

Endogamy In Israel

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God's people are always supposed to marry within (endogamy) the Covenant community. Ancient Israel was commanded not to make marriages for their children with the sons or daughters of their heathen neighbors. "For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 7:4). Christians are still commanded to marry only "in the Lord" (I Corinthians 7:39). Even our father Abraham, when arranging Isaac's marriage, strictly charged his servant "that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell. But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac" (Genesis 24:3-4).

Unhappily, our father Isaac never managed to make similar marital arrangements for his twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Thus, when they were forty years old, Esau "took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah" (Genesis 26:34-35). Some thirty-seven years later, Isaac, still obsessed with Esau's venison (Genesis 25:28), sought to bless his profane son, Esau. He was privately seeking yet another meal of savory venison from Esau (Genesis 27:3-4). But, providentially Isaac was spared such a fiasco by Rebekah's clever ruse. He wound up blessing Jacob instead, in keeping with God's prophetic word (Genesis 25:23). Then, belatedly, Isaac sent Jacob to Padanaram with a charge not to "take a wife of the daughters of Canaan [but] . . . of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother" (Genesis 28:1-2).

But, Jacob's quest for a wife was marred. Jacob was blinded by a romantic obsession with Rachel (Genesis 29:20). Accordingly, he was vulnerable to Laban's deceitful effort to marry off his less attractive daughter, Leah. Further, Jacob's hatred of Leah and Rachel's consequent barrenness (Genesis 29:31) set off a "Baby Derby" which in twenty years brought eleven sons, a daughter and two more wives into the house of Jacob. God's call to return to Canaan did more than free Jacob from Laban's exploitation (Genesis 31:12-13). This contested exit precluded marriage covenants between Jacob's sons and young women in Laban's idolatrous household (Genesis 31:29-32). So, endogamy in Jacob's house restricted their marital choices to daughters of respected servant families in Israel. When Shechem seduced Dinah, her brothers were "wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel" (Genesis 34:7). After servants, loyal to Simeon and Levi, massacred the Shechemites, Jacob banned idols and fetishes in Israel prior to return to Bethel to make "an altar unto God" (Genesis 35:2-4).

Israel's endogamous rule was also broken by Simeon (Genesis 46:10) and his younger brother, Judah, with disastrous results (Genesis 38:1-11). Further merging with idolatrous Canaanite society was halted when Israel migrated into Egypt (Genesis 46:2-4). Similarly, bondage and the Exodus from Egypt largely prevented assimilation of God's people into Egyptian idolatries. Sadly, some Canaanite nations survived Joshua's conquering of Canaan and Israel "took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods" (Judges 3:6). Finally, Jews, returning from Babylonian exile, began to marry "strange" wives. In horror, Ezra exhorted them, "Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them . . . And let it be done according to the law" (Ezra 10:3).

Regarding this precedent, Paul did not require divorce in incompletely converted homes. "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" (I Corinthians 7:14). Yet, faced with America's god of sexual convenience, God's people, in the matter of marriage covenants, are still

called to "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (II Corinthians 6:17).