The Biblish of Wilder

What's Wrong With Polygamy?

Jane's troubles began when her father found work in a city.* There, far from their home in rural Africa, he began to live with another woman. "Life was not easy for us," explains Jane, "because my father did not support us financially; he was supporting his second wife and her children. In my final years of schooling, I often went to bed hungry. Our home was in a bad state of disrepair. On weekends I tried to help my mother by selling fruit, but we could not make ends meet. I used to cry night after night."

ANE'S experience pinpoints the hardships that a polygamous marriage often imposes upon innocent parties. Vendaspeaking people in southern Africa have a Abraham's household.—Genesis 16:5, 6; 21: name, muhadzinga, that one wife may call an- 8-10. other wife in a polygamous household. It comes from a word meaning "roast," which perhaps well describes the trouble that polygamy often causes between wives.

'But,' you may ask, 'is polygamy wrong? If so, why were some well-known Bible charac-Courtesy of The British Museum ters polygamous?

> Polygamy in the Bible

God allowed polygamy for a time, as it contributed to the fulfillment of his promise to Abraham: "I shall make a great nation out of you." (Genesis 12:2; Exodus 1:7) At that time, Abraham's wife, Sarah, was childless. Eventually, she pleaded with

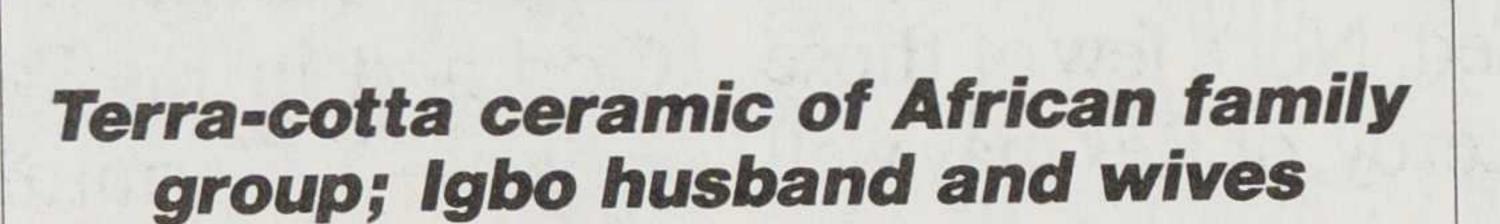
* Real name not used.

Abraham to produce offspring by her slave girl, Hagar. Interestingly, the Bible clearly describes the problems that this brought upon

As for Jacob, Abraham's grandson, he intended to marry only one woman, Rachel. (Genesis 44:27) It was Jacob's father-in-law, Laban, who tricked him into marrying both of Laban's daughters, Rachel and Leah. (Genesis 29:21-28) And it was upon the urging of these

wives that Jacob produced offspring by having relations with their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah. Again, the Bible does not hide the many problems polygamy brought upon Jacob's large household. -Genesis 29:30, 31; 30:1-3, 15, 16, 20; 37: 2-4; 44:20-29.

The Bible also records the story of Elkanah, who was the father of Samuel the





prophet, and Elkanah's two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah was treated so unkindly by Peninnah that she would often cry and lose her appetite. Peninnah, for her part, was apparently jealous because Elkanah showed more love for Hannah.—1 Samuel 1:4-7.

Indeed, the custom of polygamy has caused hardship. While it was tolerated among God's ancient people, the Bible clearly shows whether God originally intended that man should be polygamous.

God's Original Standard

To understand God's standard for marriage, we have to go back to the beginning of human history. God's Word describes the attraction Adam felt on being introduced to his one newly created wife, Eve. "This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," he said. "That is why," the Bible continues, "a man will leave his father and his mother and he must stick to his wife and they must become one flesh."—Genesis 2:21-24.

For Christian marriages, Jesus restored God's original standard—monogamy. (Matthew 19:4, 5) Furthermore, he showed that married people should now adhere to this divine criterion. As he explained: "They are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has yoked together let no man put apart. (Matthew 19:6) Thus, a married Christian must protect the "one flesh" bond that exists between him and his legal mate.* Sexual intercourse with a polygamous third party would desecrate that divine arrangement. Such an act is forbidden in the Christian congregation. —1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9, 16, 18; Hebrews

It comes as no surprise, then, that the Scrip-

"Sexual jealousy and bickering are common problems for the [polygamous] family; and a husband must be wise, strong, diplomatic, and shrewd to preserve harmony."

-The New Encyclopædia

tures make favorable mention of married Christians that have only one wife. (1 Corinthians 9:5; 1 Timothy 3:2) The Bible explains: "Let each man have his own wife [not wives] and each woman have her own husband [not a man who already has a legal wife]."—1 Corinthians 7:2; Proverbs 5:18.

On learning of the Bible's prohibition of polygamy, some have taken courageous steps to bring their lives into harmony with God's will. Consider John, who lives in a city in central Africa.* He used to have three wives. But after studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses, John came to a personal decision in consultation with his wives. After he made arrangements for the future care of his second and third wives and their children from the former polygamous marriage, they went back to their rural homes. By this means John qualified for the privilege of serving God in association with the local congregation. He also experienced other blessings.

"Every night," he explains, "I used to come home to a house full of problems. For example, one wife would find fault with the children of another, and the kids would take sides among themselves. The first thing I had to do was to straighten out the mess. Now that I have learned to live with one wife, my home has become a place of rest and peace."

Certainly, peace with God's blessing is worth the effort.—Romans 12:1, 2.

^{*} The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology states that the Greek expression translated "one flesh" at Matthew 19:5b has special significance as the translation of the Hebrew words of Genesis 2:24 and denotes "a complete partnership of man and woman which cannot be broken up without damage to the partners in it."

^{*} Real name not used.