

ested in obeying God's laws (Gen. 4:19-24).

Abraham, who married Sarah and took Hagar as a concubine, saw Hagar's attitude towards Sarah change after Hagar conceived (16:4). He finally had to send Ishmael away because of Ishmael's sin of mocking Isaac. Jacob married Leah and Rachel, and took two concubines, but witnessed nothing but jealousy on Rachel's part and strife between the two sisters. Elkanah married Peninah and Hannah, but endured the grief of seeing Peninah mocking Hannah. Solomon had many wives but they led him to serve idols. God did not allow the sin to go unpunished!

The sin was less serious, however, in the old dispensation than it is in the new.

There is a good reason for this. Marriage is a picture of a heavenly reality, the true and spiritual marriage of Jesus Christ and His church (Eph. 5:22-33). The heavenly and spiritual marriage of the Lord and His bride was only dimly perceived in the old dispensation. There are many times, especially in the prophets, where God calls Israel His wife. And so the relationship of marriage and the true heavenly marriage was already dimly defined. But the picture in earthly marriages of the heavenly marriage was not very clear. The picture was blurred and of poor quality.

Yet it was a sin to distort the picture of marriage by marrying many wives. Those who did this were afflicted with trouble and grief in their homes.

I suppose, perhaps, that an illustration can be used. If you have a picture of someone you loved, anyone who would mar that picture by tearing it or defacing it with a pen would do you a great wrong and you would be angry with such a one.

But if the picture of someone you loved was a picture of someone still living and somebody would murder that person, the sin would be far greater.

So it is with marriage. The picture of our marriages is that of Christ and His church. But the marriage of Christ and His church is a reality already accomplished in those who believe in Christ and are grafted into His body by a true and living faith. Any two saints that are married are also married to Christ. The reality itself of Christ and His church is present in a very real sense in our marriages.

To desecrate our marriages by unlawful divorce and to remarry if divorced are dreadful sins that mar the figure of the reality. A man and a woman, united in sacred marriage, cannot and may not break the bond that binds them as one, simply because the bond between Christ and His people cannot be broken.

Marriage is a great gift. It is a union of love rooted in Christ's love for His bride. It is the sacred bond that it is because it is God's way of bringing His elect children to life in His church (Mal. 2:15). It is honourable and beautiful. Yea, it is an institution that God created in Paradise.

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Polygamy in the Old Testament

A reader writes, "I Corinthians 6:9-10 states that 'neither fornicators' 'nor adulterers' 'shall inherit the kingdom of God.' Surely in Israel people like King Solomon (1,000 wives and concubines) and those returned exiles described in Ezra 10 (assuming they remarried) would have been guilty of these sins and thus were barred from heaven? Surely God never lowers the standard of the law?"

We read of various men in Old Testament times who married more than one wife or who had concubines. In fact, some of the most prominent saints in the old dispensation married multiple wives or took concubines. I need name only a few: Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon and others. Undoubtedly, some of the kings married more than one wife because it was a custom in those days for monarchs to demonstrate their greatness with a harem. Judah even had intercourse with a woman he thought was a whore, yet Tamar's son by Judah, though born outside of wedlock, was a father in the promised line that brought forth our Saviour.

Sadly, fornication also occurred among the males in Israel. When Judah was guilty of this sin, it seems as if no one thought much about it (Gen. 38), although, when Shechem the Hivite raped Dinah, Levi and Simeon were furious (Gen. 34). There is evidence though of Judah's repentance (38:26; cf. 44:18-34).

The case of some of the returned captives who married foreign wives is somewhat different (Ezra 10). They sent away their wives and the children born to them. This was probably done under the law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

But even this regulation in Deuteronomy 24 has been an occasion for some serious disagreement and debate. It is a passage in Scripture that is appealed to in support of the legitimacy of remarriage after a separation or divorce in new covenant days. It is interesting to note, however, that the New Testament Scriptures emphatically forbid remarriage in the case of a rupture of the first marriage, so long as one's spouse is alive (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3; I Cor. 7:39).

It is true, as the questioner observes, that God never lowers the requirements of His law. But it is also a fact that the seriousness of a sin is determined by God in connection with the circumstances. Jesus Himself reminds us that the one who knew his Lord's will and disobeyed him is worthy of many stripes, whereas ignorance is a significant mitigating factor (Luke 12:47-48). Therein also lies the solution to the problem.

There can be no question that God punished the sins of adultery and fornication in the old dispensation as well as the new. Lamech, in the line of Cain, had two wives. He murdered a man and then boasted of his foul deed to his wives. He was totally disinter-

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Zechariah's Day of the Lord (3)

Three verses in Zechariah 14 specifically refer to God's coming at the end of this age: "Behold, the day of the LORD cometh" (1), "Then shall the LORD go forth" (3) and "the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee" (5). Putting all this together, Jehovah goes forth from heaven (3) so that "the LORD my God shall come" in the air (5; cf. I Thess. 4:17) with the result that this day—the best of all days—comes to the Most High for His glory (Zech. 14:1)!

Notice the first person singular pronoun in verse 5: "the LORD *my* God shall come." Zechariah is speaking here, first of all, but every believer also declares with true hope in Jesus, "the LORD my God shall come" (5). This is our confession regarding Christ: He is Jehovah God. As well as confessing Jesus' deity, the believer affirms that He is "my God" personally: "I have covenant fellowship with Him, as one chosen in Christ, redeemed by Him and united to Him by a living faith."

When the resurrected Jesus was before him, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). When we think of Christ's return, each one of us says, "the LORD my God shall come" (Zech. 14:5). He will come for His church and for me personally, if I am alive on the earth at "the day of the LORD" (1).

This is our comfort. This is deep consolation also for the saints to whom we speak of these things. "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thess. 4:17-18).

There is also an important preposition in Zechariah 14:5: "the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints *with* thee." The "saints" or holy ones are the elect angels and/or the glorified believers (I Thess. 4:14). This is our honour: to be with Christ as His train, flanking Him on that glorious day. This also magnifies the glory of the Lord Jesus, for He is coming with His perfected people attended by His mighty angels.

The coming of God in Jesus Christ is the climax of the "holy war" in the Bible: "Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle" (Zech. 14:3).

Deuteronomy 20 is the greatest chapter in the Bible explaining Israel's holy war. Fundamentally, the command is *fear not*: "let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them" (3)! Why? "For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (4). Scripture includes many instances of the holy war: the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14-15), the fight with the Amalekites (Ex. 17:8-16), the conquest of Canaan in the book of Joshua, the battles of the judges, the wars under Samuel and David, etc.

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will be the culmination of the holy war, the war to end all wars. This will be the case because, first, Christ will fight not only against the Egyptians or the Philistines but against the whole world of the ungodly. Second, this battle will occur at the end of the world: "Then shall the LORD go forth,

and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle" (Zech. 14:3).

Zechariah 14:12-15 graphically portray how God will destroy the Antichristian forces at Christ's second coming. Verse 12 describes a plague upon the wicked people: "this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh [in which they attacked the church] shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes [that looked with hatred upon God's people] shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue [that they used to slander the saints] shall consume away in their mouth." Ultimately, this is the horrible corruption of hell (Isa. 66:24; Mark 9:44, 46, 48).

The destruction of the wicked on the day of the Lord is also presented in terms of infighting: "it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the LORD shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour" (Zech. 14:13). There are other instances of God's holy war taking the form of infighting among His enemies (e.g., Judg. 7; I Sam. 14; II Chron. 20).

Zechariah 14 pictures the church as joining in the holy warfare: "Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together, gold, and silver, and apparel, in great abundance" (14). We will be victorious and we will take the spoil!

Moreover, the plague will be not only on people (12) but also on the animals: "And so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents, as this plague" (15).

There are many other passages which describe the holy war that God fights with the wicked at the end of the world. Ezekiel 38 portrays an earthquake (19) that even makes the fish of the sea and the birds of the air to quake at Jehovah's presence (20). Like Zechariah 14, Ezekiel 38 speaks of infighting among God's enemies: "I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man's sword shall be against his brother" (21). Then it mentions six more divine judgments: "I will plead against him with [1] pestilence and with [2] blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, [3] an overflowing rain, and [4] great hailstones, [5] fire, and [6] brimstone" (22).

Revelation 19:11-21 pictures Christ coming on a great white charger with His armies following Him on white horses. The birds feast on the carcasses of His defeated foes. Upon their capture, the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire.

Likewise, when "the camp of the saints" is surrounded, fire from God comes down to devour the wicked (Rev. 20:9); and the breath of Christ's "mouth" and "the brightness of his coming" will consume the man of sin and son of perdition (II Thess. 2:8).

The culmination of the holy war at the second coming of Jesus Christ is founded upon the great battle of the cross. There our Saviour defeated sin, Satan and the world, when He bore the punishment for our iniquities. Only the mop-up operation remains, the final destruction of all the wicked, those who thought that they had won!

Rev. Stewart