

G O D,
M A R R I A G E,
AND F A M I L Y



Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation

SECOND EDITION

ANDREAS J. KÖSTENBERGER
WITH DAVID W. JONES

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God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation, Second Edition

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Five years have passed since the publication of *God, Marriage, and Family*. We are so grateful for the way the Lord has chosen to use this volume for his glory. We attribute the overwhelmingly positive response to our book to the fact that our primary purpose has been, as the subtitle suggests, to return to the biblical foundation of marriage and family in God's Word, and we are convinced that it is this desire to learn from our Creator and Redeemer what is God's plan for marriage and the family that our Lord chose to honor. By way of brief summary, the need for the publication of a second edition so soon after the first arose on account of the following factors.

First, we wanted to incorporate the many constructive suggestions for additions we received from a variety of sources, including reviewers, students, and other readers. Second, a steady stream of publications on marriage and the family has continued to appear, and we wanted to keep our volume up to date. Third, controversy erupted on several of the topics addressed in our book, such as divorce and remarriage and singleness. This, too, called for an update. Fourth, there were certain smaller but important topics we did not explicitly or extensively address in the first edition, such as parenting teens, that upon further reflection seemed to merit more extended treatment, and we have added such in the second edition.

In addition, the last few years witnessed the growth of a movement related to marriage and the family sometimes called the "family-integrated church approach" that requires evaluation from a biblical and theological perspective. Admittedly, adjudicating the strengths and weaknesses of any new movement such as this is not an easy task, in part because the movement is anything but monolithic and also because any such assessment calls for the application of biblical principles and the judicious evaluation of a variety of hermeneutical, theological, and cultural factors. Nevertheless, we felt that we should attempt such an assessment,

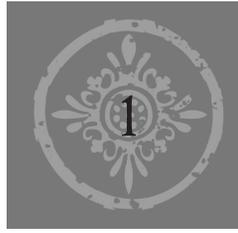
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however preliminary, in order to provide some much-needed guidance in this eminently vital area of church life.

For ease of reference, then, here is a summary of the new features in the second edition of *God, Marriage, and Family*:

- A new chapter on marriage, family, and the church (including an assessment of the “family-integrated church approach”).
- A summary of recent debates on physical discipline of children, singleness, homosexuality, and divorce and remarriage.
- New sections on the theology of sex and parenting teens.
- A new streamlined format for the chapter on divorce and remarriage, where emphasis is placed upon the divine design of the permanence of marriage and more technical material was put in an appendix.
- Incorporation of discussion of important recent articles and monographs on marriage and the family, such as Christopher Ash’s *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* and Barry Danylak’s *A Biblical Theology of Singleness*.
- Updated bibliographies and endnote references.
- Many other smaller adjustments in response to reviewer comments, student feedback, and other constructive criticisms we received subsequent to the publication of the first edition.

It is our hope that with these additions and improvements, *God, Marriage, and Family* will continue to serve readers who are willing to return to the biblical foundation, persuaded, as we are, that marriage and the family are not man’s idea but God’s and that for this reason those who conduct their marriages and families without reference to the Instructor’s Manual do so at their own peril and at the loss of the glory of God. “Now to him—the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named—who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:14, 20–21).



THE CURRENT CULTURAL CRISIS:

Rebuilding the Foundation

For the first time in its history, Western civilization is confronted with the need to *define* the meaning of the terms *marriage* and *family*. What until now has been considered a “normal” family, made up of a father, a mother, and a number of children, has in recent years increasingly begun to be viewed as one among several options, which can no longer claim to be the only or even superior form of ordering human relationships. The Judeo-Christian view of marriage and the family with its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures has to a significant extent been replaced with a set of values that prizes human rights, self-fulfillment, and pragmatic utility on an individual or societal level. It can rightly be said that marriage and the family are institutions under siege in our world today, and that with marriage and the family, our very civilization is in crisis.

The current cultural crisis, however, is merely symptomatic of a deep-seated *spiritual* crisis that continues to gnaw at the foundations of our once-shared societal values. If God the creator in fact, as the Bible teaches, instituted marriage and the family, and if there is an evil being called Satan who wages war against God’s creative purposes in this world, it should come as no surprise that the divine foundation of these institutions has come under massive attack in recent years. Ultimately, we human beings, whether we realize it or not, are involved in a cosmic spiritual conflict that pits God against Satan, with marriage and the family serving as a key arena in which spiritual and cultural battles are fought. If, then, the

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cultural crisis is symptomatic of an underlying *spiritual* crisis, the solution likewise must be spiritual, not merely cultural.

In *God, Marriage, and Family*, we hope to point the way to this spiritual solution: a return to, and rebuilding of, the biblical foundation of marriage and the family. God's Word is not dependent on man's approval, and the Scriptures are not silent regarding the vital issues facing men and women and families today. In each of the important areas related to marriage and the family, the Bible offers satisfying instructions and wholesome remedies to the maladies afflicting our culture. The Scriptures record the *divine institution* of marriage and present a *Christian theology* of marriage and parenting. They offer insight for decision making regarding abortion, contraception, infertility, and adoption. They offer helpful guidance for those who are single or unmarried and address the major threats to marriage and the family: homosexuality and divorce.

THE CURRENT CONFUSION OVER MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Measured against the biblical teaching on marriage and the family, it seems undeniable that Western culture is decaying. In fact, the past few decades have witnessed nothing less than a major paradigm shift with regard to marriage and the family. The West's Judeo-Christian heritage and foundation have largely been supplanted by a *libertarian ideology* that elevates human freedom and self-determination as the supreme principles for human relationships. In their confusion, many hail the decline of the biblical-traditional model of marriage and the family and its replacement by new competing moralities as major progress. Yet the following list of adverse effects of unbiblical views of marriage and the family upon society demonstrates that replacing the biblical-traditional model of marriage and the family with more "progressive" ones is detrimental even for those who do not view the Bible as authoritative.

One of the negative consequences of the erosion of the biblical-traditional model are skyrocketing *divorce* rates. However, the costs of divorce are troubling, not only for the people involved—especially children—but also for society at large. While children may not show ill effects of the trauma of divorce in the short run, serious negative long-term consequences have been well documented. *Sex outside of marriage*, because it does not occur within the secure environment of an exclusive lifetime commitment, also exerts a heavy price from those who engage in

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adulterous or otherwise illicit sexual relationships. Teenage pregnancies and abortion are the most glaring examples. While pleasurable in the short run, sex outside of marriage takes a heavy toll both psychologically and spiritually and contributes to the overall insecurity and stress causing the destabilization of our cultural foundation. *Homosexuality* deprives children in households run by same-sex partners of primary role models of both sexes and is unable to fulfill the procreative purposes God intended for the marriage union. *Gender-role confusion*, too, is an increasingly serious issue; many men and women have lost the concept of what it means to be masculine or feminine. This results in a loss of the complete identity of being human as God created us, male and female. Our sex does not merely determine the form of our sex organs but is an integral part of our entire being.

These few examples illustrate the disturbing fact that the price exacted by the world as a result of its abandonment of the biblical foundations for marriage and the family is severe indeed. An integrative, biblical treatment of marriage and the family is essential to clear up moral confusion and to firm up convictions that, if acted upon, have the potential of returning the church and culture back to God's intentions for marriages and families.

THE LACK OF BIBLICAL, INTEGRATIVE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE ON MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

It is not only the world that is suffering the consequences of neglecting the Creator's purposes for marriage and the family. The church, too, having lowered itself to the standard of the world in many ways, has become a part of the problem and is not offering the solutions the world needs—not that Christians are unaware of their need to be educated about God's plan for marriage and the family. An abundance of resources and activities is available. There are specialized ministries and parachurch organizations. There are marriage seminars and retreats. There are books on marriage and the family, as well as magazines, video productions, Bible studies, and official statements focusing on marriage and the family. Yet for all the church is doing in this area, the fact remains that in the end there is shockingly little difference between the world and the church. Why is this the case? We believe the reason why all the above-mentioned efforts to build strong Christian marriages and families are ineffective to such a significant extent is found, at least in part, in the *lack of commitment to*

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seriously engage the Bible as a whole. The result is that much of the available Christian literature on the subject is seriously imbalanced.

Anyone stepping into a Christian or general bookstore will soon discover that while there is a plethora of books available on individual topics, such as marriage, singleness, divorce and remarriage, and homosexuality, there is *very little material* that explores on a deeper, more thoroughgoing level the entire fabric of God's purposes for human relationships. Though there is a place for books focused narrowly on one given topic to address certain specific needs, it is only when we see how the Bible's teaching on human relationships *coheres* and finds its common source in the Creator and his wise and beneficial purposes for men and women that we will have the insight and the strength to rise above our natural limitations and to embrace God's plan for human relationships in their fullness and completeness.

When a couple struggles in their marriage, they often find it helpful to focus on the more superficial remedies, such as improving their communication skills, enriching their sex life, learning better how to meet each other's needs, or similar techniques. Yet often the true cause for marital problems lies deeper. What does it mean for a man to leave his father and mother and to cleave to his wife? What does it mean for a husband and a wife to become "one flesh"? How can they be naked and not ashamed? How can it be that, once married, husband and wife are "no longer two, but one," as Jesus taught, because it is *God* who joined them together? How does sin twist and distort the roles of husband and wife, parent and child? Only if we are seeking to answer some of these deeper, underlying questions will we be adequately equipped to deal with specific challenges we face in our relationships with one another.

Yet the fact remains that many, if not most, of the plethora of popular books written on marriage and the family are theologically weak and not fully adequate in their application of sound principles of biblical interpretation. Many of these authors have PhDs in counseling or psychology but their formal training in the study of Scripture is lacking. Theological and hermeneutical naïveté gives birth to superficial diagnoses, which in turn issue in superficial remedies. It seems that the dynamics and effects of sin are poorly understood in our day. The result is that many Christian self-help books owe more to secular culture than a thoroughgoing Christian worldview. Christian, biblical counselors who take Scripture seriously and believe that diagnoses and remedies must be based on a theologically and hermeneutically accurate understanding

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of the biblical teaching on marriage and the family find this unhelpful if not positively misleading.

For this reason there remains a need for a volume that does not treat issues related to marriage and the family in isolation from one another but that shows how human fulfillment in these relationships is rooted in the divine revelation found exclusively and sufficiently in Scripture.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS BOOK: BIBLICAL AND INTEGRATIVE

The authors of the present volume believe that a biblical and integrative approach most adequately represents the Bible's teaching on marriage and the family. Within the limited scope of this work, we will attempt to sketch out the contours of a "*biblical theology* of marriage and the family," that is, a presentation of what the Bible *itself* has to say on these vital topics. While we certainly do not claim to have the final word on every issue or to be infallible interpreters of the sacred Word, what we are after is decidedly *not* what *we* think marriage or family should be, based on our own preconceived notions, preferences, or traditional values, but what we believe *Scripture itself* tells us about these institutions. This, of course, requires a humble, submissive stance toward Scripture rather than one that asserts one's own independence from the will of the Creator and insists on inventing one's own rules of conduct.

In such a spirit, and placing ourselves consciously *under*, rather than *above*, Scripture, we will seek to determine in the following chapters what the Bible teaches on the various components of human relationships in an *integrative* manner: the nature of, and special issues related to, marriage and the family, childrearing, singleness, as well as homosexuality and divorce and remarriage. Because the Bible is the Word of God, which is powerful and life-transforming, we know that those who are willing to be seriously engaged by Scripture will increasingly come to know and understand God's will for marriage and the family and be able to appropriate God's power in building strong Christian homes and families. This, in turn, will both increase God's honor and reputation in this world that he has made and provide the seasoning and illumination our world needs at this time of cultural ferment and crisis with regard to marriage and the family.



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

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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 down 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 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 on at least three very important clusters of principles, which will be explored in the following

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discussion.⁵ There 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-kelb, 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. 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

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reflect most accurately the emphasis in the biblical record.¹⁰ 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 (Gen. 1:28). 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 (Gen. 2:22), and named the woman with a name derived from his own (Gen. 2:23; cf. 3:20), which also implies his authority.¹¹ 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):¹² 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 (Gen.

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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 (Gen. 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.¹³ 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 NIV).

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,” Gen. 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* (Gen. 2:18). In relation to God’s mandate for humanity to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28), the woman is a suitable partner both in *procreation* (becoming “one flesh” with him [Gen. 2:24]) and in the earth’s *domestication* (Gen. 1:28: “And God blessed *them*. And God said to *them* . . .”).¹⁵ 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; Pss. 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?¹⁶ 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.

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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.”¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ Neither 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.¹⁹ 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 complements 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 nonreversible 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 “unisex” 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.²⁰

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

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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.²¹ 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. Gen. 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. Gen. 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.²²

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).²³ 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 (Gen. 3:19, 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 (Gen. 3:15, the so-called *protoevangelion*, 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 (Gen. 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 onward.

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

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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 NIV). 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 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 and 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 often fell short of the

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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 cherish 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).²⁴

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 (Gen. 2:15–17); and the man’s naming of the woman (Gen. 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 (Gen. 3:9). While the fall distorted the way in which men exercised their headship in subsequent generations (Gen. 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.

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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."²⁵

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.²⁶ This passage stipulates that, "If he [the man] takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her *food, her clothing, or her marital rights*."²⁷ 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.²⁸ This circumscribes the husband's responsibility to provide his wife with peace, permanence, and security (Ruth 1:9 speaks of "rest").²⁹

The Role and Responsibilities of Wives toward Their Husbands

Wives' roles and responsibilities toward their husbands were considered to be essentially threefold in: (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.³⁰ 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).³¹

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*).³² 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.

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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

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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.³³ 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).³⁴

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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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),³⁷ 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), Ashur (1 Chron. 4:5), Rehoboam (2 Chron. 11:21), Abijah (2 Chron. 13:21), Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:14), Joash (2

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Chron. 24:1–3), and Belshazzar (Dan. 5:2). Although no explicit rationale is given in Scripture by those who were polygamous, among other possible reasons, the practice was likely engaged in for financial increase and stability, as an expression of authority and power, and in order to increase the number of one’s offspring.

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. Lev. 18:18; Deut. 17:17),³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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),⁴⁰ but 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).⁴¹

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,

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and *they shall become one flesh.*” While there is some debate among scholars regarding the intricacies of what “holding fast” and “becoming one flesh” mean, there is no question that God designed marriage to be permanent.⁴²

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 divorcée (even if she was not the guilty party; Lev. 21:7: “They 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” (Deut. 24:4), 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).⁴³

Adultery

Another way in which God’s ideal for marriage was compromised in the history of Israel was the occurrence of adultery.⁴⁴ While it could be argued that fidelity was Adam’s only option, his 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.⁴⁵

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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 (Gen. 26:7–9), and Joseph with Potiphar's wife (Gen. 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).⁴⁶ 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 spouse and to him—and was clearly offended when they were not.⁴⁷

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, “according to their kinds,” 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 (Gen. 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; Pss. 113:9; 127:4–5; 128:3–4).⁴⁸ 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. 6:23). 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.⁴⁹