

MARRIAGE

The union of a man and a woman as husband and wife, which becomes the foundation for a home and family.

Origin of Marriage. Marriage was instituted by God when He declared, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Gen 2:18). So God fashioned woman and brought her to man. On seeing the woman, Adam exclaimed, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen 2:23). This passage also emphasizes the truth that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). This suggests that God's ideal is for a man to be the husband of one wife and for the marriage to be permanent.

Legislation. God's desire for His people was that they marry within the body of believers. The Mosaic Law clearly stated that an Israelite was never to marry a Canaanite. The Israelite would be constantly tempted to embrace the spouse's god as well (Ex 34:10-17; Deut 7:3-4). Likewise, the apostle Paul commanded the members of the church at Corinth, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14).

Marriages between Israelites were directed by law, and all incestuous relationships were outlawed (Lev 18:6-8; 20:19-21). In addition, priests were forbidden to marry prostitutes and divorced women (Lev 21:7,13-14). Daughters who inherited their father's possessions had to marry within their tribe or lose their inheritance (Num 27:8; 36:2-4).

Choosing the Bride. In Old Testament times, the parents chose the mate for their son. The primary reason for this was that the bride became part of the clan. Although they were married and became "one flesh," the couple remained under the authority of the bridegroom's father. The parents chose someone who would best fit into their clan and work harmoniously with her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law.

Sometimes the parents consulted with their children to see if they approved of the choice of mates being made for them. For example, Rebekah was asked if she wanted to marry Isaac (Gen 24:58). Samson demanded that a certain girl be acquired for him. Although his parents protested, they completed the marriage contract for Samson (Judg 14:1-4). Frequently people married at a young age, a fact which made the parents' choice a practical matter. By New Testament times, the Jewish leaders had decided to establish minimum ages for which a marriage contract could be drawn up. The age was set at 13 for boys and 12 for girls.

Even if the young wife lost her husband in war or accident, she remained within the clan and was wed to her brother-in-law or next of kin. This arrangement is known as **LEVIRATE MARRIAGE**. It is the basis for the story of Ruth and Boaz (Deut 25:5-10; Ruth 3:13; 4:1-12).

Concept of Love. Although romance before marriage was not unknown in Old Testament times, it played a minor role in the life of teenagers of that era. They did not marry the person they loved; they loved the mate they married. Love began at marriage. When Isaac married Rebekah, the Bible records that "she became his wife, and he loved her" (Gen 24:67).

Marriage Customs. A number of customs and steps were involved in finalizing a marriage in Old Testament times. The first was agreeing on a price to be given to the

father of the girl. The payment was compensation for the loss of a worker. The sum was mutually agreed upon (Gen 34:12; Ex 22:16-17). It could consist of services instead of money. For example, Jacob agreed to work for seven years for Rachel (Gen 29:18-20). The giving and receiving of money was probably accompanied by a written agreement. After this agreement was made, the couple was considered engaged.

In biblical times, a betrothal for marriage was a binding agreement that set the young woman apart for the young man. The agreement was voided only by death or divorce; one could not get out of the betrothal in any other way. When Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant, he did not want to make a "public example" of her; instead, he decided to divorce her secretly. However, he did not carry out the divorce, because an angel of the Lord convinced him that the baby to be born to Mary would be the Son of God (Matt 1:18-25).

During the engagement period, the bridegroom had certain privileges. If war was declared, he was exempt from military duty (Deut 20:7). He also knew that his bride-to-be was protected by Mosaic Law. If another man raped her, the act was treated as adultery; and the offender was punished accordingly (Deut 22:23-27). This was considered a more serious crime than the rape of a girl not yet betrothed (Deut 22:28-29). The length of engagement varied. Sometimes the couple was married the same day they were engaged. Usually, however, a period of time elapsed between the betrothal and the marriage ceremony. During this time the young man prepared a place in his father's house for his bride, while the bride prepared herself for married life.

On the day of the wedding, the groom and his friends dressed in their finest clothes and went to the home of the bride. Together the couple went back to the groom's house. Their friends sang and danced their way back to his house.

Once at the groom's house, the couple was ushered into a bridal chamber. The marriage was consummated through sexual union as the guests waited outside. Once that fact was announced, the wedding festivities continued, with guests dropping by for the wedding feast. Usually the wedding party lasted for a week.

New Testament Teaching about Marriage. The New Testament does not contradict the teachings about marriage in the Old Testament. Most marriage teaching in the New Testament comes from Jesus and the apostle Paul.

Jesus' first miracle occurred in Cana in Galilee when He and His disciples were attending a wedding (John 2:1-11). Our Lord gave His blessing and sanction to the institution of marriage.

On another occasion, when Jesus was asked about marriage and divorce, He quoted two passages from Genesis. "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Gen 1:27; 2:24; 5:2; Matt 19:4-6). He taught that marriage was the joining together of two people so they become "one flesh." Not only did God acknowledge the marriage; He also joined the couple.

The church at Corinth struggled over a number of issues, including the proper view of marriage. In response to their questions, Paul gave an answer about marriage. From His answer, it seems that three faulty ideas about marriage were prominent among some believers in the church. The first was that marriage was absolutely necessary in order to

be a Christian; another was that celibacy was superior to marriage; the third was that when a person became a Christian, all existing relationships such as marriage were dissolved. When chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians is read with that as background, the following teaching emerges.

First, Paul stated that celibacy is an acceptable lifestyle for a Christian, not all people need to marry. In fact, Paul declared that he himself preferred not to marry. However, the single life can be lived for God's glory only if God has given the gift of singlehood. If one does not have that gift, he should marry. And Paul expected most people to marry.

Next, Paul spoke to the problem faced by a Christian believer whose spouse does not believe. He reasoned that if the unbelieving partner is willing to live with the Christian, then the Christian should not dissolve the marriage. Remaining with the unbelieving partner could result in his or her salvation (1 Cor 7:14).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul showed how a marriage relationship can best function. First, he said, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph 5:22). The model for the wife's submission is the church, which is subject to Christ (Eph 5:24). Second, husbands are to love their wives. The role that the husband plays is outlined by Jesus Christ, who loved His bride, the church, so much that He died for her (Eph 5:25).