gen. 25:24-28).[21] The fact that the life paths of their sons Jacob and Esau took completely different directions added even more tension in Isaac's and Rachel's marriage. After a serious conflict between their sons, Esau vowed a blood vengeance on his brother Jacob (Gen. 27:41). All these things brought even more pressure on their parents' relationship. Out of spite towards his parents and in a situation in which he felt cheated, the vindictive Esau took Hittite women for himself, "When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite" (Gen. 26:34).[22] This, as witnessed by the Bible text, became the source of aggravation between Isaac and Rebecca (cf. Gen. 26:35).

Rachel and Jacob: "I have had it"

After mutual blame shifting (Adam and Eve), jealous outbursts (Sarah and Abraham), and a dysfunctional family (Isaac and Rebecca), marital disputes go back to the account of the children in the marriage of Jacob and Rachel; the same Jacob who was raised in a dysfunctional family of his parents (Isaac and Rebecca) and his mother's brother Laban. The story of the marriage of Rachel and Jacob is another classic Genesis story, with the additional tension regarding the pressing need to obtain an heir. Of course, it needs to be a son since a female child does not count as heir.[23] In such a constellation and the frustration due to the inability to become pregnant, Rachel has a knee-jerk reaction towards her husband Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die (מתה אנכי)" (Gen 30:1), and in the most literal sense this translates as, "Give me children! Otherwise, I'm dead."

Here's Jacob's reaction, which is in line with the understanding of the day that the woman's infertility is actually some sort of divine retribution, "Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb'?" (Gen. 30:2).[24] It is possible that Rachel had been giving her husband Jacob indirect hints about offering him his maid Bilhah as concubine, which Jacob obviously did not understand so she had to explain it to him more clearly, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her (אליה

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21 „The comic and ridiculous characteristics are emphasized. That is certainly true of the dark-skinned Esau (the Palestinians noticed the much darker color of the eastern and southern inhabitants of the desert), and besides, the child was so hairy that he seemed to have been given a fur coat by nature."

22 The Hittites are an intriguing ethnic group, originating from the area of Anatolia (a region in modern Turkey).

23 At the same time, in Jewish history until this very day the Jewish ethnicity is transferred through the mother, and not the father.

24 The situation with Rachel and Jacob is very similar to that of Sarah and Abraham.

בא) that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children" (30:3).[25]

Like with Sarah and Abraham, this is another one of those most ancient and most primitive cases of surrogate motherhood. Namely, Sarah also instructed her husband to "go in" to her maid Hagar and concluded, "perhaps I will obtain children through her (in this way)." In an almost identical manner, Rachel offers a similar solution of surrogate motherhood to Jacob: her maid servant Bilhah would conceive with her husband Jacob, Bilhah would, in Rachel's words, "may bear on my knees" (30:3b).

Nabal and Abigail: "The Beauty and the Fool"

The story of Nabal's and Abigail's marriage and of their marital discord is different from all other marriage stories. The marriage stories we have considered and analyzed thus far have usually focused on the mutual blame shifting between the partners (Adam and Eve), the problem of marital infertility (Sarah and Abraham; Rachel and Jacob), or the marital problems caused by children (Isaac and Rebecca).

With Nabal and Abigail we're faced with a new challenge. This is a married couple that we could easily find counterparts for in our age. Here we have an extremely wealthy but arrogant husband (Nabal) and the wise wife (Abigail).[26] In our world, Nabal would probably be one of the macho men and tycoons, while Abigail would be one of attractive and wise women. Abigail is the wife of the rich Carmelite man, Nabal.[27] There is an unavoidable pun in the names of these people, both etymologically and onomastically; the name Nabal (= stupid) (cf. Beck 1962), while Abigail (= my father's joy) (cf. Dalglish 1962). As in many other situations with onomastics and toponymics, the names are very descriptive and they sometimes do not correspond with real-life situations. Namely, it is not very likely that parents would name their son, Nabal ("Stupid" or "Dumb-bell"), which corresponds with the name, Nabal. And yet, when Nabal's wife met David, she has no hang-ups when it comes to her husband's name and nature: "Please do not let my lord pay attention to this [b]worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him" (1 Sam. 25:25).

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25 Once again, this situation points to our previous presumption that in the OT, despite the polygamous practice, the marriages were still essentially monogamous. We've even pointed this out in several Biblical examples; in the analyzed Biblical marriages, the *mater familias* or, to use a modern term, 'the alfa female', was very much present even in those Biblical days.

26 '..now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite' (1 Sam 25:3).

27 Abigail - cf. Beck 1962; Nabal - cf. Dalglish 1962.

In his foolishness, Nabal was an arrogant and violent man. The arrogance in his characters is intricately tied to his wealth. In this account, David and his entourage are traveling through the desert and they are hungry, and when they heard about Nabal and his abundance, they merely asked for at least something for the starved group to eat ("Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David." 1 Sam. 25:8). Nabal resolutely refuses to provide any help. David and part of his group (1 Sam. 25:13) are getting prepared to confront Nabal. The tense situation is rescued by Nabal's wife Abigail who, without her husband knowing it, prepared some food for David and his group (1 Sam. 25:18). It is evident that there is no love, harmony, nor romance in Nabal's and Abigail's marriage. Furthermore, due to this unhappy marriage it seems that in the episodes which introduced David and his group in the middle of this not very happy marriage, we can see some hints of a romantic relationship between David and Abigail (cf. 1 Sam. 25:23-31). The story is concluded when, after a drunken feast, the arrogant Nabal has a heart attack and dies. He was so drunk and blinded – "And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk" (1 Sam. 25:36) that his wife Abigail had to explain to him in the morning everything that had been happening during the night. Basically, David had been preparing to take Nabal's life during that feast and to destroy all of his property, but Abigail talked him out of it: "As the Lord God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light as much as one male" (1 Sam. 25:34).

In the morning, after Nabal sobered up and heard the entire account of the night's events from his wife, his heart betrayed him, "and his heart died within him so that he became as a stone" (25:37). After this heart attack, Nabal continued to live for a while "and he died" (1 Sam. 25:38). Right after Nabal's death, David asked Abigail to be his wife (1 Sam. 25:39). It seems that the romance between David and Abigail had begun while her husband Nabal was still alive, and he was constantly undermining his marriage and marital union with his arrogant machismo attitude.

Conclusion

By analyzing the selected Biblical OT passages, we come to the following conclusions. Despite the prevailing opinion that Old Testament marriages were mostly polygamous, it turns out that marriage and marital union in the OT were not only meant to be monogamous, but it appears to be such in the most practical terms. Even if it is polygamous in its structure, a large majority of polygamous marriages have a *mater familias*, or the "alpha female," who is really running the marriage and the family. We have pointed this out specifically and textually in the examples of marital unions that we have analyzed.

In our analysis of marital disputes, we have established the following patterns which have led to conflicts in marriage. These include: mutual blame shifting (Adam and Eve), jealousy (Sarah and Abraham), problems with children (Isaac and Rebeccah), infertility (Rachel and Jacob) and male arrogance (Nabal and Abigail).

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