

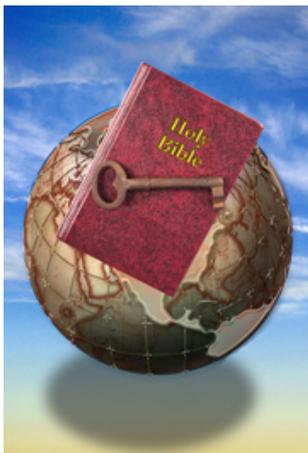
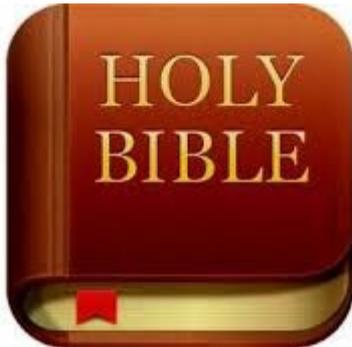
Equipes Notre-Dame



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The Bible presents us with the story of a people's journey, Israel's, in the light of God. It is only gradually that Israel discovered the demands of the Law given by God to Moses.

**It is similar in marriage. Mankind could only discover the demands of true love through mistakes and failures. The Bible helps us discover this path. Its message is presented as Good News revealed only gradually and which comes in response to the deepest aspirations of men's and women's hearts. It shows us the very meaning of couples and marriage.**

### **Violent Customs**

At the time when the first books in the Bible were written (roughly 1000 years BC), respect for a person or a life was not terribly common. Some civilizations still practiced human sacrifice. Thus, in the Old Testament, we are sometimes confronted with violent customs.

There is also sexual violence. Women, in a patriarchal society, were goods for exchange. They were

seen as sexual objects in the service of men's pleasure or else as necessary to give birth to male offspring. In the Bible, women are honoured when they have numerous sons and are despised if they are sterile.

God's Law tried to humanise this situation. God freed his people from Egyptian slavery. By handing down his Law on Mount Sinai, he gave his people the ability to free themselves from interior violence, from their sin. He invited them to adopt a behaviour that would inspire the social life of other nations to such an extent that they praised the wisdom of Israel.

God's Law opposed everything that menaced or destroyed men's lives. It condemned whatever destroys couples: taking another's wife by committing adultery, engaging the life of a third person through unsustainable sexual ties that undermine social relationships and remove their stability and balance. God's Law aimed at a married and sexual life that was experienced and lived in a truly human manner, in a manner that is truly worthy of a man and a woman.

## **The Tenderness of Couples in the Bible**

These violent customs, canalised by the Law, did not stop couples in the Bible living with great tenderness and authentic love.

Jacob grew fond of Rachel, despite the fact that she was sterile (Gn 29). Elkanah consoled his wife who could not bear children saying, "Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" (1 Sam 1, 8). The Book of Judith and the writings in the Book of Wisdom present a married ideal, which goes far beyond that prescribed by the Law.

Fidelity in the couple is accentuated in these books. Fidelity based on love and tenderness; fidelity towards the love of one's youth; fidelity, which endures beyond death. Women can truly be partners with their husbands.

The Song of Songs demonstrates the tenderness of the two fiancés, who express themselves in the language of bodies. Jewish piety considered marriage as a holy reality. The Book of Tobit encompasses this ideal and spiritual sense: the union of husband and wife in tenderness, love and fidelity and their joy at being parents of numerous children.

## **Man and Woman, one flesh**

Israel's reflection on the couple results in what is expressed in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis. Taking up the very old account of Genesis 2, 18-25 (written towards 1000 BC), the last author of the book described in a vivid way, towards 500 BC, the creation of the first couple.

Modelled out of earth, the first man received the breathe of life from God. Since the Lord considered that it was not good for man to be alone, he decided to make him a helper suitable for him. He took one of Adam's ribs to create Eve, his wife. Adam recognised her as the bone of his bones and the flesh of his flesh. He was united to his wife and they became one flesh.

This symbolic account underlines the equal dignity of man and woman. It also highlights the fact that each of the spouses can only blossom and find their fullness in the encounter with the other, who is chosen in all exclusivity. That is why it is necessary to leave both father and mother. God opens the couple up to the future by inviting them to love, by inviting them not to close themselves in unto themselves, but to open themselves up to life through the acceptance and education of children, through the organisation of the world and society: Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.

Men and women are called to become more and more people, to live one for the other and both for their children and for society.

## **Marriage, a Reflection of God's Love for his People**

Israel's reflection and spiritual experience enabled it to realise that the love that God bore for his people was the model for human love.

The Lord loved Israel freely and so, man and woman must love each other in a similar fashion. He loved Israel despite her infidelity—God's people had chosen other gods and practised social injustice, thus opposing the Lord's Law given to Moses. God forgave his people's infidelities. He showed himself to be a God whose love is free and faithful, whose mercy goes beyond all the deceptions caused by his people and who tried to ignite a response of love in the latter.

Such is the message of the prophets Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. God's attitude towards his people is the ideal that is proposed to couples in their daily lives.

## **Jesus and Marriage**

Beside those who follow Jesus on the journey through Palestine are the disciples who, while adhering to his message, continue to live their ordinary lives. Christ will call them to live their daily lives in a new way.

In an era when divorce was still allowed by the Law of Moses, Jesus showed that this stage must be overcome and God's initial project, expressed in the first chapters of Genesis, must be reverted to. "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law (about divorce). But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So there are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Mk 10: 5-15)

Through the sacrament of marriage, the spouses take on one another reciprocally in love and tenderness and for their entire lives. This commitment is irreversible. It gathers its strength from God who commits to the spouses through the sacrament of marriage, a sacrament, which binds them to be faithful to each other, to progress in love and in what is necessary for the human and Christian education of their children.

Continuing the reflection, St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 5, invites husbands to love their wife like Christ loved the Church, to the point of giving his life for her on the cross. In a couple's love, the Lord's free love ought to be recognisable, the Lord, who loved to the point of self-sacrifice and giving up his life. This is what Christian spouses are called to live every day of their lives together, in the small and great events of their life.

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