

## Polygamy and the Quran

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Those people who have modeled their thinking after New Testament Christianity are, to say the least, a bit surprised (if not shocked and appalled) to learn that the religion of Islam countenances polygamy. But the Christian mind must realize that Muhammad's Islam arose out of Arabia in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. The Arab culture was well-known for the practice of polygamy, in which the men were allowed to have as many wives as they desired. The Quran addressed this social circumstance by placing a limitation on the number of wives a man could have. The wording of the pronouncement is in a surah titled "Women": "And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only) or (the captives) that your right hands possess" (*Surah* 4:3).

Setting aside the issue of why Muhammad himself was exempt from this limitation (*Surah* 33:50—see Miller, "Muhammad's Polygamy," 2004), the divine origin of the Quran is discredited on the basis of its stance on polygamy. In the first place, for all practical purposes, the Quran authorizes a man to have as many wives as he chooses, since its teaching on divorce contradicts its teaching on marriage. Unlike the New Testament, which confines permission to divorce on the sole grounds of sexual unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:9), the Quran authorizes divorce for any reason (e.g., *Surah* 2:226-232,241; 33:4,49; 58:2-4; 65:1-7). If a man can divorce his wife for **any** reason, then the "command" that limits a man to four wives is effectively meaningless—merely restricting a man to four legal wives **at a time**. Theoretically, a man could have an **unlimited** number of wives—all with the approval of God!

In the second place, Jesus declared in no uncertain terms that "whoever divorces his wife, **except for sexual immorality**, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9, emp. added). Jesus gave one, and only one, reason for divorce in God's sight. In fact, even the Old Testament affirmed that God "hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16). The teaching of the Bible on divorce is a higher, stricter, nobler standard than the one advocated by the Quran. The two books, in fact, **contradict each other** on this point.

In the third place, why does the Quran stipulate the number "four"? Why not three or five wives? The number four would appear to be an arbitrary number with no significance—at least, none is given. Though the passage in question indicates the criterion of a man's ability to do justice to those he marries, there is no reason to specify the number four, since



men would vary a great deal in the number of women that they would have the ability to manage fairly.

The answer may be seen in the influence of the contemporaneous Jewish population of Arabia. Sixth century Arabia was a tribal oriented society that relied heavily on oral communication in social interactions. Muhammad would have been the recipient of considerable information conveyed orally by his Jewish, and even Christian, contemporaries. Many tales, fables, and rabbinical traditions undoubtedly circulated among the Jewish tribes of Arabia. The Jews themselves probably were lacking in book-learning, having been separated from the mainstream of Jewish thought and intellectual development in their migration to the Arabian peninsula. The evidence demonstrates that the author of the Quran borrowed extensively from Jewish and other sources. The ancient Talmudic record (*Arbah Turim, Ev. Hazaer*, 1) stated: "A man may marry many wives, for Rabba saith it is lawful to do so, if he can provide for them. Nevertheless, the wise men have given good advice, that a man should not marry more than four wives" (see Rodwell, 1950, p. 411; Tisdall, 1905, pp. 129-130). The similarity with the wording of the Quran is too striking to be coincidental. It can be argued quite convincingly that the magic number of four was drawn from currently circulating Jewish teaching.

### REFERENCES

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The title itself evokes an emotional response that spans the spectrum. Some view Charles Darwin's famous opus, *The Origin of Species*, as a negative turning point for human society; others revere it as practically sacrosanct. While both the author and the book have become historical icons, few people likely are aware of the full title of Darwin's most famous work: *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection—or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* denotes that, historically speaking, the term "race" referred to a group of persons, animals, or plants connected by common descent or origin—in other words, similar to the way it is used today.

While many have argued that Darwin himself was not a "racist" (referring specifically to the fact that *The Origin of Species* did not include much discussion about *Homo sapiens*), his second book left little question about his personal views. Titled *The Descent of Man*, one entire chapter was dedicated to "The Races of Man." In that book, Darwin wrote:

At some future period not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races throughout the world. At the same time the anthropomorphous apes...will no doubt be exterminated. The break between man and his nearest Allies will then be wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilised state, as we may hope, even than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as the baboon, instead of as now between the Negro or Australian and the gorilla (1874, p. 178).

While some have argued that Darwin was simply "predicting the future," the chapter on human races makes painfully clear his beliefs on the subject. For instance, a few pages later in chapter seven, he noted:

Their mental characteristics are likewise very distinct; chiefly as it would appear in their emotional, but partly in their intellectual faculties. Everyone who has had the opportunity of comparison must have been struck with the contrast between the taciturn, even morose, aborigines of S. America and the light-hearted, talkative negroes.

While Darwin may have maintained an outward concern for social justice, Thomas Henry Huxley, a close personal friend of Darwin's and an indefatigable champion of evolution (who frequently referred to himself as "Darwin's Bulldog") observed:

No rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average Negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man. And if this be true, it is simply incredible that, when all his disabilities are removed,

and our prognathus relative has a fair field and no favour, as well as no oppressor, he will be able to compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller jawed rival, in a contest which is to be carried out on by thoughts and not by bites (1871, p. 20).

The point is obvious: if man evolved, then so did the various races. But more than that, Darwin and Huxley argued further that the "caucasian" race was farther along in the evolutionary process, and thus superior to all the other races.

However, evolutionists do not exactly revel in the thought of being associated with racism (which is one reason that the title of Darwin's *Origin of Species* book has been truncated). Most would argue that these views are ancient, and are simply reflections of the culture of that age. Yet the stigma of an "inferior race" took root, and has from time to time continued to spring up in the literature. More than fifty years after Darwin released *The Origin of Species*, Henry Fairfield Osborn remarked:

The Negroid stock is even more ancient than the Caucasian and Mongolian, as may be proved by an examination not only of the brain, of the hair, of the bodily characters such as teeth, the genitalia, the sense organs, but of the instincts, the intelligence. The standard of intelligence of the average Negro is similar to that of the eleven-year-old youth of the species *Homo sapiens* (1980, 89:129).

The most recent addition in this evolutionary theory of human races comes from two prominent scientists—Vincent Sarich (one of the founding pioneers of the molecular clock) and Frank Miele (senior editor of *Skeptical magazine*). Robert Proctor reviewed their 2004 book, *Race: The Reality of Human Differences*, in the February 5, 2004 issue of *Nature*. The first six words of his review were: "This is a very disturbing book" (2004, 427:487). **Disturbing indeed!** The authors categorized people according to race, thereby reinforcing the contemporary ideas of racial hierarchy. How many individuals have ever stopped to fully grasp the true extent of evolutionary beliefs? And yet, the foundations for this racist thinking are being taught in classrooms all across the country. The Bible is clear—God created simply the **human** race—not a multiplicity of **races**.

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**Brad Harrub**

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