

Why did the Patriarchs have multiple wives?

See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polygamy_in_Christianity

In the beginning, God made one wife for Adam, not several, “and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:18–25)

The first mention of multiple wives is Lamech (Genesis 4:23–24) , which is combined with his bragging about murder. “And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.”

Jesus confirmed the understanding of marriage as between only one husband and one wife when he was asked about divorce by the Pharisees. (See Mark 10:1–12 and Matthew 19:1–12). In His response Jesus quoted from Genesis 2 ; ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?.

Jesus said divorce was allowed by Moses “because of the hardness of your hearts ... but from the beginning it was not so.”

Moses in fact had three wives; Zipporah (Exodus 2: 21), the daughter of Hobab (Numbers 10: 29) and the Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12:1) And there is a provision for at least a second wife in the Law,, but it takes the form of a restriction: Exodus 21:10: "If he take another wife for himself; her food, her clothing, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.”

Like Jesus’ statement that divorce was allowed by Moses because of the “hardness of your hearts,” and having multiple wives falls into the same category.

Scripture compares the relationship of husband and wife to that of Christ and the church. In Ephesians 5:25–33. Paul explained this relationship and referred back to Genesis 2:24.

Although there is no passage that expressly forbids it, polygamy always is portrayed as breeding jealousy and animosity, and Solomon’s many wives “turned away his heart” from the Lord and to the worship of false gods. Kings that were to rule Israel are told not to “multiply wives” to themselves (Deuteronomy 17:17).

Polygamy became a rare exception in post-exilic Israel, and was forbidden in the Dead Sea Scrolls. But it still survived. Josephus in two places speaks of polygamy as a recognized institution: and Justin Martyr makes it a matter of reproach to Trypho that the Jewish teachers permitted a man to have several wives.

In the New testament, leaders of the church are told they must be the “husband of one

wife.” (Titus 1:6)

The second-century Christian apologist Tertullian noted, “For Adam was the one husband of Eve, and Eve his one wife, one woman, one rib.”

Then why were the Patriarchs allowed multiple wives? Tertullian explains it by the desire of the Patriarchs for numerous offspring:

“God did then indeed, in the beginning, send forth a sowing of the race by an indulgent laxity granted to the reins of connubial alliances, until the world should be replenished, until the material of the new discipline should attain to forwardness: now, however, at the extreme boundaries of the times, he has checked (the command) which He had sent out, and recalled the indulgence which He had granted.”

But the question persisted even into the Reformation. Martin Luther wrote: "I confess that I cannot forbid a person to marry several wives, for it does not contradict the Scripture. If a man wishes to marry more than one wife he should be asked whether he is satisfied in his conscience that he may do so in accordance with the word of God. In such a case the civil authority has nothing to do in the matter."

But Luther's context was a situation in which the sickness of a wife prevented matrimonial intercourse. Luther believed exceptions might be allowed in certain extreme cases such as are now generally recognized in Protestant countries as justifying divorce.

Later he said, "It is my earnest warning and counsel that Christians especially shall have no more than one wife, not only because it is a scandal, which a Christian should avoid most diligently, but also because there is no word of God here to show that God approves it in Christians.... I must oppose it, especially in Christians, unless there be need, as for instance if the wife be a leper, or be taken away from the husband in some other way."