

# When someone has more than one wife

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**Multiple wives.** Why would I talk about that? In most western countries, it's illegal to have only one wife at a time. But in Biblical times, it wasn't uncommon for a man to have several wives. In the early church, apparently some had several wives also. What would you and your congregation do if someone showed up with three wives and a bunch of kids? Would he be allowed to attend? What would you do? Well we have that situation in some African countries and you might find this interesting.

**In East Africa – Kenya and Tanzania – it's legal to have several wives. (Not so in America.) In fact, the 2014 act in Kenya does not limit the number of wives a man can have.**

**What the does the Bible say should be the actions of the church when someone wants to start attending with us but who has more than one wife? Can he be a pastor or an elder? Can he attend with all his wives? Does he have to divorce all his wives except one?**

**That's what is being said by many church organizations. But what's right?**

**God's ideal was one husband, one wife. When our Creator made mankind, He created one man and one woman.** There were no other people yet and it would have been understandable if God had created Adam with several wives, so the earth could be populated faster. But God did not do that. One man, one wife. That's God's ideal.

But later on we see even among God's people that men began marrying more than one wife. Jacob had two wives plus two concubines. Moses had two wives. David had at least eight wives, plus lots of concubines. Gideon had many wives. Elkanah, father of Samuel, had two wives. Most of the kings of Judah and Israel had multiple wives. Don't ask me to explain concubines. Let me say this: one man, one woman. Not several wives and concubines.

**In virtually every case, having more than one wife didn't work out well for them.** Moses' sister Miriam, criticized Moses over his Ethiopian wife and God cursed her for that attitude with temporary leprosy (Numbers 12:1-15). David's wives – and their sons – actually sometimes tried to kill one another. We could go on and on with all the many examples of how having multiple wives was not, and still is not, a good thing in people's lives. **Certainly, those in Africa and elsewhere: do NOT be adding any more wives than you have now even though you legally can.** Let me explain further.

**My point is: one wife is what God ordained.**

**Though the Bible nowhere says having more than one wife is a sin, it certainly is not wise to have more than one wife.**

**One of God's rules for kings, however, was that kings would be wise not to have many wives, lest the wives turn his heart away from God (Deuteronomy**

17:17). Obviously, YHVH is not in favor of kings -- or really *anyone* -- having several wives, though He obviously permitted it, even for righteous kings like David.

**Deuteronomy 17:17** ***“Neither shall he (the king) multiply wives for himself,** lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.”*

We can't say that God considers having more than one wife is a sin however, because God himself told King David that He was the one who had given David several wives.

### **2 Samuel 12:7b-8**

'...I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 ***I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping,*** and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. *And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!”*

**So having more than one wife is not a sin. It's certainly NOT the ideal, but not a sin. It certainly can lead to many sins though, so don't do it!**

***But even if having more than one wife is legal in your country, my advice: don't do it. Don't marry more than one wife.*** It won't help your situation.

**Scripture is very clear though, that a man cannot be the leader of a congregation if he has more than one wife.** Though it's not a sin to have more than one wife, because his example is so important, that man with more than one wife would not be allowed to be the pastor, overseer, elder or deacon.

Here's what we're told to be looking for in an elder or deacon. Notice: having only one wife.

### **1 Timothy 3:1-12 NIV**

“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an **overseer**, he desires a noble task.

**2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife,** temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, *able to teach,*

*3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.*

4 **He must manage his own family well** and see that his children obey him with proper respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 6 **He must not be a recent convert**, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

**8 Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine,** and not pursuing dishonest gain. 9 They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 **They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.**

11 In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.”

**12 A DEACON must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.”**

**So someone with more than one wife cannot be one of our elders or deacons.** That man also must show the right example in his child rearing, his marriage and even in matters like alcohol or wine: he must be seen as someone in complete control of that area and not a drunkard. He must not be a new convert. Elders and deacons also must first be tested.

**I'm far more likely to ordain present servant-leaders as deacons first to test them, see how they function,** before ever ordaining them quickly as elders. We are advised to take our time before ordaining people. There should be fasting and prayer first. Those to be ordained should be considered to be deeply spirit-filled believers... AND have only one wife.

**GOD is the one who chooses the elders. Present pastors or elders are the ones to pick who will be ordained, as led by God,** as Paul told Titus to go to Crete and HE was to ordain elders in every city. He did not say the brethren were to tell Titus whom they want to be the ones ordained. These new elders also must be trusted to follow instructions and to faithfully teach sound doctrine as they have been taught.

#### **Titus 1:5-9 NIV**

"The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and **appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.**

6 **An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife,** a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be **blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.** 8 Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."

Again, we're told in Titus 1 that **an elder must be the husband of one wife, set a good example, not be inclined to overdrinking, and must know the Bible well** and teach it as he's been taught. If he believes there is error in the way he was taught, he should discuss it with the senior pastor and resolve the issue scripturally so the truth is taught properly.

**We do not ordain WOMEN as pastors or elders. Women CAN be ordained as a "deaconess" however – a female servant. Romans 16:1** speaks of **Phoebe**, a servant in the church. The Greek word for servant is "*diakonos*" – one serving, servant. Deacons do not have authority or rulership however, as ordained pastors and elders do.

Back to one wife and how we deal with men who have more than one wife. Again, they cannot be an ordained pastor or deacon. But what about other issues?

**If a person has multiple wives and wants to attend church services? Of course they can, with open arms! He and all his wives can attend. He just can't be in any leadership position. And nobody attending God's services from now on, should ever add any more wives. I hope that's clear. I've instructed our pastors in Africa not to officiate in any weddings that add any wives.**

**But neither do I believe these with multiple wives currently need to be forced to divorce their extra wives, as most sabbath organizations are insisting. I don't go along with that at all.**

**Would you have forbidden Moses or King David from attending your church because they had several wives?** David will rule all Israel in the resurrection! So any groups and churches that are requiring men to divorce or leave their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> wives before they can attend our church services, are simply wrong in doing so, in my view. That is not a Biblical command. They misunderstand. They have no Biblical basis for this. Since those women are MARRIED to the man, there is no adultery taking place, so no grounds for forcing them to be divorced. Again, the Bible clearly allowed more than one wife, though it was not God's ideal. So let's not be more righteous than God on this.

*I frankly don't care what other groups believe on this or other topics. I only care and teach what the Bible tells us.*

**Africans, and any of you Muslims or others who have multiple wives, let me be very clear: I believe it would be a greater sin for you to divorce or leave your wives you're currently married to, especially if children are involved, when there is no Biblical command to do so.** How will those wives take care of themselves without their husband? And what about your children? What would happen to them, without Dad around? So there is NO requirement to leave one's wives BEFORE we allow them to come into our fellowship. *In fact, I teach it would be a greater sin to divorce those wives once the man has married them.*

**WELCOME them without reservation: I would urge all the brethren to welcome such families completely,** without any reservation or holding back or gossip going on. In fact, there does not need to be any discussion about their situation.

**Passover: Of course the man and his wives can attend Passover,** as long as those participating are baptized and **have examined themselves** prior to Passover (1 Cor. 11:27-33). If a man has multiple wives, and he's baptized, he can come and participate in Passover and his wives who are baptized also can participate. If he has unbaptized wives, they can come watch, but cannot eat of the bread or drink of the small vial of wine.

The man with multiple wives needs to extend extra effort to be a great husband to EACH of his wives, trying not to favor one over the other. We can see how distressing this was to Leah when Jacob obviously favored Rachel as his wife. So those of you with more than one wife, work extra hard on your marriages.

I hope this has been helpful.  
Philip Shields