AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE AND BIBLICAL PATTERNS: THE CASE OF THE ASHANTIS OF GHANA

by

STEPHEN ADEI

Submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

In the subject

OLD TESTAMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF. P. J. VAN DYK

JUNE 2003
Acronyms

Cross-Cousin to a person's son or daughter

MOBR - Mother's brothers
FASI - Father's sisters
FABR - Father's brothers

Unfamiliar Terms

Wherever an Akan (Twi) word is used in the text an English translation is provided in bracket and therefore are not listed under unfamiliar terms other than names.

- Polyandry The custom of having more than one husband at the same time.
- Polygamy The custom of having more than one wife at the same time.
- Ashanti or Term that describes both the land, kingdom as well as people who live in central Ghana and the subject study in this dissertation. The context will indicate whether the people or land is being described. To avoid confusion, use the plural 'Ashantis' to describe the people.
- Akan A larger group who share common linguistic and cultural heritage and who constitute about sixty percent of modern day Ghana, the largest group of which are the Ashantis.
- Abusua The Ashantis use the same word to refer to both the extended family and the clan which is considered as a bigger family. Which is in view of the test is always indicated by the English equivalent.
- Mohar Jewish bride price.
- Matrilineage Matrilineal descent or system of descent succession and inheritance.
- Twi The language spoken by most Akans. The other main Akan language is called Fante.
• Concubinage: Describes the practice of having a pseudo-wife or living with a woman without performing customary marriage rite. The woman's status is often less than a full wife but socially recognized in many traditional societies.

Pronunciation of Ashanti or Akan Names

Ashanti language is phonetically written and hence can be read by none Ashantis with ease. Only two vowels require to be mastered in addition to the English alphabets as follows:

'ɛ' – as 'e' in the word met.
'ɔ' – as 'ou' in the word bought.
AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE AND BIBLICAL PATTERNS: 
THE CASE OF THE ASHANTIS OF GHANA

SUMMARY

This dissertation compares the family and marriage traditions of the Ashantis of Ghana and Ancient Hebrews. Some common features characterize the two societies, principal among which is the idea that having children is the key purpose of marriage above love and intimacy. Others are the low status of the wife in the domestic context; endogamy rules based on consanguinity; and payment of bride price.

However, the two traditions differ in important areas. For example, the Ashantis follow kinship system based on matrilineal descent, succession and inheritance and the girl child is preferred. The patriarchal system of the Ancient Hebrews invest all authority in the father and the male heirs is preferred. Other defining factor in Ashanti and Pentateuchcal marriage is their religion and belief systems. Much of the marriage traditions seem to be cultural references rather than religious imperatives binding on Christians today.

Key Terms:

Ashanti Marriage; Biblical Marriage; Marriage in the Pentateuch; Family Life; African Traditional Marriage; Matrilineal system; Status of women; Bride price; Prohibited marriages.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work had to be done during the most hectic time in my life when I had been appointed the Director-General (President) of Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA). The fact that I could do it at all was due to the encouragement of my wife Georgina; I am grateful to her. Other people who made invaluable contribution in terms of providing support, helping to identify literature and other relevant information were Mr. R. B. Perbi, Mrs. Joyce Wereko-Brobby, Mr. E. Cabutey-Adodoadjji and Mr. Theophilus Yeboah. UNISA library staff provided invaluable help during my brief stopovers at the University. I wish to thank them all.

Requiring special mention is my Prof. P.J. van Dyk without whose direction and supervision I could not have completed my studies. Thank you Sir.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Georgina my wife and my colleague Mr. Kweku Aidoo of GIMPA.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acronyms</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1: Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Objective of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. The Hypothesis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4. Relevance of Study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5. Methodology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6. Limitations of Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7. Outline of Dissertation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2: Issues on Marriage and Family Life in Traditional Societies</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Nuclear and Extended Family Systems</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Patrilineal and Matrilineal Family system</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 The Role of Male and Female Traditional Societies</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Marriage</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Polygamy Versus Monogamy</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Purpose of Marriage</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Rules of Endogamy and Sexuality in Traditional Societies</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 The Process of Marriage</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 Conclusion</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.7 Children in the Family .................................. 94
5.8 Inheritance .............................................. 95
5.9 Summary .................................................. 96

Chapter 6: Traditional Marriage Among the Ashantis

6.1 Introduction ............................................. 98
6.2 Three Keys to Understanding Ashanti Traditional Marriage ........ 100
6.3 Double Exogamy ....................................... 100
6.4 Cross-Cousin Marriage ............................... 101
6.5 Prohibited Marriage .................................. 104
6.6 Types of Approved Marriages ....................... 105
6.7 Age of Marriage and ‘Nubility Rite’ .................. 107
6.8 Sexuality Among the Ashantis ....................... 108
6.9 Polygamy .................................................. 109
6.10 The Purpose of Marriage Choice ................... 111
6.11 Adultery ............................................... 115
6.12 The Process of Marriage ............................. 115
6.13 The Status of the Spouse in Marriage ............ 121
6.14 Inheritance and Family-Child Relationship ....... 123
6.15 Divorce .................................................. 124
6.16 Remarriage ............................................. 126
6.17 Widowhood and Levirate Marriage ............... 127
6.18 Summary ................................................ 128

Chapter 7: Ashanti Traditional Marriage and Biblical Patterns

7.1 Introduction ............................................. 131
7.2 A Comparative Analysis of Marriage Among the Ancient Hebrews and Traditional Ashantis ............ 132
7.3 Ashanti Traditional Marriage and Biblical Pattern ........ 138
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Conclusion</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Marriage and family constitute foundational institutions in virtually all known human societies from our primitive ancestors to present day societies. In the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), especially in the book of Genesis, the authors have built one of the most enduring religious traditions around the family lives of patriarchs, namely: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Through their lives, human stories became divine messages.

The role of marriage and family life in human societies derive from the fact that kinship systems have implications for:

- leadership not only in the family but society in general
- welfare of people, ranging from economic to social aspects
- inheritance
- development and transmission of culture (Vander 1990).

In traditional or rural societies, social and economic activities centre around the family which combine into clans and tribes. At the base of the family is marriage. Thus understanding the family and marriage life of any group of people is a key to knowing them (Hess, Markson & Stein (eds.) 1988).

1.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study has been prepared in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Theology at the University of South Africa. It aims at exploring traditional
marriage among the Ashanti's (or Asante people) of Ghana, and compares this with Biblical family and marriage patterns as found in the Pentateuch. It seeks, in particular to identify the main coordinates of traditional marriage in Ashanti and in Ancient Israelite societies such as rules for the endogamy group with whom one may not marry, permitted and prohibited sexual relations, the process and act of marriage and relationships within the home. This comparative study of two traditional societies linked today by the fact that the 'God of the Hebrews' is today acknowledged by the majority of Ashanti's as their God (as Christians) will enable some conclusions to be drawn as to the relative roles of marriage in transitional societies.

1.3 THE HYPOTHESIS

While in social science it is not easy to come up with cut and dry hypothesis, it is important for such a study to be guided by a central thesis. The work will be guided by the following hypothesis:

*The defining factors in Ashanti traditional marriage and pentateuchical marriage are religion and kingship system (the matrilineal form of kinship and descent of the Ashantis and the patriarchal system of the Ancient Hebrews).*

1.4 RELEVANCE OF STUDY

A recent census of Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000) indicated that 68.3% of Ghanaians profess to be Christians. (See Table 1). While the figure may be on the high side with regard to practising Christians, there is no doubt that Ghanaians generally accept the moral and social teachings of the Hebrew Bible as normative.
Table 1: Religious Affiliations in Ghana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion stated</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Ghana Statistical Service, census 2000*

Thus the teachings of the Ten Commandments, for example, are widely acknowledged. When one attends Christian worship services in the country and especially weddings, passages such as Genesis 2:24 – ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh’ (NIV) – are interpreted to mean that monogamy is the norm for Christians.

In practice, however, the Ashantis are polygamous traditionally. While Ancient Hebrew families are patriarchal (Philips 1980), the Ashantis are matriarchal (Fortes 1960). The role and sanctity of the sexes in marriage seem to differ. At the same time the two people, characteristic of simple societies, share certain commonalities. These include the emphasis on having children rather than love as the major motivating factor for marriage (Mugabane 1998). Even among the matrileanage of the Akans, within the marriage, the male plays a dominant role.
A comparative study of Ashanti traditional marriage and that of the Ancient Hebrews, therefore, is important for three reasons. First, so far as the author’s research reveals, there has been no study of its kind which makes it intellectually a worthwhile pursuit.

Secondly, the study may unearth the challenges that an Ashanti who adopts the religion of the Hebrews has to confront in terms of family and marriage institutions. It is hoped that the study will motivate the author himself or someone else to do a follow up study on coping or adapting mechanisms of Ashanti Christians to their newly found religion since the introduction of Christianity in the 18th Century. However, that is beyond the scope of this study.

Thirdly, the importance of the study lies in providing comparative analysis of two distant traditional societies which have largely maintained their identities into the modern world. The ‘rebirth’ of Israel in 1948 has made the Hebrew Bible a living document among one of the most conspicuous groups in the world today – The Jews. In Africa, the colonization of the continent introduced major social transformations in traditional societies to such an extent that today most of the ancient kingdoms and traditions have either disappeared or are only nostalgically rehearsed at special celebrations.

Not so with the Ashantis. The Ashanti Kingdom was not conquered and subjugated by the colonialisation process until the dawn of the 20th Century, the year 1900 to be exact (Buah 1980). Even then the British, although attempted it, did not disturb their traditions and allowed them internal autonomy to a large extent. The result is that much of the Ashanti
traditions with respect to marriage and family life remain intact today. With exceptions of countries with monarchical forms of government (e.g. Morocco, Swaziland and Lesotho), the King of Ashanti is among the few non-Heads of State who is accorded State visits status to countries such as the United States and Britain.

Most importantly, to the delight of the author, and partly a factor in the delay in completing this dissertation, there is a wealth of information that exists with regard to family and marriage life among the Ancient Hebrews and the Ashantis. In the case of the latter, the legendary masterpieces of the anthropologist and colonial administrator by the name Captain R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (Rattray 1923) and *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Rattray 1927) – provide the Ashantis the equivalent of the Pentateuch to the Hebrews, albeit in far greater detail than the Biblical account. The incredibly meticulous 750 page studies of the religion, art and social life of the Ashantis by a specialist at a time when the society had not been impacted by modernity is quite significant. Rattray’s work has since been built upon by other scholars. It is hoped that this dissertation in a small way will bring out the rich studies on the Ashanti to the attention of a much wider scholarly public.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

This work is based largely on desk research. In the case of the Ashantis a bird’s eye view of the original works on a people who constitute the biggest monolithic group in modern Ghana are provided.

A three-step approach is used. First, the main coordinates of Hebrew and Ashanti family and marriage lives will be outlined. Second, the two traditions are compared with respect to their similarities and differences.
Finally, an attempt is made to account for the patterns that emerge. The usual distinction between literature survey and research material in dissertations therefore will not apply as the bulk of the study is devoted to the former.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
The study is limited in scope as it is in partial fulfillment of a Masters degree. Study of the marriage and family life of either the Ancient Hebrews or Ashantis could be the subject matter of a doctoral thesis. However, notwithstanding this limitation the study on a comparative analysis of two distant societies who are linked by a common religion today is significant; a religion which has its genesis in the Hebrew Bible.

1.7 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION
The rest of the work is organized as follows: Chapter 2 presents a brief overview of leading issues in marriage and family life in traditional societies generally. While sharing some commonalities with social life of today, traditional societies differ in many ways. It is important in such a study to avoid projecting what prevails today into the past. That is followed by a survey of marriage and family life in Ancient Israel in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively drawing on two essays written by the author in the course of his study for the degree of the Master in Theology.

Chapter 5 is devoted to Ashanti traditional society and family life which introduces their belief system, kinship structure and family life as a prelude to Chapter (6) which focuses on the details of marriage among the Ashantis. In chapter 6, Ashanti traditional marriage is compared and contrasted with Biblical patterns. We conclude in Chapter 7 with a collation of the main findings of the research.
CHAPTER 2

ISSUES IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The role of family in the life of people even in modern societies is often underestimated. Yet even today, the nuclear family largely determines the type of education, socialization, cultural medium, material and general well-being of its members. What is true of modern families is even more so when we come to traditional societies. In these societies the family is the locus of economic, religious, social and moral life of the people. This is due to the fact that in pre-industrial societies economic activities – mainly agricultural and pastoral – are organized around families. The concept of family and marriage in traditional societies are therefore broader than contemporary usage.

2.2. NUCLEAR AND EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM

It is amazing how common usage of words often lack the specificity and clarity as to what is meant. The terms family and marriage are no exceptions. A contemporary example is, ‘who is married?’ Currently in Western societies homosexual partners are being accorded the status of married couples while they are officially ‘accursed’ in Zimbabwe. In traditional societies where the extended family is observed, the limits of a family are not easily defined. Similarly, we will find later that among the Ashanti’s the term ‘my wife’ or ‘husband’ may be applied to a paternal cousin without any conjugal relationship. It merely acknowledges the fact
that the rules of endogamy allow and even encourage ‘cross-cousin’ marriages.

It is therefore important to indicate the use of few terms that will occur frequently in this dissertation namely ‘nuclear family’, ‘Extended family’, ‘Marriage’ and ‘Polygamy’ without claiming to remove all the ambiguities in their use. We will look firstly two types of families of relevance to this study namely: nuclear family and extended family. Polygamy versus monogamy, which may be practised in the context of nuclear, or extended family system is taken up latter in this chapter.

a) **Nuclear Family:** The Encyclopedia Britannica describes a family ‘as a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption, constituting a single household, and interacting with each other in their respective social positions of husband and wife, mother and father’ (1994 Volume 4:673). A household, however, may include non family members especially in traditional societies. It is therefore important to distinguish between a couple and their offspring and other people who may share common residence, religious, social and economic life as a household. At the core of the household is the nuclear family.

Nuclear family will be used to designate husband, wife (wives) and their offspring. The family thus defined is contrasted with the household, which includes other people who share common residence and kindred which may in turn be divided into several smaller households.
b) **Extended Family:** Traditional societies scarcely use the word family in the above sense of a nuclear family. In fact an Ashanti traditionally never uses the word family (*abusua*) to refer to his nuclear family which is described as 'my wife/husband and children'. In many traditional societies, like the Ashantis, family invariable means extended family which expand on the nuclear family (parents and dependent children) to include members of one's lineage. The extended family in traditional societies include distant kin such as grand parents, uncles, auntsies and cousins. Within the extended family terms such as ‘father’, ‘mother’, ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ have a wider application than what we are used to in modern societies. For example, one's father's brother may be addressed as (junior) father.

In traditional and rural societies the concept of family is based on unity of bloodlines and therefore the family encompasses a bigger group of households and kindred regulated by complex customs of marriage, sexual relationships and inheritance. One common characteristic of all types of traditional families is the emphasis on common blood relationship and descent (Rattray 1923). Typically family members trace their lineage to a common ancestor. The extended family in such societies performs several functions and is more important than church or state to its members. In the absence of modern day insurance, and given the vagaries of life in primitive economies, the extended family, in addition to its social functions, play an important economic role and directly provides for the needs of its members and the self-sufficiency of the group. Clan members cooperate and support each other.

The extended family may live in the same locality and work together or may live at several locations as a clan. However, the head of the family or
clan rallies them on important occasions such as birth, marriage, death and major economic needs of a member.

Unless otherwise stated we will use the term family in the sense of an 'extended family' throughout this dissertation as that is more appropriate description of the family life among the ancient Hebrews and Ashantis.

2.3 PATRILINEAL AND MATRILINEAL FAMILY SYSTEMS

Family relationship may be reckoned through the father or mother. Family systems which trace descent through the father are known as patrilineal systems. Many tribal groups have kinship structures based on polygamous and patrilineal descent. While that may be true in terms of prevalence of patrilineal family systems, in Africa significant groups including the Akans who constitute about 60% of the Ghanaian population and tribes in Kenya for example have matrilineal systems that trace descent through the mother rather than the father. (Mbiti 1994; Nkansah-Kyeremeateng 1996).

Broadly speaking ethnographers (Bohannan and Middleton 1968) distinguish between matriarchal and patriarchal systems of family organization with the rest being variants of these two dominant types (Vander 1990). In patriarchal societies lineage and inheritance is traced through the male (father or through the eldest son) while the opposite is the case in matriarchal societies. Among the matriarchal; lineage is traced through female members of the family. Children therefore identify with the mother's family and may not succeed or inherit from their fathers but from their uncles on their mother's side.
2.4 THE ROLE OF MALE AND FEMALE IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES

The relative role of the sexes in traditional societies is generally characterized by inequity. The male, especially that of the father/head of family/husband, has much authority and control over the female members and children. The inferior position of women in Ancient Israel (Deist and Le Roux 1987), in African societies (Masenya 1995, 1999) has received much attention and has been firmly established in the literature.

One would have expected that in matriarchal societies the opposite would be found.

However, De Vaux (1988:20) notes that even in matriarchal societies the mother rarely exercises authority. For example, among the matriarchal Akans of Ghana much of the authority in the extended family resides in the uncle (mother's brother) and the 'abusuapanin' (Head of family who is invariably a man). Within the household the father is still the main authority. Thus while the child belongs to the mother's family and social group and inherits through the mother, nonetheless in day to day running of the family the father still dominates and wields most of the authority.

Evans-Pritchard (1965) writing on 'The position of women in primitive societies' provides important insights into marriage and family life among simple people. (We will prefer to use 'simple societies' to Evan-Pritchard's 'primitive societies' because of the derogatory connotations of the latter). Among the issues identified by him are the following:

- There is seldom anything corresponding to romantic love as the basis of marriage. It is marriage first, love later so to speak.
Parents or elders of the extended family have a major say in determining who one marries.

Invariably the woman occupies an inferior status.

'The sexes do not intrude on one another all the time especially among the spouses ... A married couple have their family together with other children in their home, but outside the home the man and to a lesser extent the woman, has a independent social life and goes about such affairs as concerns him or her as a man or woman'. (Evans-Pritchard 1965:49).

However, men invariably 'hold the authority, though in some societies and in certain circumstances old women may exercise authority as well'. (Evans-Pritchard 1965:50).

Goody and Goody (1966) agree with Evans-Pritchard on the inferior position of women in their study. They write 'the position of women in simpler societies is unfavourable and in this respect, there is no great difference between hunters, agriculturalists and pastoralist'. However, Lowie (1929) thinks that the influence of women has often been misunderstood and underestimated especially their ability to hold their own, the esteem they are held and their important social role.

2.5 MARRIAGE

Unlike the concept of family, marriage is easier to describe among simple societies. Until recently other relationships such as homosexuality and lesbianism were not recognized even though they have probably existed as long as mankind. The fact that the Bible for example strongly condemns these relationships (see for example Romans 1:26–27) itself is an indication of the existence of such phenomena.
The institution of marriage refers to the complex of customs regulating the sexual relations between the cohabiting pairs of adults within the family group. Marriage defines the procedures for establishing and terminating the husband-wife relationship, as well as the reciprocal obligations and the accepted restrictions upon its 'personnel' (Lowie 1929:673).

Earlier works such as that of McLennon (1865) and Wake (1889) seem to suggest that marriage institutions are the historical outcome of progressive restraints on promiscuity. However, marriage customs, contractual agreements, obligations and restrictions regulating sexual relations between cohabiting adults as well as procedures for establishing and terminating the husband-wife relation, when viewed globally in history did not always restrain promiscuity.

Despite the diversity in forms of marriage, certain general characteristics can be identified so far as the marriage custom is concerned in traditional societies. Social analysts, again drawing on ethnographic examples, consider traditional marriage as transfer of valuables by legal contracts, and sometimes as symbols of political alliance (Bohannan and Middleton 1968). In such societies the legal contract which defines a marriage is not necessarily between the married couple but between their respective families.

The marriage ceremony varies greatly from simple exchange of gifts (as among the Akans) of Ghana, or the heavy bride price consisting of several cows that may be paid over several years, as is still the practice in Southern Africa. The significance of the 'dowry', 'bride price' or 'mohar' in traditional societies vary greatly. The level of the bride price seems to determine the control the husband has over the wife. For example, among
the patrilineal Neur of South Sudan, the dowry did not buy the woman but entitled the payer (husband) to exercise rights over the children of the woman. In the case of the Akans of Ghana, of which the Ashantis are a part, it would seem the bride price only confers sexual and domestic rights on the husband. On the other hand in many African traditional societies after marriage the wife literally becomes part, if not the property, of the husband’s family.

2.6 POLYGAMY VERSUS MONOGAMY

The literature on traditional marriage identifies two types of arrangement. One is monogamy whereby marriage rules restrict the permissible relationship of marriage to one man and one woman at a time. Other sexual relationships may exist among married people such as concubinage and even adulterous ones but the way these are described indicates that they are considered as aberrations.

The other is where one spouse is allowed to marry two or more people of the opposite sex. This is polygamy. Polygamy comes in two forms. The rare version of polygamy is polyandry where a woman may espouse more than one husband as among the Nayar of South India. The more common form of polygamy and the one that is widely practiced in Africa, is polygyny. Under polygyny the rules of marriage allow a man to take more than one wife. Because polygamy is the widely used term in Africa, even though, technically it is polygyny, unless otherwise specified we will stick to the more familiar expression of polygamy when talking about a man espousing more than one wife.

According to Mbiti (1974:82) ‘the polygamous institution of marriage is found in almost every African traditional society’. Bascom and Herkovits (1959:185) however think that the actual incidence of polygamy is greatly
overstated, with the average number of wives per married man being about 1.5.

Even in monogamous societies and definitely in polygamous societies other forms of marriage and consensual sexual relationships are also recognized. This includes concubinage and levirate marriage, the latter of which requires further explanation. In many traditional societies, a man may take on the wife of a deceased brother to provide offspring to the deceased relative, to preserve ‘family property rite’ or to ‘provide for the childless widow a place in the family’ (Epstein 1942:279). This is what is called levirate marriage.

2.7 PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE
The modern day emphasis on love and marriage differs from that in traditional societies. In fact, in traditional societies marriage tends to serve greater ends than the happiness of the couple. Emphasis is placed on having children, maintaining the lineage and building social alliance between groups (Mbiti 1974). Understanding this is fundamental to unraveling marriage and family life among traditional societies.

2.8 RULES OF ENDOGAMY AND SEXUALITY IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES
The importance of marriage in traditional societies is attested to by the elaborate rules that govern the institution which will form the subject matter of the bulk of this dissertation with respect to the Ancient Hebrews and Traditional Ashantis. It will suffice at this point to note that; regarding exogamy and endogamy, almost all societies have rules regulating whom one may marry and whom one cannot have sexual relations with or marry.
For example, an Ashanti cannot marry one of the ‘same blood’ or ‘family’ (abusua) which are defined as a person of one’s mothers lineage. However, ‘cross-cousin’ marriages (uncle’s daughter or son) is actually preferred by the Ashantis even marrying though they are close relatives. This is because ‘same blood’ is understood strictly in matrilinear terms. (These are explained in Chapters 5 and 6 in detail). The Ancient Israelites also practiced endogamy in that marrying outside the twelve tribes was not encouraged.

2.9 THE PROCESS OF MARRIAGE

The process of marriage also varies from society to society, from simple ceremonies to elaborate and prolonged ones among traditional people. Therefore it is better to discuss them with respect to specific traditional societies. We shall be looking at various aspects of marriage among the Ashantis and compare them with those prevailing among the ancient Israelites with respect to:

(a) Whom one may marry (see under exogamy and endogamy above).

(b) The role of parents in the choice of spouse: In traditional societies parents and or the elders have a greater role in the choice of a partner.

(c) Betrothal stage and whether betrothal constitutes marriage or not.

(d) The ‘bride price’ dowry or ‘head money’: Invariably there is some payment made to the bride’s people on marriage which may be accompanied by reciprocal gifts from the bride’s family. The significance and size of payment vary however, from a token payment among the matrilineal Akans (Kyeremateng 1996) to
several cows for the bride price among the patrilineal Xhosa’s and Tswanas of Southern Africa (Magubane 1998).

(e) Marriage ceremony: This may range from a simple civil contract not sanctioned by any religious rite as among the Ancient Israelite (De Vaux 1988) or elaborate celebrations as is still practiced among most of Israel’s Arab neighbours today.

(f) Virginity test and ‘rite de passage’: Many traditional societies have initiation into adulthood for boys and girls. In the case of the latter they are expected to enter marriage chaste and show evidence of virginity, without which the husband may divorce her or ask for a refund of the bride price.

(g) Divorce and Remarriage: The present day Roman Catholic view of sanctity of marriage and marriage for life does not seem to hold in many traditional societies. However, the social network between the two contracting families, non-existent social security for unmarried adult women and in some case the payment of a heavy bride price to be refunded on divorce may limit the practice. But once divorced remarriage may occur easily.

2.10 CONCLUSION

While we cannot follow further the interesting discussion on marriage and family in traditional societies in general it will suffice to conclude with the following generalizations:

- In traditional societies all normal adults are expected to marry. ‘Among those things that first strike a visitor to a primitive people is that there are no unmarried adult women’ (Lowie 1929:43)
- Marriage is seen in a bigger context such as producing children, maintaining the lineage and forming social alliances and not purely as a conjugal relationship between two lovers.
- The status of the woman is generally inferior.
- The family is extended and may include several generations and even deceased ancestors who are regarded as 'living dead'.
- Children are considered as a most important product of marriage, who belong either to the wife's or husband's family. In most patrilineal system the heavy labola seems to imply purchase and for all intents and purpose the wife belongs to the husband.
- African societies value children as the most important purpose and meaning of marriage. Indeed in certain cases a marriage is not considered as such until children are born (Mbiti 1974).
CHAPTER 3
FAMILY LIFE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE HEBREW BIBLE

While other complementary materials exist such as those on the customs and practices of Israel's neighbours, the main source of information with regard to traditional Israelite society is the Old Testament. (The Hebrew Bible). This dissertation further focuses on the first five books of the Hebrew Bible which has been dubbed the Pentateuch. Given that not only was the Bible without an author in the ordinary sense and that the traditional titles of most of the books were latter assumptions and inferences (Van Dyk 1987), it is important to provide a brief introduction to the Pentateuch.

Van Dyk (1987), Gottwald (1985), De Vaux (1988), Deist and Le Roux, (1987) provide much more elaborate introductions to the Old Testament as a source material, a summary of which is contained in an essay by Adei (2002). In a nutshell, Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible is disputed among scholars of Biblical studies. Rather they are viewed as recollections of sagas, legends, novella, etc. systematized into collective history of the ancient Hebrews in later times. Some fundamentalists think that such a position constitutes an undermining of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. But that should not be so as God could use an individual author or a general collection by redactors to communicate 'His Story'.

Today the prevailing theory attributes the authorship of the Pentateuch to four writers or group of writers who are identified by their style of writing
and use of divine names as follows (See Gottwald 1985 for a brief summary):

i) ‘J’ for Yahwistic author whose trademark is calling God ‘Yahweh’.

ii) ‘E or Elohist for his/their preference of the divine name ‘Elohim’.

iii) ‘D’ for the Deuteronomistic material credited with the bulk of the Hebrew Bible from Deuteronomy to Ezra-Nehemiah.

iv) ‘P’ or Priestly authorship which has the hallmark of priestly regulations, laws and practices.

Thus the conclusion of current scholarship is that: (a) The Pentateuch cannot be taken as literal history of ancient Israel but rather a systematized reflection and recollections of Ancient Israel people. (b) Far from being authored by one person, be it Moses or someone else, it is the product of several people or groups of people – in short the product of the religious community of Israel.

In terms of dating the current scholarship stands at variance with the traditional view of Mosaic authorship. Rather J and E. traditions were developed at the period of United Israel and the D and P between ca 700 and 450 BC (See Vaux 1998; Epstein 1942 and Gottwald 1985). In that regard, while ‘today the tendency is to do one of two things with ‘source’ previously taken as composing the Pentateuch either they are dated much latter than they used to be, or to deny they ever existed’ (Deist and Le Roux 1987:35) most scholars would agree that the documents present us with sufficient pointers to the social life and basic familiar pattern of the ancient people predating the monarchy.
For our purpose however, what is important is that it is evident that the Ancient Hebrews were a distinct community formed around their belief in God. Otherwise they shared much with their neighbours in terms of family life and marriage laws (De Vaux 1988).

3.2 ‘THE FATHERS’

The Pentateuchal history is presented as the unfolding of God’s promise to one man Abraham, a descendant of Adam through Noah and his descendants which reached fulfillment through the twelve ‘Sons’ of Jacob. On the surface therefore the Pentateuch in the main describes the successive generations of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve Sons almost with occasional digression to point to branches such as the Ammonites, Moabites, (descendants of Lot); Arameans as descendants of Nahor; and Edomites of Esau. The clustering of the traditions around these ancestors has raised questions as to whether they represented individual family traditions or tribal groups with their names being used eponymously. For example, Gottwald is of the view that ‘virtually all of the Abraham sagas can be read as events in the life of a family head’ (1985:192). However, ‘it is far more likely that sagas about individuals and families identified as significant ancestors of Israel, have been given direct and indirect eponymous meanings, and have in turn given rise to traditions units that are eponymous at their core’ (Gottwald 1985:195).

Notwithstanding the eponymous use of the fathers however, it would be difficult for the stories to emerge if there were no real flesh and blood behind the Fathers and Mothers. Tradition being what it is, ancient heroes tend to be invested with super-human characteristics, but often these constitute exaggerations built around real kernels.
Thus the family and marriage traditions in the Pentateuch can be taken as indicative of the family and marriage life of the Ancient Hebrews.

3.3 FAITH AND MARRIAGE/FAMILY LIFE
The Hebrew Bible begins with a firm statement of faith – 'In the beginning God'. Without digressing into a vibrant and scholarly debate as to whether the Ancient Hebrews were originally polytheistic or monotheistic there is no doubt that social, family and individual living in the Pentateuch is presented as centering around their common belief in 'Yahweh'. It was God who made 'male and female' to be fruitful and multiply; the Decalogue – the Ten Commandments – contain three instructions about family life – parenting, adultery and coveting a neighbour's wife (Exodus 20). In fact, the defining moment of the Israelite people was God's initiative in calling Abraham to himself.

3.4 PATRIARCHY AND THE ROLE OF MALE AND FEMALE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL
In the Pentateuch, there is evidence of strong roles played by women in social and family life. For example, in Genesis 16, Sarah seems to direct Abraham to have a seed through Hagar. In fact 'Sarah is a strong-willed equal of Abraham capable of compelling her handmaid in a jealous fit and not above laughing at the promise of a son in her old age'. (Genesis 16: 1-16, Genesis 18: 9-15) (Gottwald 1985:175). The role of Rebekah in her relationship with Isaac (Genesis 24-25), and the seeming manipulative corruption of Jacob's wives (Genesis 30) have also led some scholars to propose that Israelite society was originally matriarchal (Smith 1885 as referred to in De Vaux 1988). In reality, however, the general thrust of the evidence is that Israelite family has been basically patriarchal. This is amply supported by the fact that all Biblical lineages are through the father.
with one exception (Matthew in regard to Jesus). Families are described as 'house of one's fathers'. The husband is the 'master' of the wife.

The superiority of the male is reflected in the address of the wife to her husband with 'my lord (usually ba'āl, but in Genesis 18:12 even adonai) and in the prestige which accrues to the wife or 'handmaid' who bears a son' (Rodd 1967:24). Fathers have almost absolute authority over their children (De Vaux 1988:20). Thus we agree with Phillips (1980:242) that Israelite 'family law indicates legal power which the head of the house wielded. His daughter was his property to be disposed of if he willed'. The view that the woman was created from the man's rib (Genesis 2:22) and that the wife is listed among the property of the man subject to covetousness (Exodus 20:17) seem to support the inferiority of women in ancient Jewish society.

We can, therefore, conclude that the culture of the Hebrews prescribed a patriarchal family system. Power was vested in the male head of the family who is either the father or upon his death the eldest son. The story of the seven daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27) who asked for their father's inheritance because they had no male heir confirms the rule of patriarchal system instead of contradicting it.

The foregoing conclusion is not evident in other sections of Genesis 1 and 2 where we read that:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him male and female, He created them' (Genesis 1:27).

'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him' (Genesis 2: 18).
‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh’ (Genesis 2:18).

In these verses the inferiority of the woman is not evident. Also in the fifth Commandment children are to honour their fathers and mothers equally (Exodus 20:12).

One must, however, be cautious in making inferences from Genesis 1 and 2 which represent a systematized account of P and J in latter centuries. For example, Westermann (1987:10) is of the view that being created in the image of God ‘does not mean a particular human quality, it is not an isolated assertion about human beings but rather concerns the purpose of their creation’. Similarly, the ‘two becoming one flesh’ (Genesis 2:24) might be equivalent to one clan (Leviticus 25:49). In Hebrew and Arabic flesh is synonymous with clan or kindred. More probably it refers to the connubium (Skinner 1994:70). Similarly Beston (1986) is of the opinion that the phrasing of Genesis 2:24 where we have ‘leaving’, and ‘cleaving’ indicates that sometimes the man did leave to join his wife’s clan in contrast to near Eastern tradition. If he did, he was to abandon his clan for his wife’s with all its rules of inheritance and taboos in order not to be treated as an outsider but a full member. In other words he ‘donned their skin’. All these point to the need for caution in reading too much into the texts. Thus all one may say is that the subordination of woman to man is not as strong in Genesis 1 and 2 as in the rest of the Pentateuch and that the former may be evidence of development in tradition over the years.

It is important to note that obligations of family members to each other usually different from their legal status. Each member of the family in Ancient Israel irrespective of status had an obligation to help and protect
each other. This norm was formalized in the 'go'el' system whereby a near relative had the responsibility to redeem or buy back an enslaved kin or mortgaged property that falls into the hands of non kinsfolk. 'The go'el was a redeemer, a protector, a defender of the interests of the individual and of the group. If an Israelite had to sell himself into slavery in order to repay a debt, he would be redeemed by one of his near relations' (Leviticus 25: 47-49) (De Vaux 1988:21). The exploits and intercessions of Abraham on behalf of his nephew Lot (Genesis 18) bear ample witness to that.

The male headship of the family went with important prescribed roles far beyond the modern concept of fatherhood. He had great authority. The role of the male in the family in the patriarchal system may be summarized as follows:

i) He could choose spouses for his sons (Genesis 24).

ii) He could sell his daughter into slavery.

iii) He seemed to have absolute control over his wife. (See iv below).

iv) He could even invalidate a solemn vow made to the Lord by his wife or unmarried daughter (Numbers 30: 2-16).

The patriarch's authority was balanced with responsibilities as leader, manager of the family 'business', overseer of the camp or settlement, judge and commander in chief.

In some ways the father was an embodiment of the family. His exploits brought great honour to members of his family. In the same way the family shared in the consequences of his sins. For example, Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16) and Achan's covetousness (Joshua 7) resulted not only in their deaths but that of their whole families.
Not so easily defined was the role of the woman. That the woman's role was subordinate compared to that of the male in general is clear, however. Invariably, she was under a male authority. She was not an equal partner in marriage and it would seem that she could not initiate divorce (Deuteronomy 24). A good wife was depicted in terms of fulfilling certain responsibilities (Proverbs 31) the chief of which seemed to be that of bearing children especially a male heir to the man (Mbuwayesanyo 1977). The wife was not a slave and could not be sold but a daughter may be sold (Exodus 21:7). Thus, in this way a woman as a daughter was part of the father's estate. The fact that a daughter could be sold indicated the low status accorded women generally in ancient Israel.

The following quotation from De Vaux (1988:38) summarizes the role of women in the family as portrayed in the Pentateuch:

The wife in ancient Israel did not inherit from her husband or father ordinarily, but did most of the hard work in the home. A wife called her husband 'ba'al' or master and sometimes even 'lord' (Genesis 18:12). The Decalogue includes a man's wife among his possessions in the tenth commandment along with his house and land, his male and female slave, his ox and his ass (Exodus 20: 17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Her husband can repudiate her, but she cannot claim a divorce. All her life she remains a minor. The wife does not inherit from her husband, nor daughters from their father, except when there is no male heir (Numbers 27:8). A vow made by a girl or married woman needs, to be valid, the consent of father or husband is needed and if this consent is withheld, the vow is null and void (Numbers 30: 4-17 De Vaux 1988:38).
In recent times and in the light of what may be called the feminist movement, scholarly attempts to interpret the Biblical account (Deist and Le Roux 1987) including the portrait of women have emerged. In that regard the works of Masenya (1995 and 1999) provide some of the best reviews of feminist works with an African perspective. She notes that much of feminist hermeneutics share certain basic convictions. First, women are full human beings and must be valued as such. The feminist scholars also articulate the principle of mutuality as basic goal of interpersonal relationship (Masenya 1995). Like others such as Farley (1985) she feels that while Biblical witness yields feminist insights to interpret the rest of Scripture (for example, the principle of equality) ‘feminist consciousness’ cannot be solely confined to Scripture.

She notes that feminist approaches fall into three options as follows:

i) Looking to texts about women to counteract famous texts against women.

ii) Looking to the Bible generally (not specifically to texts about women) for a theological perspective offering a critique of patriarchy.

iii) Looking to texts about women to learn the intersection of history and stories of ancient and modern women in patriarchal cultures (Sakenfeld 1985:56-64 as cited by Masenya 1995).

The challenge is how to confront the perceived biases of the Bible without imposing our own biases on it and for that Masenya proposes the ‘Bosadi’ (womanhood) approach which seeks to critique the androcentric class and race elements as a way of liberating the marginalized from oppressive texts. Another complementary approach is to highlight the qualities of
independence, women’s ability to decide on their own, industry and achievements of Biblical women who in the midst of male dominated culture rose above their kit and kin such as Ruth, Noami and the ‘Noble woman of Proverbs 31’ (Masenya 1997; Ljung 1989).

Women exercised de facto power in Biblical times, but that depended on their relative capacity vis-à-vis their husbands. Their judicial authority was limited even if they played significant roles in the Pentateuch. As noted by Bosman and Loader (1988):

   It is also unquestionably by the actions of women that the Pharaoh’s extermination plan is foiled: Jochebed refuses to allow her baby son to be killed; her daughter cares for the baby; a princess has compassion on the little boy; midwives are disobedient to the Pharaoh and deliver their babies too quickly in birth for his plan to work. The entire miracle of the exodus from Egypt is made ‘possible’ through women. Again, it is once more a woman who saves Moses’ life by circumcising his son (Exodus 4:24-26) and it is a woman who at last plays a key role by saving the spies who go to reconnoitre Jericho immediately prior to the entry (Joshua 2:2-24).

The story of Miriam’s challenge of Moses authority in Exodus 12 (a story in which Aaron seems overshadowed by her sister) indicates that a woman in Israel could wield power, and even challenge a national male leader. Nonetheless the woman’s role generally remained subordinate.

Thus while the Israelite wife was juridically subordinate to her male counterpart, de facto many women played significant, even leadership roles. She was loved and listened to by her husband as in all societies, but, within the family, she was not an equal. In fact, De Vaux (1988) rightly notes that the social and legal position of an Israelite wife was inferior to
the position of a wife in the surrounding countries such as Egypt and Babylon (Deuteronomy 21:14).

3.5 CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY

One may infer the role of children in the Hebrew Bible in three ways: the narratives of children in family contexts; laws and regulations regarding children; and critical incidences pertaining to children. The author of Psalm 127 would declare that 'Sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward' (Psalm 127: 3).

While marriage was for companionship and complementarity (Genesis 2: 18, 24), the 'garden concept' of marriage for procreation dominates the Pentateuch (Trobisch, 1971). The first couple was created to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1: 28). Gottwald (1985:157) has noted stylized sagas or 'type scenes' characterized by the 'birth of an ancestor to barren mothers' in the narratives (Genesis 6, 7, 8, 11 - Isaac to Sarah; Genesis 23, 49, 56 - Jacob's sons to Rachel). The sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22); birth and upbringing of Isaac's twin boys (Esau and Jacob, Genesis 24-26), Jacob's sons; the dreams of Joseph; and the birth of Moses dominate the stories of the fathers and mothers and give prominence to children. Having children was, therefore, of particular significance to the Hebrews. Much of the narratives of the lives of the Fathers relate to childbirth and children while much of the critical incidences in Genesis involved children. To have children, especially a male heir was prized and sterility was dreaded by couples especially wives.

The expectations about children were summed up in the fifth commandment. 'Honour thy father and thy mother' (Exodus 20:12). Children were considered as willful creatures to be trained, restrained and
punished. Parents were to discipline their children and in the worst case of stubborn rebellion to be given up to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21: 18-21).

The eldest son of legally married Israelite woman held a special place with certain privileges and the husband had no choice in that (Deuteronomy 21: 15-17). It would seem from the story of Jacob and Esau that this rule was not that firm in patriarchal times so that Jacob, the younger could be given priority over Esau his older brother (Genesis 25). The first son inherits doubly on the death of the father (Deuteronomy 21: 17). That position could be lost on a grave offence (Genesis 35: 22 in Reuben’s case) or surrendered as Esau did to Jacob (Genesis 25: 29-34). The texts suggest a clear and consistent preference of boys over girls.

3.6 FAMILY LIFE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

The Hebrew family, like many traditional African societies, reveals that the patriarchal family was an extended one as opposed to the nuclear family of father-mother and offspring. Thus, for example, Abraham leaves Mesopotamia with his wife Sara as well as his father, nephew Lot and a host of other members (Genesis 12). Noah enters the ark with his own family and in-laws. It was common for a family to include the patriarch, wife or wives, concubines, offspring, slaves and even strangers who attached themselves to them. In fact the family could extend to the clan. Jacob thus goes to Egypt with a ‘family’ of about 70 men who themselves had nuclear families (Genesis 46:26).

In the narratives of the lives of the Patriarchs in Genesis 12-50 the extended family lives together in a cluster of tents. The wider kinship network remains important so that even after decades Jacob is welcome
by Laban as a nephew in far away Mesopotamia (Genesis 29). Within the family, however, as would be expected, there were tensions such as those between Abraham and Lot, Jacob and Esau as well as closer bonds especially between maternal siblings as was the case of Joseph and Benjamin. Wives joined their husbands' households generally though Genesis 2:24 and the special case of Jacob residing with Laban for over 20 years show there were exceptions.

The family system, however, changed with the transition from a pastoral to an agricultural economy through the introduction of a tribal confederation (amphictyony), monarchy and finally the collection of the laws into a series of codes (Rodd 1967, Deist and Le Roux, 1987). Evidence of evolution abound in the Pentateuch and throughout the Hebrew Bible which the following examples illustrate. While Abraham could take Hagar (an Egyptian) and Moses married a Medianite, the code and especially Ezra legislate strongly against marrying foreign wives. The story of Abraham and Lot shows that once they settled after decades of wandering, it became necessary to emphasize the uniqueness of one's immediate family leading to their parting company (Genesis 13). Again, Rodd (1967) suggests that much of the law codes did not necessarily reflect practice and that the case of limiting the practice of levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5 might have been a reflection of that, an attempt to revive what had fallen into abeyance in the agricultural society of latter days.

Like all societies, the effects of the settlement in Palestine and the transition from agricultural to city life not only led to specialization (Levites, wood workers, linen manufacturers and porters as in 1 Chronicles 4:14; 21; 23; Jeremiah 19) but also to changes in the structure of the family.
Rodd's (1967) succinct summary which we follow here, notes that the family group became smaller as evidenced by smaller sizes of city houses with some children having their own homes (2 Sam. 13: 7f; 20). The lineage nevertheless remained important as well as the role of the 'go'el' redeemer. Another important change was limitation of the absolute right of the father over the son. Now it was elders who had the power of death sentence as in Deuteronomy 21: 18-21.

Of equally great impact was the formation of the tribal confederacy with the ark and the laws as their focal points. A major change in that regard was groupings into tribes, which was possibly just a larger group of kinsfolks or extended family. Hierarchy was still limited until the introduction of the monarchy when the royal household stood higher relative to the ordinary people. Then further specialization occurred with the introduction of a bureaucracy (secretaries, recorders), standing army on the one hand and conscripted labour at the other extreme ensued. Administrative districts replaced older forms of tribal organization. Introduction of taxes to finance both genuine needs and kingly extravagances resulted in internal conflicts (1 Kings 12: 1-24). 'Even the sanctities of the family group will not be honoured' (Rodd 1967:26). With these changes came relaxation of rules against intermarriage with foreigners. Polygamy was used for purposes of alliance and prestige rather than for children, especially male heirs.

It would seem that the revivalist (Ezra) and much of the law and codes which the priestly class sought to enforce and which dominate the Pentateuch were reactions to the changes in the family and general life in Ancient Israel. One may say that the changing social structure in Israelite society impacted the organization and functions of family in Ancient Israel. The Pentateuch, which we noted earlier was largely of latter origin
therefore would contain vestiges of what prevailed in Ancient Israel, as the authors sought to counter changes in custom.

The role of the family in the social life of its members prior to the monarchy nevertheless remained great.

The traditional Hebrew family was an organization of great strength and unity. It existed in a social context where there were no other elaborately developed institutions. Political power was held largely by patriarchs; the economy was rudimental; even religion was primarily a family matter. The patriarch served as priest at worship and presided over ceremonial activities. There was not yet a separate class of rabbis. Under these conditions, the family performed many functions and was a strong and stable unit Leshe (1976:178).

Being a member of the family came with privileges and responsibilities. The family was the unit of society. It was the frame of reference and social identity for its members. It united people of common blood and common dwelling place of several generations (Genesis 46: 8-26). In a wider sense the term family in the Bible was synonymous with the clan.

It is important to emphasize that the family was the centre of the practice of Israelite-religion. Even though the tent and later the temple became the rallying point of national religious activities, the patriarch was the priest-king. The Passover was celebrated from the earliest times in the home (Exodus 12: 3-4, 46) even though that could be a post exile phenomenon.
3.7 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we must recall a text from De Vaux (1988) that 'the members of the family in the wider sense had an obligation to help and protect one another. The go'el was a redeemer, a protector, a defender of the interests of the individual and the group'.

One of the areas the family had great influence was on the rules and choice in marriage. Chapter 4 addresses issues relating to marriage in early Israelite society. By introduction, marriage in the Pentateuch allowed for polygamy. Marriage between close kin such as that between Abraham and his half-sister Sarah was initially permitted but forbidden in later law codes (Rodd 1967).

The above brief survey of family life among the ancient Hebrew would suggest the following:

i) The Hebrew family was basically patriarchal.

ii) The family is depicted as living together with emphasis placed on the extended family.

iii) The role of the woman was subordinate to that of the male and even though women played significant roles in the Pentateuch one would say it was still a man's world.

iv) In terms of residence it was more common for a bride to join her husband's house though Genesis 2:24 and Jacob's case show that there were exceptions.

v) Children were significant members but on the whole were expected to be subject to parental authority. A child was to honour parents and in extreme cases of rebellion could be sentenced to death by communal stoning commanded by the patriarch.
vi) In terms of respect fathers, sons and women who bore sons were held in high esteem.

It has been noted, however, that the source material has to be approached with care. It is not history in the conventional sense but stylized writings centuries later. Some scholars even question whether the fathers really lived. Biblical archaeology remains inconclusive on that. However, it is safe to conclude that the records represent the expectations of family life in the period of the monarchy and immediately after the exile, which themselves may date back to oral tradition that describe the origins of the ancient Hebrews.
CHAPTER 4

MARRIAGE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In fact, much of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch in particular, is devoted to describing marriage and family life of the patriarchs, divine interventions notwithstanding. We noted in Chapter 3 for example, that stories surrounding Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons and their families provide the bulk of the material in Genesis while the rest of the Pentateuch outlines the fortunes of Jacob’s descendants.

Thus, the cardinal importance of marriage and sexuality is underscored in the Hebrew Bible. Both the priestly author of Genesis 1 and the Yahwist who wrote Genesis 2 was at pains to indicate marriage as a divine norm. God created ‘male and female’ (Genesis 1:27) and that it is God who saw that it is not good for the man to be alone (Genesis 2:18).

This chapter seeks to identify the main coordinates of marriage among the ancient Israelites with particular reference to the Pentateuch. However, in the case of marriage other sections of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) such as Malachi 2:14-16, Ruth and Song of Songs provide important illustrations and allusions to the Law. To that end even New Testament references such as Jesus’ pivotal teaching on marriage in Matthew 19:1-12 refers back to God’s creation ideal in Genesis 2:24. On that occasion, Jesus himself was responding to the Pharisees reference to the Mosaic teaching in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 on divorce.

This chapter on Marriage Life Among The Ancient Hebrews will focus on the following aspects of Israelite marriage:
- The purpose of marriage as outlined in the Pentateuch.
- Sexuality in Ancient Israel in terms of attitude, what is permitted and sexual prohibitions.
- Forms of marriage with particular reference to polygamy versus monogamy, prevalence of concubinage, and levirate marriage.
- The marriage process including choosing a bride, engagement or betrothal, the bride price and marriage ceremony.
- Roles of husband and wife in marriage
- Divorce and remarriage.

Each of the above in itself could be the topic of an in depth essay. However, the approach adopted is that of an overview that summarises the main coordinates of marriage in Ancient Israel. This is done in anticipation of comparison between marriage in Ancient Israel and in Ashantis (Asante) in Ghana.

4.2 THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE IN ISRAEL

In trying to find the Pentateuchal teaching on marriage two sets of passages stand out. They are the foundational passages by the priestly writer in Genesis 1:27-28 and the Yahwist in Genesis 2:18-25 especially verses 18, 24 and 25. The latter are quoted four times in the New Testament as the norm for Christian marriage (Matthew 12:3-9; Matthew 5:31-32; Mark 10:2-12 and Ephesians 5:31). Even if practice and precept (see under polygamy and monogamy below) in the Bible are not the same, these passages are the logical reference points in our search for the purpose of marriage:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them
and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’ (Genesis 1:27-28).

The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him... For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:18, 24,25).

Ernest White’s (1965) summary of five purposes of marriage in the Bible is largely based on these passages. The first three derive directly from the Pentateuch:

i. **Fellowship:** The spouses through mutual exchange of human experiences open their lives to each other (Genesis 2:18).

ii. **Procreation:** ‘Historically, the procreative function of marriage has received major attention and is the primary purpose in the sacramental view’ strongly held by Roman Catholic theologians (Genesis 1:27-28).

iii. **Edification:** This is the role of marriage in furnishing an opportunity for the experience of love unparalleled in any other relationship. However, White (1965) seems to dwell more on the New Testament to support the third conclusion. While love may be assumed in most parts of the Pentateuch and can directly be inferred from the teachings of Genesis 2:18, and the injunction to exempt a newly married bridegroom from military service for one year (Deuteronomy 24:5) no explicit statement on love exists in the Pentateuch as we find in Proverbs and Song of Songs. In the case of Deuteronomy 24:5 the reference may be explained by the need of offspring before possible death in battle. In the case of Genesis 2:18 the text would
support companionship better which accords with the issue of edification.

Skinner (1994:33) commenting on Genesis 1:27 and 28 passage 'be fruitful and multiply' notes that taking verses 26 to 28 together 'benediction is here again the source of fertility, but this time also of dominion'. Claus Westermann (1987:11) agrees that 'the blessing is primary fertility. Through procreation, conception and birth, the blessing produces the chain of generations that P places after the creation story in Chapter 5'. Thus, as in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, a cardinal purpose of marriage is procreation.

It is, therefore, interesting that Genesis Chapter 2 does not address the question of fertility directly but rather emphasises the relationship between the spouses (loneliness in Verse 18 and unity and 'one flesh' in verses 24 and 25). Even though it is now fairly established that Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 are different in sources being Priestly and Yahwist respectively, one cannot overlook the fact that the compiler/redactor would have noted the differences in the stories. We surmise therefore that he saw the complementarity in the functions of marriage in Genesis chapter 1 (fertility) and chapter 2 (companionship and 'integration'). Skinner (1994:67) comments that 'the Creator taking pity on the solitude of the man, resolves to provide him with a suitable companion' taking a 'helper meet for him' in Genesis 2:8 to mean 'corresponding to him'.

Genesis 2:24 is by far the key passage on marriage not only in the Pentateuch but one which is the reference point in the New Testament. It is a passage that lends itself so easily to various interpretation. Much more problematic is the suggestion that the man on marriage leaves his
parents to join his wife’s household which the commentators identify as
‘benė’ marriage. This is because the practice in Ancient Israel and the
records in the Pentateuch point to the contrary: Rebecca joins her
husband’s family; Ruth becomes de facto Israeliite; and even though Jacob
resides with Laban, the father in law, it was partly for reasons of paying the
bride price (Rodd 1967:19). The above has led Beston (1986) to postulate
that the context shows one of a conditionality more than a must; that is if
he does leave, then he must cleave in the sense of imbibing their traditions
(donne their skin) in order to be regarded as a member. Whatever
meaning is put on leaving, the author no doubt leads on to state that all
that leads to being united with one’s spouse is to become ‘one flesh’. The
phrase could mean one ‘clan’. Skinner (1994) and Westermann (1987)
note that in both Hebrew and Arabic ‘flesh’ is synonymous with ‘clan’ or
‘kindred group’. It could also be referring simply to the ‘connubium’ (i.e.
related with marriage). One may conclude by saying that marriage in
Genesis 2 is envisaged as a partnership that involve bringing two people
together in an integrative sense which sex – ‘naked and not ashamed’
(v.25) - is the ultimate expression.

The above three purposes of marriage White (1965) calls ‘creative
purposes’. He, however, adds two other goals which he characterizes as
‘preventive functions’ namely:

i. **Control of passion:** Marital sex is a means to exercise sexuality
legitimately thus preventing wrong ways of satisfying sexual passion.

ii. **Prevention of the dissolution of society:** Marriage seems to be the
bedrock of family life without which social cohesion is threatened.

While White’s analysis was largely a commentary of marriage in the New
Testament, marriage as a basis of family life is true of all societies and that
was true of Ancient Israel. By marriage the basic unit of community is defined even though the Old Testament definition of family is broader including slaves and others who choose to attach themselves to the household. Even then there is a clear distinction between children of the spouses and other members of the family so that for example Abraham would go to great lengths to seek an offspring through Isaac so that Eliezer, a servant would not inherit from him.

We think, however, that marriage in the Pentateuch does not have as its primary purpose that of controlling sexual passion. This is because there is no evidence that anyone was censured for having sex outside marriage in the case of men, provided the woman involved was unmarried and the union was consensual. All the prohibitions relate to having sex with the wife of another, a ‘virgin’ which implied an unmarried young maiden or rape. The latter deserves the right of being properly married. The extent to which that is true indicates the subordinate role of women in Ancient Hebrew society (See Chapter 3).

A most important function of marriage not emphasized in the literature is that of partnership for work or ministry and the complementary role of the sexes implied in the Genesis account. God did not only command the man and his wife to be ‘fruitful and multiply’ but also to manage his creation (Genesis 1:28). All throughout human history till the industrial revolution, the couple constituted the basic work team. Even today, if housework is complementary to whatever work the couple does, the pattern is unbroken though weakened.

These days one hears of statistics pointing to the contingent nature of marriage with the rate of divorce now reaching one in two in many
industrialized societies. However, it is also true that most of those who divorce remarry. This is because the purpose marriage fulfils in the lives of individuals and society remains valid and there are no comprehensive substitute.

In the Hebrew Bible, the purpose of marriage may be summarized as follows:

i. For fellowship or companionship. Indeed God places the lonely in families (Psalm 68:6, Genesis 2:18).
ii. For procreation (Genesis 1:28)
iii. For love in its entirety (sexual, friendship and agape love) and edification (Genesis 2:18-25, Song of Songs).
iv. For partnership in work (Genesis 1:28).

Other functions may be inferred but the above appear to be fundamental ones.

4.3 SEXUALITY IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

a. **Sex in Marriage**

It is interesting to note that much of traditional and even pseudo-Christian views about sexuality is alien to the Bible and definitely the Pentateuch. By that we refer to sex as bad or a necessary evil. For example, in the middle ages there was ecclesiastical exaltation of celibacy or asceticism as a high level of spiritual life. It is clear that the authors of the Hebrew Bible intended to place sex within marriage as integral part of God's creation. The first couple were to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1:28) implying sex. 'The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame' (Genesis 2:28).
In fact, sex in marriage is nowhere spoken of in condescending terms in the Pentateuch. Even prohibited sexual acts are described in such graphic details that today’s parents often blush when reading them with their children. A case in point is Onan’s spilling of semen to avoid levirate responsibilities. Another is Judah’s incestuous relationship with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Genesis 38). Revered patriarchs’ sex lives are described without reservation. Harvey (1993:463) deduces that ‘in the ten passages where the Bible speaks explicitly on sexual aspects of the relationship between man and wife or between the betrothed, the language used is positive and affirming’. Despite attempts to allegorize the Song of Songs by some Christians it stands out as a romantic piece with sexual love explicitly spoken of by the subjects.

‘Knowledge’ and sexuality are closely connected in Biblical writings. The use of ‘to know’ meaning sexual intercourse was more than a Hebrew desire to avoid discussion of delicate matters: rather, it is a revelation of an attitude towards the meaning of sexuality. ‘The indiscriminate use of (to know) in the Bible for all kinds of sexual relations takes cognisance of the fact that sexuality can become the means of communication for deep and unutterable knowledge between persons’ (White 1965:12).

The sum total of Biblical view of sex in marriage is that the two become ‘one flesh’ – a phrase which suggests bringing the two into close relationship of a kindred type. According to Brain Driver and Briggs (1996) the Hebrew word for one flesh (basar) means ‘kindred blood relations’. Sex marked the consummation of marriage. A major purpose of sex in the Pentateuch therefore is this physical bonding that sex provides.
The all-important purpose of sex however, remains that of procreation in the Pentateuch. In fact, having children was seen as the primal blessing to the patriarchs and barrenness the bane of conjugality (see for example Genesis 15:1-6). This is what Walter Trobisch (1972:29-32) calls the 'garden concept' of marriage. Yet no evidence exists of marriage being dissolved on the basis of barrenness in the Hebrew Bible. Thus procreation could not have been an exclusive purpose of marriage.

Often times the Patriarch's wife or beloved spouse was childless despite desperate efforts made to have offspring. In 1 Samuel at a period many scholars consider contemporaneous to the writing of Genesis, Elkanah could tell his barren wife 'Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you down hearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?' (1 Samuel 1:8). Sex in marriage is therefore for love independent of having babies.

One must be careful not to read Christian concepts into Hebrew culture though. In the New Testament much is made of 'agape' love and commitment in marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33). This Christian emphasis on fidelity, responsibility and monogamy are not the primary concerns of sex in the Pentateuch. There is always the temptation to read back into the practice of Ancient Israel from a Christian perspective. All that can be said is that implied in the direct teaching of the Old Testament and especially in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 is the fact that sex within marriage was the Biblical ideal.

The ideal of sex in marriage comes through regulations regarding sexual immorality. Prohibition of adultery is one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14). While as we will see below concubinage is acquiesced in
the Hebrew Bible, it is not put on the same status as marriage. Reference to homosexuality in the Hebrew Bible is very limited and almost none existence. But man is not expected to lie with man because it is an abomination (Leviticus 18:22). This is consistent with the most explicit statement regarding homosexuality in the Bible in Roman 1:26-27 where it is characterized as part of the evidence of depravity of man.

One may conclude from the foregoing brief survey that among the Ancient Hebrews, marital sex was held in high honour and performed functions beyond procreation. Much of the references to sex, are, however, in regard to sexual aberrations which by inference confirms the view that marital sex was held in high honour in the Hebrew Bible.

b. Sexual Prohibitions

Besides the almost casual reference to homosexuality as if to say it was not debatable an issue being an abomination, (Leviticus 18:22) and having sex with an animal which was strictly forbidden as accursed, there are other sexual prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Law which we can only touch upon briefly. Any extensive treatment would distort the focus of this Chapter. Epstein (1968) provides a comprehensive treatment of the subject. We will discuss these under four topics namely: intermarriage or sex with the foreign woman; incest or sex with family members and near relations; adulterous sex within the commonwealth of Israel outside marriage; and rape.

i. The foreign woman

Louis M. Epstein (1968) has identified five factors that impacted Jewish prohibition against intermarriage: (i) common rule of endogamy; (ii) unfriendly relations with other tribes; (iii) cultic contamination; (iv)
community distinctiveness; and (v) the need of self preservation in the midst of foreigners. The post-exilic strict regulations against marrying foreign wives aimed at separating the people of Israel for a cultic community evident in Ezra-Nehemiah, is not present in the early writings. Nevertheless sex with non-Hebrew women carried the danger for men of being drawn into idolatry. Abraham thus instructs that his son Isaac should not marry among the Canaanites (Genesis 27); Esau’s foreign wives are a source of discomfort for the parents, which Jacob is to avoid (Genesis 27:46). A Hebrew man having sex with a Medianite woman in his tent was seen as the cause of trouble for the congregation for which the couple paid the ultimate price with their lives (Numbers 25). It also indicates that the issue at stake was less of the Israelite having sex with a Midianite woman and more of worship of Baal of Poer that it encouraged. On the whole one may say from the above that inter-marriage was ordinarily discouraged.

Contrary to the above conclusion we note that part of the core lineage of prominent Hebrews were foreign women. Joseph married an Egyptian (Genesis 41:45); Moses was espoused to a Midianite (Exodus 2:21); Boaz a grandparent of David married Ruth, a Moabite (Ruth 4); even father Abraham’s second wife Katurah was definitely not from Ur of the Chaldeans. In that regard it is noteworthy that among the genealogy of Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 1, are four women. - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Uriah’s wife. Of these definitely Rahab and Ruth were aliens. Thus the issue pertained to faithfulness to Yahweh. Where foreigners came to accept the God of Israel they were permitted to intermarry. In other words, then as among Christians of today, it is a matter of ‘mismating with unbelievers’ (2 Corinthians 6:14).
That said, endogamy we will see below was the preferred mode of marriage and that in all the cases where the Patriarchs married foreigners the circumstances were unusual and atypical. Joseph, for example, could scarcely have married an Israelite woman and so was Moses.

ii. Incest

Much more explicit were prohibitions against incestuous relationships. The laws of incest in a nutshell draw lines around family members with whom sex is forbidden and hence whom one could not marry. We shall briefly look at the pre-deuteronomic and deuteronomistic legislation against incest. Epstein (1968:222-3) is of the view that 'the pre-deuteronomistic law prohibited only mother and maternal sister as first grade incest and daughter as a lower grade incest'. Even sex relations between son and mother are not specifically prohibited in the early sections of the Bible. The implied anomaly of sexual relations between Lot and his daughters issuing in Ammonites and Moabites (Genesis 19) is the only case of father-daughter sex but that is not outrightly condemned. Abraham, for example, married his paternal sister Sarah (Genesis 20:12). Thus Epstein (1968) is of the view that in the pre-deuteronomic period incestuous marriage prohibitions were limited. Sisters could marry the same man as Leah and Rachel were to Jacob (Genesis 27-29).

In the book of Deuteronomy, however, (especially chapter 27:11-26) a series of incestuous relationships are 'accursed'. While the basis of incest remained consanguinity (blood relatives) this time both the paternal and maternal side are included. While this enlarged definition of incest in Deuteronomy could still date to earlier pre-deuteronomic time, most likely it reflected a more sophisticated urban society. In addition to prohibitions of sex with paternal half-sisters, and ban against sex with daughters, the
priestly authors now include sex with a large category of in-laws where there is no blood relation among incestuous relationship – e.g. mother-in-law or step-mothers (Deuteronomy 28:20-23).

In the book of Leviticus sex with the following persons are prohibited – mother, maternal or paternal sister, step-mother, mother-in-law, daughter and daughter-in-law; grandparents and grandchildren, aunts, nephews, the wife of a brother (presumably during his life time), uncle or niece (Leviticus 18 and 20). The basis of almost all these prohibitions is the principle of kinship. Epstein (1968) ably summarized the following categories of Levitical prohibitions by incestuous relations as follows:

i. Prohibition of sex with all primary kin: father, mother, brother, sister, brother and daughter as well as with their spouses.

ii. Prohibition of sex with all secondary kin, i.e. kin of kin, grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews.

iii. Prohibition against marrying two wives (even) successively, who are first-degree kin: i.e. marrying a mother/father and daughter/son.

iv. Prohibition against marrying second-degree kin e.g. a woman and her granddaughter.

There is clear evidence of progression in the code. For example, as noted earlier, half-sister and half-brother marriage was allowed in the pre-deuteronomistic texts such as between Abraham and Sarah.

iv. Adultery

The prohibition of adultery in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:21) indicates that extra-marital sex was generally prohibited. This is
collaborated by references to the effect that a woman is expected to be a virgin at the time of marriage (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). She is punishable by death otherwise. Adultery is un-cleanliness and sin against one’s neighbour (Leviticus 18:20) as well as sin before God (Genesis 20:1-13; 26:7, 11). So strong was the feeling in the Pentateuch against adultery that adultery between two married people or between a betrothed woman and a man was punishable by death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-24; Genesis 38:24).

It is worthy of note that unlike her neighbour’s, adultery in Israel was treated as a crime and not a civil offence. Once proven, the parties were to be stoned. In the post exilic period excommunication from the cultic community replaced the death penalty (Philips 1981).

It would seem that among the ancient Hebrews the issue of adultery pertained strongly and probably exclusively to a married woman. The Pentateuch does not proscribe adultery on the part of a man with an unmarried consenting woman. Even fornication with an unmarried woman could precipitate marriage and or a fine at most (Deuteronomy 22: 28-29). The only exception is a case involving an unmarried daughter of a priest who is punished by being burned alive (Leviticus 21:9), presumably as a result of the high office of the parent (see De Vaux 1988:36-37).

v. Sex with an unmarried and unbetrothed virgin
Sex with a married woman or betrothed woman is adultery if consensual and rape otherwise. Both were punishable by death. Sex with a virgin was also an offence but of lesser degree. The man who rapes a virgin is made to marry her at a predetermined bride price of fifty shekels which could imply a penal bride price and cannot divorce her (Deuteronomy
22:28-29). That may be to avoid a situation whereby the girl would not easily get another husband for having lost her virginity. Normally a woman is to enter her first marriage as a virgin and to produce evidence of her virginity on her wedding night (Deuteronomy 22:13-22). Thus violating a virgin woman was not a light matter. The father of a violated virgin may however refuse to give his daughter in marriage but the rapist must still pay the bride-price (Exodus 22: 16, 17).

vi. Rape
To end our review of sexuality in the Pentateuch, we wish to look at rape or having sexual relationship without the partner consenting. Rape was punishable by death. The rapist is condemned to death (Deuteronomy 22: 25) except in situations where the woman in town could have cried for help and she did not. In the latter case it was presumed to be consensual and if it is adulterous both partners died for it. The Israelite attitude to rape is summed up in the words of Tamar to her half brother Amon: ‘Don’t force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel’ (2 Samuel 13:12).

4.4 FORMS OF HEBREW MARRIAGE
In this session we shall examine three themes: polygamy versus monogamy, concubinage and levirate marriage.

i) Polygamy and Monogamy
Even though the New Testament suggests a one man marrying one wife, as the ideal (Matthew 19:3-9) in the Hebrew Bible the practice of polygamy or more accurately polygyny (one man with multiple wives) was practised. As noted in Chapter 2 polygamy includes polyandry or a woman with multiple husbands but that is so alien to the Bible that we will use polygamy to mean polygyny only. De Vaux (1998) notes that 'polygamy
first appears in the reprobate line of Cain, when Lamech takes two wives’ (Genesis 4:19), thus suggesting that the association could be deliberate to infer that polygamy is a degeneration from the creation ideal. Such an inference cannot be assumed though. Art, music and many technical occupations are also associated with Cain’s lineage.

How widespread was polygamy? In the first place polygamy could never be the norm in any society as literally there would not be enough women to go round. Second, much of the characters in the Bible including the kings were prominent figures in society, and their practice could not be extrapolated to that of the commoner. De Vaux (1998) for example notes ‘that the books of Samuel and Kings, which cover the entire period of the Monarchy, do not record a single case of bigamy among commoners’. The unique story of Elkanah’s two wives (1 Samuel 1) just before the beginning of the period of the Monarchy as was the case of Jacob’s sibling spouses, if anything at all, points to the fact that several wives did not make for peace in the home. Even if it is the house of revered patriarchs like Abraham and Jacob (Genesis 16:4-5; Genesis 29:30-31) it made no difference. This is buttressed by the fact that there is not a single instance whereby a priest in the Bible married two wives. Kings, contrary to their practice, were specifically advised not to have multiple wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). Excessive wives, was viewed as un-kingly and distasteful. The usual Hebrew practice due to economic constraints or reasons stated above was therefore monogamy though polygamy was allowed.

It is, however, uncontroversial that at the time of the compilation of the Pentateuch bigamy or polygamy in general was recognised as a legal fact (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). It is safe therefore to conclude that the Biblical
practice in the Pentateuch is ‘one man one wife’ but polygamy was accepted. The authors concern was not to sanction it but to regulate it. In that regard we share the conclusion of Epstein (1968) that ‘polygamy was never more than the exception in Judea, monogamy was the rule. The law acknowledged the fact of polygamy, but never made peace with it.’ Ordinary people as it is today could not afford it.

The practice of polygamy among the fathers – Lamech, Abraham, Esau and Jacob in Genesis no doubt reflected the social setting of pre-urban society. Today, in societies where polygamy is legal, it is mostly practised in rural settings even though multiple sexual partners are rampant in urban areas. The question is what other purpose did polygamy serve? One of the major reason was the almost overwhelming desire to have male offspring. That was definitely behind Abraham taking on Hagar even if one may question whether that could be called marriage (Genesis 6:2). Having children assured that one is remembered. Remembrance or to ensure that one’s name is not blotted out of the families of Israel was a primary cause of levirate marriage. To meet ones levirate duty of having to espouse a dead brother’s widow of course would invariably lead to polygamy on the part of the surviving brother. But even levirate marriage was strongly linked to the passion for an heir so that one’s name was not put out in Israel (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). Thirdly, having many children was viewed as a sign of divine blessing among the ancient Hebrews.

While polygamy was permitted in the Pentateuch, there is evidence of evolution in attitude as to whether one could marry kinfolk especially sisters. In the case of Jacob he married Leah and Rachel, the two daughters of Laban either as a result of custom or the sheer treachery of Laban. However, later the law forbade the marrying of two sisters
(Leviticus 18:18) as it amounted to 'uncovering her nakedness while her sister is yet alive' (Tosato 1984; see also Dresner, 1990). The tensions generated between Leah and Rachel in the accounts might have been intended to show the consequences of marrying two sisters as rivals.

ii) Concubinage

Concubinage was known and practised in the Hebrew Bible. It was definitely seen as a solution to infertility in the case of Abraham and Hagar (Genesis 16:1). Epstein (1968:34) is of the view that concubinage was an imported product from some foreign culture and even the Hebrew word for it, 'pilegesh', is foreign in its origin. There is, however, a tendency for a society to adopt a foreign word for what is distasteful. The affinity of the fathers to Babylon and the fact that the Babylonians practiced concubinage would suggest that concubinage is as old as the ancient Hebrews.

Unlike polygamy, the law says very little on concubinage and does not regulate it. Concubine was a kind of a wife (Judges 8:31) and as such she had to be divorced to be sent away. She was nevertheless a wife of inferior rank. Further, Epstein may be correct to say 'we do not know of concubinage institution during the patriarchal family period both in Babylonia and among the Hebrews' (1968:41) if we exclude Abraham and Hagar's affair as less than concubinage. In other words concubinage was a latter introduction. But we are of the opinion that silence should not lead to the conclusion that concubinage did not exist in ancient Israel.

It would appear that concubines were generally slaves and women captured in war or poorer members of the society. This implied inferior position of a concubine may account for the scarcity of concubines among the patriarchs until the period of conquest.
iii) *Levirate Marriage*

The term *Levirate* is a derivative of Latin ‘Levir’, meaning a husband’s brother. The purpose is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, i.e. to guard against the extermination of one’s brother’s name out of Israel. The stories of Judah and Tamar and of Onan show (Genesis 38) that levirate responsibility was taken as serious and sacred duty and seemed obligatory. However, a man may be released from his levirate responsibility (Deuteronomy 25:7-9), but that was viewed as a disgrace for refusing to build a brother’s house.

Besides the motive of providing an offspring for a deceased relative Epstein (1968:79) identifies two other motives for levirate marriage as ‘preserving the family’s property right’ and ‘to provide for the childless widow a place in the family where as during her husband’s lifetime, she may continue to receive protection, care, and sustenance and retain the social advantages of membership in her husband’s family’. The coupling of offspring and inheritance according to Davies (1983) is the reason why a kinsman backed off in favour of Boaz in the case of Ruth. He was willing to redeem the property of the widow Naomi who was past child bearing but not marry the younger Ruth whose offspring will inherit his property. Deuteronomy limits levirate marriage to brother in law (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), but a latter development in the book of Ruth (Ruth 3 and 4) somewhat modified the practice beyond immediate brothers so that other near relatives could exercise the right (Davies, 1981).

Given the social role of levirate marriage, it is ironic that Leviticus either ignores the institution or even appears to legislate it out of existence (Leviticus 20: 21; and 18:16). It is possible that in a Leviticus 20:21, and 18:16, that the authors had in mind not a case where a levirate marriage
was permitted on the death of a brother but rather one of having sex with a brother's wife while the brother was alive which was an anathema to the Hebrew. In any case levirate marriage is rare in the records with the only one clear example being in Genesis 38 and a quasi-levirate marriage in Ruth 4:1-10. Historical-critical scholars use such passages as evidence of historical development in the institution of marriage and successive Biblical legislation in respect to it (Epstein 1968). Manor (1984) for example, is of the view that the attitudes toward the Levirate tradition clearly reflects an evolution, over a millennium and half, from strict compliance with custom, to an effort to avoid levirate relationship altogether.

The foregoing discussion may be summarized briefly as follows: Monogamy in the Pentateuch is portrayed as the norm and could even be inferred as the ideal. However, polygamy was recognised and regulated. There may, however, be indirect association of polygamy with degeneration. Concubinage appears not to be a major issue among the fathers but levirate marriage was a sacred responsibility and duty at some time though Leviticus and Numbers almost neglect it.

4.5 THE PROCESS OF MARRIAGE
When was one considered married among the ancient Hebrew? What constituted an authentic and complete marriage rite? How was marriage celebrated? These are questions, which are not easy to answer even among contemporary societies. For example, Adei and Adei (1986) noted that marrying has become 'the African Christian's burden because while performing customary rites constitute legal marriage some Churches insist on western style wedding.' That remark came out of the confusion surrounding Christian marriage in many traditional African societies where
the spouses are torn between traditional marriage norms and Church or western style weddings.

In this section of our survey we will address the following issues with respect to marriage among the ancient Hebrews:

i) Endogamy

ii) The role of parents vis-à-vis the spouses and age of marriage

iii) Engagement and betrothal

iv) The bride price and arguments surrounding them.

v) The marriage ceremony.

Within the few pages that can be devoted to all these, we can only highlight the essential dimensions of each of the topics.

i) **Endogamy**

We noted above that while individual foreigners who embraced Israel's God were absorbed into the people of Israel and that some of the patriarchs under the circumstances they found themselves married 'outsiders' – Joseph and Moses for example - marrying from outside was not generally acceptable. Thus endogamy was the norm in ancient Israel.

It would seem that preference for endogamy or marriage within own group in Israel was because of two main reasons. The first was to preserve inheritance. Thus a woman who inherits family property was required to marry only into the tribe of her father. The second and strongest reason is the fear that Israelites would weaken their monotheism or worship of Yahweh and adopt the religion of foreigners. The ruse of Dinah's brother to avenge her rape by Shechem was that their sister could not marry an uncircumcised man (Genesis 34: 15-17). The strict endogamy of the post-exilic period, however might have been the result of a people under threat of losing national identify. Cosby 1984.
ii) The Role of Parents in Choice of Spouse and age of marriage

The evidence is thin in the Bible regarding when one could marry. 'The Bible gives particularly no information about the age at which girls were married' (De Vaux 1988). The practice of marrying the eldest first (Genesis 29:26) was not universal and in any case Jacob had no idea that he was not to be allowed to marry Rachel first. On the other hand, it seems certain that girls, and therefore presumably boys too, were married very young. Invariably, in traditional societies girls married earlier. The emphasis on virginity at the time of marriage also point to early marriage for girls soon after puberty between 13 and 15 years. Puberty is seen as passage to womanhood while in patriarchal societies the boy is expected to be able to look after his wife in addition to sexual readiness.

With regard to choice of partner and parental role, we have cases in the Pentateuch to refer to. We see Abraham commissioning his servant, Eliezer, to go and look for a wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24). The marriage is brokered between Laban, Rebekah's brother who might have inherited the father, with the girl's consent being sought almost as an after thought. Isaac and Rebekah direct Jacob as to where to go to seek a wife (Genesis 28: 1-2). Even rebellious Esau took his parents wishes into consideration in marriage (Genesis 28: 8-9).

However, one must distinguish between tradition and legislation or societal rules. In the case of Rebekah, her consent was sought even if afterward. If she had not been moved by the servant and not consented would she have been obliged? In the Pentateuch we do have sufficient evidence to answer this question one-way or the other. The case of Esau who chose to marry Canaanite women to the displeasure of his parents point to a situation whereby a young person – definitely the boy – could go against
convention. Again, at the time of the Judges, Samson’s parents gave in to their son’s marriage to a Philistine woman unwillingly.

Thus one would conclude that the parents by tradition choose and/or influenced greatly the choice of a spouse. The Hebrew father took an active part in choosing his son’s wife. After all, his son and son’s sons would continue his family line. In practice it would seem the parents of the bridegroom negotiated the marriage with the bride’s family. But that was more of a norm than a religious rule which in ancient Israel would have been binding. The same practice prevails in most African traditions today. The choice of the parents however, was almost conclusive and should in no way be extrapolated to their marginal role of our day.

There were strong reasons for that. First, invariably the young couple had to live and share the parents’ land. Second, in traditional societies norms have such a force that deviants received social sanction. Third, according to De Vaux (1988), the tendency to marry early increased parental influence. However, parental consent was not a pre-requisite for legal marriage in the Pentateuch.

To the modern mind parents choosing a spouse may give the impression that the couple were denied the opportunity to ‘fall in love’. That is not necessarily so. In the first place, the extreme romanticization of sexual love is a modern phenomenon. Second, in traditional societies most marriages are between people in the same community and therefore even where parents decision were decisive the young people would have known each other and grown up together. Moreover, ‘love is an art to be learned’ and failure to do so is the bane of modern marriages resulting in high rates of divorce. Enjoying one’s honeymoon might have been anticipated,
however. In the Pentateuch a man was exempted from military duties for 1 year (Deuteronomy 24:5) even though the main reason was perhaps to assure that the man had an heir.

iii) Betrothal

In ancient Hebrew society it seems there were distinct phases in the procedure by which a man and a woman became husband and wife, namely the betrothal and nuptial stages.

While this sharp distinction did not always apply as for example in the case of Rebekah and Isaac (Genesis 24 and 25), they serve as a good basis to unravel Hebrew tradition with regard to the steps involved in marrying. Betrothal was not engagement in the modern sense of the initial private agreement between the couple to marry. It was a formal event. While the couple were not expected to engage in sex prior to the wedding ceremony the betrothed woman was deemed a married woman. Having sexual intercourse with a betrothed woman was therefore adultery. It was at the time of betrothal that the ‘bride price’ was agreed upon though full payment could be spread over a period. The formal declaration of marriage was undertaken at the time of betrothal. Violating a betrothed woman was punishable by death, unless the woman was deemed to have consented in which case she was also culpable (Deuteronomy 22: 23-27). Thus betrothal functioned as the formal setting aside of the two irrevocably for marriage.

There is no set time in the Pentateuch between betrothal and the nuptials. In the case of Jacob and Leah, it took seven years but that was due to the huge bride price in kind demanded by Laban. In the case of Rachel, she was given to him in one week to pay the bride price later (Genesis 29: 15-
21). In Rebekah’s case it was only the distance between Pandanaram and Canaan that stood between betrothal and consummation of the marriage (Genesis 24). From these it may be deduced that the time between the betrothal and the wedding ceremony was a matter of convenience, preparedness of the groom and was subject to negotiation.

The concept of betrothing children who have to wait till maturity to be married has little or no Biblical precedence. Even in the case of Joseph and Mary (Matthew 1), the fact that Mary was found pregnant only points to some time between betrothal and the nuptials which could have been weeks to few months. This is not to rule out betrothal of children among the ancient Hebrews. Rather the evidence to that effect is thin. On the contrary a widow may wait for a younger brother of the husband to mature for him to discharge his levirate responsibilities as it was in the case of Tamar (Genesis 38).

iv) The Bride Price
Invariably, all Hebrew marriages involved the payment of a bride price – *mohar*. Virtually all the authorities agree that marriage among the ancient Hebrews involved the payment of a bride price or *mohar* (De Vaux 1998, Epstein 1968 and Gottwald 1985). As evidenced in the case of Jacob, service could be substituted for money and gifts if the suitor was poor (Genesis 29: 14-30).

There is no specific amount of the size of the *mohar* given in the Bible but seven years of service that Laban demanded of Jacob could be an exception which reflected the uncharitable character of the former. The value of *mohar* would ordinarily be moderate and symbolic of marriage contract. De Vaux (1988:26) records that the word *mohar* occurs only three
times in the Bible two of them in the Pentateuch (Genesis 34:12, Exodus 22:16 and 1 Samuel 18:25). These references suggest that the amount varied according to the girl’s father or the social status of the bridegroom. It possibly served as security for the wife or compensation to the girl’s family. At least Leah and Rachel felt that their father, Laban’s high demand of a bridal price was tantamount to being sold. What is interesting was that they did not expect their father to use up the mohar which suggests that it was to be kept for them as security in case of divorce (Genesis 31:15).

If we take the penal bride price of fifty shekels of silver involved in the case of rape and resulting compulsory marriage (Deuteronomy 22:29), one would estimate that ordinary grooms paid far less, probably half of that. Leviticus (27: 4-5) sets the redemption fee of a woman at thirty shekels and a girl under twenty years of age at ten shekels when they made a special vow. However, one cannot equate that with the bride price as De Vaux (1988) attempts to infer. Thus we can only say that ordinarily Hebrew men paid bride price of up to 50 shekels of silver and that could be in kind, in the form of service or livestock.

The idea of bride price has generated much controversy regarding the status of a wife. The main issue is that it seems the bride price connotes marriage as an economic transaction. Consequently, it has been suggested that it was marriage by purchase. This view of marriage by purchase is reinforced by the fact that the wife played a minor role in the transaction.

Burrows (1938) examines an alternative explanation of mohar. Instead of it being viewed as marriage by purchase, the bride price equally supports the theory of compensation and economic security. He argues along these
lines: In ancient Hebrew, as among Arabs today, the family, the clan, the tribe rather than marriage was the primary concern of the people. A woman was valuable and a valued member of the family as a mother providing male successors and as a worker to the family. Marriage deprived the family of these valuable contributions and the bride price had the essential purpose of compensating the family. Sale implied in marriage by purchase would have required exchange of equivalent values. However, he concludes that in principle both purchase and compensation share commonalities including exchange, but the mohar is essentially a compensation gift. ‘One family gives a very precious possession, a daughter, the other, to put things in an equal footing, gives a valuable present. The mohar thus established the prestige of the husband and his family, gives him authority over his wife, makes the contract binding on both parties and creates an alliance between two families’ (Burrows 1938:13). This dated view of Burrows is collaborated by more recent works (De Vaux 1988; Kruger 1984; Plantz 1964).

In reality, the problem about the significance of mohar is that only few passages directly mention it. Even the passages in the Pentateuch - Genesis 34:12, Exodus 22: 16 directly and indirectly Deuteronomy 22:28 - which talk about it, we find that in each case they represent exceptional cases rather than a regulation of mohar per se in normal cases.

One strong argument against marriage by purchase however, is that in addition to the mohar there were exchanges of other gifts. For example, Caleb gave a dowry to his daughter (Joshua 15: 16-20). In the case of Abraham’s servant there is no evidence of paying a mohar. Rather we observe the giving of generous gifts. The gifts were seen as adequate
(Genesis 24: 53-54). On the extreme, parents could extort huge compensation as Laban did to Jacob.

We think that De Vaux (1988:27) is right to conclude that 'the mohar was a sum of money which the fiancée was bound to pay to the girl's father. Thus obligation to pay a sum of money, or its equivalent, to a girl's family obviously gives the Israelite marriage the outward appearance of a purchase. But the mohar seems to be not so much the price paid for the woman as a compensation given to the family'. Looking at extracts in English of the work of Plantz (1964) the author, after examining the works of other scholars, concludes that the Mohar is to be understood as a gift which compensates the loss which the family of the betrothed bride suffers by marriage. In that regard, the Israelite man was no more conscious of buying a wife than was the man of the orient in general. The wife, therefore, could not be sold but a slave could be. Moreover, in addition to the mohar both families may exchange gifts and a father could give a dowry to her daughter. As noted earlier, in Genesis 31:15, Leah and Rachel accused their father for using up the price paid for the marriage which would suggest the bride price was to be held in trust for them in case the husband dies or the marriage was unsuccessful.

v) **Marriage Ceremony**

A child used to say 'after the wedding; cutting the cake'. After betrothal and paying of bride price or pledging full payment in due course and exchange of gifts come the wedding ceremony or nuptials in Hebrew society.

In that regard it is noteworthy that both in ancient 'Israel and in Mesopotamia, marriage was purely a civil contract, not sanctioned by any
religious rite' (De Vaux 1988:33). De Vaux (1988) thinks that even though passages such as Malachi 2:14 and Ezekiel 16:8 allude to marriage as a covenant or covenant with God, the texts may well refer to written civil contract evidence of which are found in latter writings (Tobit 7: 13-14 and Elephantine manuscripts).

That such contracts existed in ancient Israel may be inferred from the fact that in Deuteronomy 24: 1-3 reference is made to certificate of divorce. It is unlikely that there would be a certificate of divorce without a corresponding contract of marriage. But the bride's price itself would be sufficient proof of marriage with the force of a contract even if no written document existed. In any case in traditional societies most contracts are verbal as we will observe in the case of the Ashantis of Ghana. We, therefore, subscribe to the view of Kruger (1984:81) that 'Throughout the Old Testament marriage is of juridical nature. Certain obligations are expected and certain privileges granted to each partner in a mutual deal'.

In almost every known human society, marriage is an occasion for celebration. It seems in ancient societies there was never marriage without celebration and ancient Israel would not be an exception. To that effect evidence abounds in the Hebrew Bible. Much of that is outside the Pentateuch though. The bride was gorgeously dressed (Psalm 45: 14-15, Genesis 24:65, Isaiah 6: 10); entered the bridegroom's house in the midst of singing and fanfare (Psalm 45: 15-16); she was veiled (Song of Songs 4:1, 3; 6:7; Genesis 24:65). The bride presumably went to the groom's house in the evening at nightfall so that Jacob could not recognize he had Leah for Rachel (Genesis 29: 23). It was an occasion for feasting, love songs and rejoicing (Jeremiah 16:9, Psalm 45). One would say it was the 'jour de gloire' for the bride and that might have accounted for the death
penalty of a man who violates a maiden without marriage (Deuteronomy 22: 13-29).

Not only is it a day of glory for the woman but also for the groom. The author of Proverbs 18:22 sums it all up when he writes that ‘He who finds a wife, finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord’. Finding a good wife is placed above inheriting wealth and houses from fathers (Proverbs 19:14). Isaiah 61:10 suggests that the bridegroom wore a diadem and was accompanied by his friends and with a band, proceeded to the bride’s house to bring the bride to his house (De Vaux 1988).

The Pentateuch, however, provides only scarce glimpses of actual marriage celebration. Rebekah is taken to the tent of Isaac (his mother’s tent to be exact) and becomes his wife (Genesis 24:67). The only occasion we see prolonged wedding activity was in connection with Jacob’s marriage to Leah for Rachel whereby there seemed to have been a week’s rite (Genesis 29:27). However, the Deuteronomic provision for a year of ‘honeymoon’ so to speak would suggest the joy of marriage festivities could last longer (Deuteronomy 24:5).

The marriage ceremony in latter times in the Bible took place in the husband’s home (Matthew 22:1-3). But in ancient Israel it appears that it took place in the home of the bride (Genesis 29: 22-27; Judges 14: 10-12).

vi) Consummation of Marriage
When was marriage consummated and the couple had sexual intercourse? Much of the literature is silent on that and so is much of the Bible. The matter is further confused by the fact that a betrothed woman is considered a wife.
There is, evidence to the effect that the couple did not live together between betrothal and marriage ordinarily. Given that betrothal and payment of the mohar marked marriage, a man who had sex with his ‘wife’ probably would not be considered as fornicating. However, since a bride who was found to have lost her virginity before marriage ceremony and especially the night after the marriage ceremony could be repudiated and brought shame to the family, suggest that a couple would not have sex until after the marriage ceremony.

This emphasis on virginity is also known to exist among many West African traditional societies. That is confirmed by traditional practices in some communities in South Africa where a non-virgin receives a lower price. In latter Jewish times, in the case of Joseph and Mary, it was obvious that they had not had sexual intercourse. But once Joseph provided cover for her he seems to have become a husband without the nuptials (Matthew 1). The Pentateuch generally supports the view that nuptials mark the time of sexual consummation of the marriage which the couples look up to as the peak of the marriage feast (Genesis 29:22), rather than at the time of betrothal.

The above view is strengthened by the fact that evidence of virginity was sought on the first night of their wedding. ‘The blood-stained linen of this nuptial night was preserved; it proved the bride’s virginity and would be evidence if she was slandered by her husband’ (Deuteronomy 22:13-21; De Vaux 1988:34).

Thus we have a situation whereby sexual intercourse was reserved socially for the nuptial night but judicially there was no prohibition against
having sex with a betrothed ‘wife’. The marriage could be consummated before the full bride price was paid though.

4.6. THE ROLES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE IN MARRIAGE
What generally happens in the home after the wedding, has been covered in Chapter 2 on the Hebrew Family. For completeness, however, a brief reference will be made to the role of the spouses after the nuptials as a bridge to our last point on divorce and re-marriage.

The lot of the ancient Hebrew wife was inferior to her husband (Deuteronomy 21:14). She addressed her husband as ‘lord’ (Genesis 18:12) or master. The Decalogue includes a man’s wife among his possession, along with his house and female slaves, his ox and his ass (Exodus 20:17) even though we will not agree with De Vaux’s (1988) implied suggestion that it made her equal to the listed items. The Decalogue was listing things a man can covet in a traditional society and surely one’s wife could definitely be an object of inordinate desire for other men.

The wife in ancient Israel did not inherit from her husband, but did most of the hard work in the home including looking after the flock and attending to the field. She gained increased status with birth especially when she produced a male heir (Genesis 16:4, Genesis 29:31-30:24). Children were however, to ‘honour thy father and thy mother’ equally (Exodus 20). While men could have sexual liberties by acquiring multiple wives, concubines and even enjoy casual sex as it was in the case of Judah with Tamar (Genesis 38:15-16), a wife was expected to be faithful. Even when her husband dies, as a widow, she is either to marry a brother-in-law to fulfill
levirate responsibilities or revert to the control of her father (Genesis 38:11, Leviticus 22:13).

It is, therefore, little consolation when Burrows (1938:32) argues that the Israelite woman, as we see her in the Old Testament, was far from being a mere 'chattel of father or husband' and goes on to make a distinction between the position of a wife and a slave. Yes, even a captive woman, once espoused cannot be sold like a slave. But such comparisons only confirm the inferior position of the wife vis-à-vis the husband.

In the Pentateuch women like Sarah, Rebekah, Miriam and Deborah played prominent roles but these do not contradict the proposition that on the whole the role of the woman in the home was inferior.

4.7 DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE
Lastly, we will want to consider attitude and regulation regarding the 'death of a marriage' or divorce and the issue of remarriage. Even though the creation ideal of a man shall leave his father and mother and unite with his wife (Genesis 2:24) may suggest indissolubility of marriage the evidence in the Hebrew Bible is such that scholars are strongly divided on divorce.

In the Pentateuch there is not one example of the fathers divorcing their wives. In ancient Israel there are several reasons that might have accounted for the low record of divorce. The first is the low status of women described earlier. It would seem that women could not demand divorce. Second, is the fact that a man not happy with his wife could marry multiple wives. That could be an escape route from divorcing. One could simply neglect a wife and take on another. The third is social sanction against divorce. Thus until recent times divorce had been generally low in
most societies. And come to think about it, the Pentateuch describes only
a handful of marriages.
The law however presumed divorce. At the time Deuteronomy was written
there was need to regulate the phenomenon:

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him
because he finds something indecent about her, and he
writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends
her away from his house, and if after she leaves his house
she becomes the wife of another man, and her second
husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce,
gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies
then her first husband who divorced her, is not allowed to
marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be
detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the
land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance
(Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

In ancient Israel divorce was allowed to men if not women. This
prerogative to initiate divorce by men was however, not a private affair. It
involved a declaration of disaffection or disinterest. Even though there is
no evidence of trial before divorce, the husband had to provide her a
'certificate of divorce'.

The author of Deuteronomy specifies the cause for divorce as 'if she
becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about
her'. It is very difficult to infer what this vague expression means.
However, overall it would include adultery at the time of betrothal or within
marriage.
Given the paucity of information and practice of divorce in the Pentateuch we must turn to other sections of the Hebrew Bible. The most explicit statement about divorce is found in Malachi where Yahweh is reported as saying 'I hate divorce says Yahweh, the God of Israel' (Malachi 2: 14-16). This seems to contradict the Deuteronomic teaching. It is however, clear that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is concerned with regulating post divorce behaviour of the husband after exposing a woman to the social disgrace of divorce. Having done that and wanting to remarry her later after someone else had married her was the object of the rule rather than making a law about divorce itself. It is not incompatible therefore for the Lord to hate divorce and permit its regulation that would force a husband to think twice before initiating divorce.

After a scholarly analysis, Gordon Paul Hugenberger (1994) in his *Marriage as a Covenant: A study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* concludes that Malachi 2:14 supports the view that marriage is a covenant and that it supports the indissolubility of marriage. With regard to difficulties raised by scholars such as Isaksson (1965), he argues that they are based on inadequate examination of the prophet’s pronouncement. Malachi did not imply that divorce is illegal, (thus it does not contradict the law) but sees it ‘as ethically reprehensible and as an instance of infidelity, or covenant breaking’. The same aversion is in Deuteronomy. Neither is C.C. Torrey’s view that literal marriage was not in view of Malachi acceptable (Torrey 1898). Analogies are often made from comparisons with realities to be meaningful.

We may conclude, therefore, that in the Hebrew Bible the ideal was permanence of marriage. Nevertheless divorce existed in ancient Israel.
Only men were allowed to divorce their wives. Like marriage, divorce required a formality, in this case the issue of a bill of divorce. Scholars infer from the practice among Israel’s neighbours and latter times among the Elephantines that a verbal formula was pronounced.

Divorce from Deuteronomy 24:1-4 released the woman from all marital obligations and she could remarry. She could be remarried even by the same husband provided in between she had not married another.

Even though the focus of this essay is on the Pentateuch, in the case of divorce and remarriage, words attributed to Jesus in the New Testament are highly pertinent. This is because it is presented as direct interpretation of the creation order and the will of God and not the contemporary view of Jesus’ day.

Following White (1952) Jesus seems to present an absolute ethic of no divorce. Three passages, namely, Matthew 5:31-32 (part of the Sermon on the Mount); Matthew 19: 3-9; and Mark 10: 2-12 are pertinent here. In them Jesus strongly argues as follows: (a) Male and female were created to form the nucleus of human relationship. As part of God’s good creation marriage is indissoluble as otherwise it will be destroying what God has created. ‘Marriage is complete and indissoluble’ – it is a committed relationship that allows for no divorce; (b) Marriage in its basic structure is a relationship which divorce destroys; and (c) divorce is adultery ordinarily making it equivalent to breaking the 7th Commandment.

There is much controversy, as old as Augustine, as to whether Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 provide an exception clause – i.e. there is no divorce except on condition of marital unfaithfulness. First, it is significant that the clause
is omitted in Mark which scholars agree was the first to be written and may reflect Jesus's original words. Then there is the difficulty in reconciling an exception with the absolute ethic of Jesus. Finally, there is a linguistic problem in determining whether the marital unfaithfulness referred to adultery or pre-marital sex (fornication). In both cases the phrase 'except marital unfaithfulness' is parenthetical (in commas) isolating it from the main clause. We are, therefore, of the opinion that Jesus was not making an exception even though this is contrary to popular interpretation of the passages in the Church.

For our purpose however, the importance of this New Testament excurses is that Jesus interpreted the creation story as implying indissolubility of marriage and that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 represents a degeneration from the no divorce ideal — a concession for man's weakness - rather than the will of God which is averse to divorce (Matthew 19: 3-12 and Malachi 2:14).

Very little is said about widowhood rites in the Hebrew Bible. It would seem that under normal circumstances no special rites were required and that the gracious family took care of the widow. She may become the wife of the dead person's brother through levirate marriage. The case of Tamar taking 'off her widow's clothes' (Genesis 38:13) suggests some formalities, at least a period of wearing identifiable marriage clothes as a widow. One cannot make a strong case out of this incident the focus of which, according to Coats (1972), had to do with violation of basic justice.
4.8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The foregoing overview of marriage in ancient Israel from the perspective of the Pentateuch underscores the importance of marriage to the ancient Hebrews. It served the purposes of facilitating procreation, providing companionship and forming the basic relationship of society.

In order for a Hebrew man to take a wife he had to pay a bride price, *mohar*, agreed upon at the time of betrothal which may be accompanied by exchange of gifts. Nuptials follow later and sexual intercourse was ordinarily reserved for the first night after the wedding during which proof of virginity was expected. Thus while sex for men outside marriage, except with another man’s wife, was not prohibited by the law, an unmarried woman was expected to be chaste. The overall attitude to marital sex was positive though and nowhere is marital sex spoken of with deference. In fact, it was such a deep form of relationship it was often spoken of as ‘to know’ one’s partner.

Parents, especially the father, played almost decisive role in the choice of a bride and while the opinion of the girl may be asked, it played a lesser role. However, a man could marry against parental wishes such as Esau and Samson did.

Even though the Biblical ideal in Genesis 2:24 points to a one man one woman and indissoluble relationship, polygamy was permitted and regulated. In addition, the man may have one or more concubines in a pseudo-spouse relationship while casual sex with even prostitutes might not have been uncommon as was the case of Judah and Tamar.
All these point to the inferior position of the wife in Hebrew society vis-à-vis the husband. But she was not purchased by virtue of the bride price. Nevertheless a woman was either under the control of her father or husband. A man may divorce his wife but she could not divorce her husband. Once divorced and the woman remarried, her former husband could not remarry her.
CHAPTER 5
ASHANTI FAMILY & KINSHIP SYSTEM IN 
THE CONTEXT OF AKANS OF GHANA

5.1 BACKGROUND
The Ashantis constitute the single biggest tribe in Ghana. However, they belong to an even larger group called the Akans in the country. A brief introduction of the country and especially the Akans therefore will provide the context and background to Ashanti tradition.

After the arrival of the Portuguese on the shores of Ghana in the 15th Century, Ghana, known as the Gold Coast until its independence on 6th March 1957, came under various European cultures including their religion of Christianity. ‘For over one hundred years (1844-1957) the Gold Coast was a British Colony’ (Nkansa-Kyeremateng 1999:7). It became a Republic on July 1, 1960.

Ghana is a country of 247,000 square kilometers (92,000 square miles) in the middle of the coast of the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. It had a population of 18.85 million people and growing at 2.6% per annum in the year 2000. That represents an increase of 53.3% in 16 years when the population stood at 12.3 million in 1984. The population density is estimated at 78.9 persons per kilometer. Females constitute 50.5% of the population. Ghana is characterized by a large proportion of population comprising children under 15 years (40.8%) with a small proportion of elderly persons over 65 years (5.3%) (Ghana Statistical Service 2000). The country is divided into 10 administrative regions. The capital city is Accra with a little under 3 million population followed by Kumasi (about 1 million). The other major cities are Sekondi-Takoradi, Cape Coast, Koforidua, Sunyani, Tamale, Ho, Bolgatanga and Wa, all regional capitals.
According to the latest population census, (Ghana Statistical Service 2000) 68.3% of the people are ‘Christians’. The major Christian denominations and other religions in the country are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion stated</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Ghana Statistical Service, 2000*

The official language of Ghana is English. However, it is estimated that there are more than 100 dialects and local languages spoken in the country. Ashanti (locally known as Asante) is the only tribe group that occupies a whole region. Their language which they share with some of the Akan groups is called Asante Twi (pronounced Tw-ee). With other mutually intelligible languages the major one of which is Fante it is common for them to be called the Akan language collectively. The major linguistic groupings in Ghana are:

- Akan (Fante, Asante Twi and Akuapem Twi, Brong etc.)
- Ga – Adangme
- Ewe
- Dagbani and
- Hausa.

Akan is the mother-tongue of about 60% of the people in the country but understood and spoken as second language by a sizeable number of other tribes.

Hausa is strictly not a Ghanaian language but is spoken by many northern Ghanaians, the Moslem Community and settlers from the Sahel countries.

Socio-economic indicators in Ghana show that literacy rates are low. The adult literacy rate was 70.3% in 1991. Other socio-economic indicators of Ghana are provided in Table 2 (UNDP 2001). The nominal per capita national income is variously estimated between $350 and $400. However, for international comparisons the most useful figures are the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) values which puts the GDP per capita at US$1881 per annum.
Table 2: Socio-Economic Indicators of Ghana

- Life expectancy at birth (1999) ... ... ... 56.6 years
- Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above) ... ... 70.3%
- Gross National Product (P.P.P. 2000) ... ... US$34.5 billion
- GDP per capita (ppp, 1999) ... ... ... US$1881
- Human Development Index (HDI, 1999 value) ... 0.542
- Population below poverty line (%)
  (a) $1 a day (1993) ppp US$, 1984-99... 38.8%
  (b) National Poverty Line 1984-1991 ... 31.4%
- Population with access to essential drugs (1999)... 44%

UNDP, Human Development Report, 2001

Ghana ranks 119 among 162 countries on the UNDP measure of Human Development Indicator (HDI) a composite index made up of life expectancy, literacy attainment and incomes per head. The country's HDI was 0.541 out of a possible 1.0 (Norway, had the best country score of 0.939 and United States of America, the 6th country with 0.934 score). Most challenging is the fact that nearly 40% of the population live in poverty spending less than $1.00 a day (UNDP 2001).

The economy of Ghana is predominantly agrarian (farming, fishing and forestry) which accounts for about 50% of GDP. The major cash crops are cocoa (Ghana being the third largest exporter in the world), rice, coffee, cassava, maize/corn, shea butter and timber. In good seasons the country becomes self-sufficient in food. Industrial products account for 15% of
GDP. The rest of GDP is made up of services, with Government and financial sectors dominating.

Ghana basically exports primary products with cocoa accounting for 45% of exports. The other major exports are gold, timber, tuna, bauxite and aluminium. Major trading partners of the country are Germany (29%), UK (12%), USA (12%) and Japan (5%). In 2001, Ghana exported US$1,893 million worth of goods and imported US$2,652 million worth of goods and services mainly petroleum consumer and intermediate goods, and capital equipment.

5.2 THE AKANS

Important to the understanding of Ashanti tradition is the context of the common heritage of the Akans of Ghana who as noted above constitute approximately 60 percent of Ghana's population. The Akan groups are made up of the people of Ahafo, Ahanta, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Asante (Ashanti), Assin, Bono (Brong), Denkyira, Fante, Kwahu, Sefwi and Wasa (See Map 1).

According to Nkansa-Kyeremateng (1996), the Akans as a group exhibit three unique characteristics to which we have added the last two as follows:

i) National character marked by comeliness, bravery, anti-sycophancy and love for freedom. One wonders if Nkansa-Kyeremateng, is not presenting an idealized view of the Akans. However, a well known and cherished
Map 1
AKAN STATES
THE MAP OF GHANA SHOWING THE AKANS
FIGURE 1

AKAN STATES
1. Abafo
2. Ahanta
3. Akuapem
4. Akyem
5. Akwamu
6. Asante/Ashanti
7. Asante-Akyem
8. Assin
9. Bono
10. Denkyira
11. Fante
12. Kwahu
13. Nzema
14. Sefwi
15. Wasa

Key
- Akan States
- Volta Lake
Akan proverb – *Animguasee mfata əkani ba* (Disgrace does not befit the offspring of an Akan) underscores their self-respect, dignity and in some way the pride of a true traditional Akan – the people who gave the world the *Kente* cloth and who display pomp and pageantry at their festivals at such grandeur that it is probably unequalled in the world.

ii) Common language – Twi and Fante, in particular which is mutually understood by all Akan groups. Twi is unofficially the lingua franca of over three quarters of Ghanaians.

iii) Use of Proverbs – ‘Proverbs are important feature of the Twi language and are used to adorn statements. Akan Society, therefore, has high regard for speakers of the language who apply them deeply’.

iv) By far the most important common characteristic of the Akans is their kinship and family system based on matrilineal descent with the exception of a small minority who follow the patrilineal system.

v) Belief system underpinned by ancestral veneration.

### 5.3 AKAN BELIEF SYSTEM

The fascination of scholars of Akan religion and art is attested by the fact that Rattray devoted his second volume (Rattray 1927) of over 400 pages to ‘Religion and Art in Ashanti’. We can only afford a cursory overview of the Akan belief system here. We will therefore present the highlights of Akan belief system drawing on Rattray (1923, 1927) Nukunya (1992), Warren (1996) and Nkansa-Kyeremateng (1996, 1999) mainly. All agree that religion is inseparable from the thought and day-to-day activities of the Akan. This is because in their metaphysics, ‘the sacred state of the Akan is inhabited by humans, ancestors, gods and spirits. Unlike other religions,
the distance between the organic and the spiritual world is not unbridgeable' (Warren 1986:23). Even eating and drinking to the traditional Akan is a religious affair with the first drop of a drink or morsel of food put on the ground for ancestors. The use of the generic name for God (Nyame) and call on ancestors is part of common language of the Akan. Thus like the Ancient Hebrews, a belief system underlies all existential considerations of the Akan. But that is where the comparison ends.

i) Akan concept of Deity.

The Akans believe in a Supreme God who is creator of all things. But he is too remote to be worshipped. He is the reference point in all expressions of faith but he has no priest. This supreme being is variably called Nyame (God), Onyankopon (the only Great God), Idomankoma (Creator) etc. He exists along with a pantheon of lesser gods and spirits who act as intermediaries between the Supreme God and humans. These lesser spirits are 'considered to animate natural objects' (mountains, rivers, trees and shrines). It is the spirits/gods who have priests and who when possessed communicate to the living. The earth also has a spiritual power in Akan belief – the god of fertility (Asaase Yaa). Like the Supreme Being she may be solicited through libation and sacrifices but she (a mother goddess created on Thursday) has no priest. 'The lowest superhuman power is found in the suman, a term applied to all charms, amulets, talismans, mascots and fetishes' (Warren 1986:26).

Besides gods, the Akan have strong belief in life after death and that life continues in the world of spirits. This results in elaborate funeral rights which are both send offs and preparation for life in the other world.
Though not articulated as such, the Akans traditionally believe in a limited form of reincarnation. Limited in the sense that some of the dead may be reborn.

The central place of religion in the life of the Akans is seen in their love for rituals. In fact, almost all traditional treatment of diseases take on religious nature as illness is considered to have spiritual origin: destiny, angered ancestors, witchcraft and sorcery in addition to organic causes.

ii) **Ancestral worship and libation**

The most practically important aspect of Akan belief syste m is the influence of ancestors on the living and resulting ancestral veneration and workshop. (Sarpong 1974) thinks the Akans venerate but not worship ancestors but in practice by praying and pouring libation to them etc. It is difficult to deny worship altogether.

For all practical purposes at the core of Akan belief system is the Ancestor (or more correctly ‘good ancestors’). This is natural outcome in the dual belief of life after death and the co-habitation of the spirit and humans in the Akan State. Ancestors are ‘believed to be continuing life in a (spirit) world (Asamando), as they did on earth, and are constantly watching over living relations and, therefore, are ready to punish those who break custom or to protect and help those who observe them’ (Nkansa- Kyeremateng 1999:98).

There are two ways that ancestral worship pervades Akan traditional belief. In the first place, in almost all actions – eating, drinking, praying – reference and homage is made to them. The principal way of venerating ancestors is through the pouring of libation on all Akan social occasions –
sharing a social drink, child birth, puberty, marriage and death. Ancestors are called upon to bless, protect and defend.

The second major occasion, and that is very special for ancestral veneration and worship, is at festivals. All Akan groups celebrate annual and lunar festivals. The principal one for the Ashantis is the Adae – at the end of every 42 day lunar month, one of which is designated the Adae Kesee (Big Adae). On these and other festivals ancestors are specially remembered and sacrifices are made to them along with the pouring of libation. Festivals are used for the 'propitiation, solicitation, or worship of ancestral spirits' (Rattray 1928:92). The Akans also have an annual festival of first fruits of the staples especially yam called afahye.

iii) Witchcraft

There is also widespread belief in witchcraft. Every family is supposed to have some witches (abayiffo) and wizards (mmonsamffo) to whom are attributed adversities such as accidents, untimely death and chronic diseases. Sad to say, the usual suspects are old ladies in the family as it is also believed that a witch from another family has no power over people who are not members of the witch's family. Suspicion of witchcraft often leads to bad blood and even hatred among otherwise strong Akan family members.

As far as marriage and family life among the Akans is concerned, the importance of understanding, even in outline only, the belief system of the Akans is that since the spirit and ancestors share a common world – in all matters relating to marriage, family life and divorce, the spirits and ancestors in particular are consulted. Children are believed to be sent by
ancestors. In short, marriage and family life of the Akan are steeped in their belief system.

5.4 KINSHIP AND FAMILY SYSTEM OF THE AKANS

Study of Akan kingship and family organization especially that of the Ashantis is such that it has made it the most studied traditions of the people groups in Ghana. The aim of this section is not to attempt to comprehensively cover all the ramifications of that. Instead we will focus on three major coordinates of Akan kinship and family system upon which much of the marriage traditions are built and therefore are most relevant to our study of Ashanti traditional marriage and Biblical patterns. These are Akan concept of personhood, matrilinetal kinship structure and the extended family.

i) Akan concept of personhood

All the authorities agree that the Akan concept of personhood is trinitarian consisting of mogya (blood), nton or ntor (spirit) and okra (Soul). It is not clear in the literature the relationship between the last two elements (as indeed it is among Christians). That the origin of mogya in conception constitute the foundations of Akan kinship and family system all the authorities agree (Rattray 1923, 1927, 1929 Fortes 1960; Nkansa-Kyeremateng 1996, 1999; and Warren 1986).

According to the Akans the mother alone contributes blood (mogya) at conception. And it is blood that defines descent and kinship. Thus the Akans are strictly matrilinetal. It is the female who maintains the family and clan. Even though within the nuclear family the man is still dominant, in many Akan societies especially in Ashanti, authority over the woman and her offspring resides with the maternal uncle (mother’s brother) and not the father. This is not matriarchy, however, as the female is not the head of
the family. Thus the Akan say *aʃra sɛ cse, nansɔ ŋwu abusua* (a child looks like his father but belongs to his mother’s family).

The father on the other hand contributes *ntɔn* (spirit) to the child. Sociologically *ntɔn* plays less important roles in Akan society than the blood. While the latter defines descent, kinship and succession, the spirit plays two major roles. As we will explain in full below, first to a limited extent it contributes to the rules of exogamy which is largely determined by the woman’s blood and accounts for some ‘otherwise inexplicable avoidances and rules of marriage’ (Rattray 1923:37). Its main role is to define prohibited diets and many taboos in Akan totem system. A child follows the father’s dietary and other taboos and a married pregnant woman follows the husbands taboos ostensibly for the sake of the child. The *ntɔn* is presumed to influence the character, genius, temper or quality of the person also.

There is some confusion in the literature regarding the source of the soul or *skra* or simply *kra* (Soul). It would seem that a child inherits the *skra* on the day of birth as part of its creation. It influences the child’s moral actions. Traditionally each child has *kra din* (*skra* name) which becomes the first name. Since there are only seven days in the week all Akan males have one of seven common first male names. Similarly, the women share seven female equivalents. The only way to distinguish people born in the family on the same day, say on Monday, is by adding suffices such as Junior, Senior, the 2nd, 3rd, 4th etc. Of course Akan children do not necessarily bear their father’s surname, and hence are easier to distinguish.
The days of the week and corresponding names are presented in Table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1**  
**Akan Day Names (Kra Din)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day (Twi equivalent)</th>
<th>Name (Kra Din)</th>
<th>Appellation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday (Kwasiada)</td>
<td>Kwasi/Akosua</td>
<td>Bodua/Adampo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday (Dwoada)</td>
<td>Kwadwo/Adwoa</td>
<td>Okoto/Badwo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday (Benada)</td>
<td>Kwabena/Abena</td>
<td>Ogyam/Kosia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday (Wukuada)</td>
<td>Kwaku/Akua</td>
<td>Daaku/Ekusee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday (Yawoada)</td>
<td>Yaw/Yaa</td>
<td>Preko/Bosuo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday (Fiada)</td>
<td>Kofi/Afua</td>
<td>Otuo/Nkoso or Bɛɛfi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday (Memeneda)</td>
<td>Kwame/Ama</td>
<td>Abapoma/Nyamekyɛ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above names follow Ashanti rendering. There are slight variations among other Akans especially Fante.

ii) **Kinship Structure**

The Akans use the same word *abusua* for both the clan and the extended family. This is the cause of much confusion in writing on the Akans and therefore we will make every effort to indicate whether the extended family or the whole clan is in view. *Abusua* is however, not used to describe the nuclear family generally Kyeremateng (1999:66). In fact, as will become more explicit the extended family in almost all matters take precedence above the nuclear family and wife and husband are never seen as being one family. The rules of exogamy forbids marrying clan’s man or woman.

Both the clan and extended family, among Akan society follows matrilineal system. In fact the woman is the maintainer of family and lineage. The Akan therefore will say *Wo ni wu a na wabusua asa* (The death of a mother is the end of your family).
There are seven matrilineal clans among the Akans though sometimes Agona/Bretuo are separated to make eight (See Table 5.2 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clan</th>
<th>Totem</th>
<th>Response to Greetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aduana</td>
<td>Dog/Lion</td>
<td>Adu Nana (Adu na)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agona/Bretuo</td>
<td>Parrot/Leopard</td>
<td>Ayo Nana/Etwie Nana (Ayo-na/Etwe na)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asakyire</td>
<td>Vulture</td>
<td>Ofori Nana (Ofori-na)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asenee</td>
<td>Bat</td>
<td>Ase Nana (Asen-na)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asona</td>
<td>Crow</td>
<td>Ofori-Nana (Ofori-na)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayokoɔ</td>
<td>Hawk</td>
<td>Obiri Nana (Obiri-na)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekoɔna</td>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>Duku Nana (Doku-na)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


iii) The Extended Family
The clan, literally comprises millions (one seventh) of all Akans and though they see themselves as brothers from a common ancestry, apart from using it to define exogamy and being assured of hospitality and welcome in a strange place, it is the extended family which is the basis of succession, inheritance and several issues relating to marriage.

The clan is broken into socially functional extended family members each of which can trace its ancestor. The extended family is further grouped into households. In the day-to-day life of the couple it is the extended family which is most important. As noted by Warren (1986:34) ‘the fundamental value of the Akans is their emphasis on the extended family and mutual helpfulness and cooperation of its members. The family also exists in time, since the ancestors are always considered members’ (living dead). All aspects of social life of the Akan is within the context of the
extended family – birth, puberty rites, marriage, death, calamities and celebrations.

The extended family ensures mutual helpfulness, conformity to social norms and protection to the extent that among the traditional Akans there was strictly nothing like an illegitimate child as every child belongs to the extended family (abusua). Often the main distinction of the extended family within the clan is that the family would trace their common ancestry to a specific ancestress in the recent past of about four to six generations, except royal families which tend to keep longer genealogies.

At the head of the extended family is the abusua panin (literally ‘family elder’) who is usually the oldest male member. With the increasing complexity of society this term is becoming limited to household head or cluster of near kinsmen. He represents the family on local and village council, and acts as a kind of patriarch in terms of settling disputes, rallying the family together, maintaining and protecting family property. He is the custodian of traditions and through sacrifices, libations and prayers mediate between the spirits/ancestors and the living.

There is no doubt from the foregoing that in Akan traditional society the extended family takes precedence over the nuclear family, a factor that is a cause of confusion and trouble among urban educated Akans as they seek to balance their newly acquired western nuclear family norms with their allegiance to the abusua (Oppong1974).

Although the ideal of the Akan man is for marriage to be patrilocal that is not the case in many cases. Fortes (1960:262) notes that
In relatively stable Ashanti community, between 40 and 50 per cent of the population live in matrilineal households under female heads, and only about a third of all married women reside with their husbands, the remainder living chiefly with matrilineal kin. About half of the children under 15 live with their fathers, a large proportion because their parents are living together, and the other half live in households presided over by their mother's brothers.

It would seem that traditionally, marriage among the Akans entitle the man to sexual rights and domestic services especially food and provision of water from the stream but the wife does not have to live with him in the same house which is presumed in other societies. It suffices to say that the women go into marriage basically to have children for the family, meet sexual needs and for maintenance. Without expressly saying so, there is a commercial undertone of Akan marriage; the two don't become one (they belong to their respective extended families) and intimacy during daytime is limited.

5.5 RULES OF EXOGAMY

Originally all the members of the clan, that is, one seventh of the whole of the Akan people, claim to have descended from one common ancestress and therefore have the same blood. The rules of marriage among the Akans strictly forbid marrying a clansman however, distant. It is incest, is committing mogya fra (mixing of blood) and therefore strictly prohibited. Breaking the rule was punishable by death or exile at best. The Akans therefore practised strict clan exogamy.

The first important rule to note is that these clans abusua are exogamous, that is, a person of one clan under no circumstances
marry or have sexual intercourse with anyone who belongs to his or her clan. Infringement of this law was punished by death or expulsion from the clan for both parties concerned (Rattray 1923:35).

Rattray (1923) further states that the *ntɔn* is also exogamous in that two people of the same *ntɔn* could not marry. That does not mean one cannot marry a father's clan person. In fact, marrying your father's nephew or niece (or in the opposite your maternal uncle's son or daughter) which is called 'cross-cousin marriage' is permissible. This is because one inherits *ntɔn* (spirit) from the father only. One can therefore marry a paternal auntie's (FASI) child of the opposite sex or maternal uncle's (MOBR) child of the opposite sex. In either case consanguinity does not apply because a maternal uncle's (MOBR) child or paternal auntie's (FASI) child of the opposite sex inherits blood only from their mother who is always of a different clan as the one seeking marriage while their fathers will also be different and therefore do not share the same *ntɔn*. These 'cross-cousin' marriages as they are called are the preferred marriage among the Ashantis.

Apart from the foregoing the only other prohibited marriage is that between a person and grandchildren and the reason is simple. If cross-cousin marriages go on for two generations, a person and his/her grandparent could share the same blood.

5.6 **THE STATUS OF MEN AND WOMEN IN AKAN SOCIETY**

There is no doubt that the Akan woman shares some of the low status and inequity in traditional societies. Domestic work for example is skewed against them. The man clears the forest for a farm but much of the
planting, maintenance and carrying of produce over hills and valleys is their burden. And while polygamy is permitted a woman cannot marry two men at the same time.

But even among modern times and definitely among traditional societies, the Akan woman was no second citizen and had much dignity and status unknown even among western societies of today. The Venda woman of South Africa (Mogubane 1998) was another traditional woman with much influence. The 'Queenmother' (same as Queen called Queenmother to signify that she is mother to the king) was the second most important person in the society. She is not the wife of the king but his mother, sister or niece. Unless the king's wife is a royal in her matrilineage she does not become a queen or queenmother. The woman determines lineage and her blood alone entitles one to succession. She is able and allowed to initiate divorce. She owns property and in marriage she maintains separate capital assets. All observers (e.g. Danquah 1952 and Busia 1954) stress the separate financial interest of the woman in marriage especially with regard to house, cocoa farms and other durable assets and real estate. No wonder the bride price paid by the husband in Akan land is only a token sum and drink.

In a study titled 'The Political and Military Roles of Akan Woman' by Kwame Arhin (1992), it is noted with respect to the Ashantis that:

i) There was always a female stool counterpart to the kings.

ii) The Asantehemaa (Queenmother of Ashanti) is a member of the Kɔbɔ Council (the executive cabinet of the Asanteman - Asante State) and a member of the general Assembly of Asante Rulers (Nhyiamu).
iii) Extrenched among the Ashantis is the concept of the Òbaa Panin and Aberewa (Old Lady) who is the embodiment of wisdom and final consultant on all matters of importance especially with regard to custom and tradition.

iv) The Queenmother has her own Oath, Linguist and Court.

v) Every Queenmother is called the mother of the King and as such is the Chief adviser to the King and refuge for fugitives.

vi) Women and Queen mother in particular is the custodian of custom and authority on geneology.

vii) The Queenmother decides on who is qualified by blood to be made ruler.

viii) The Queenmother can occupy the male stool if there is need. Thus the peace, order, stability and the political community therefore depended to a large extent on the Òhemaa (Queenmother) in Ashanti.

The above is not to say that the Akan man is a wimp. After all within the matrilineal system the abusua panin (head of the family) is a man and he is first among equals. The King not the Queenmother is the head of State. The Queenmother in consultation with elders is the sole nominator of the king but she is constrained by custom to choose only among her brothers, sons and sisters sons and in their absence grand-nephews. In the domestic area she is expected to be subject to her husband and serve him.

Most peculiar of the matrilineal Akans is that the male authority resides in the mother's brother and not the father of a child. Though the father has disciplinary authority over his children living under his roof, we are in agreement with the slightly hyperbolic view of Fortes (1960:268) that an
Ashanti father has no legal (we will say limited legal) authority over his children. He cannot compel them to live with him or if he has divorced their mother claim custody as a right ... Nevertheless it is regarded as a duty and the pride of a father to bring up his children, that is, to feed, clothe, and educate them, and later to set them up in life.

In practice the father’s right to discipline and bringing up of his children is unquestioned. The average traditional father, however, would care for his sister’s children equally, if not more than his children, if he has the means as his nephews would succeed him.

5.7 CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY

Like most traditional societies the worse calamity that may befall a couple is childlessness. Among the Akans, a man who is not able to have children is called kote krawa (wax penis). Even worse is bareness for the woman given the fact that children are needed to support the matrilineal system. On the other hand the greatest blessing is to have many children and a tenth child (badu) is an occasion for special celebration. In fact, traditionally the woman’s family presented a special gift of a sheep (badudwan) to the husband.

The Ashanti regard the bond between mother and child as the basis of all social relations. Childlessness is felt by both men and women as the greatest of all personal tragedies and humiliations. Prolific child-bearing is honoured. A mother often boasts of her achievements and is given public congratulations (Fortes 1960:262).


The Akans do distinguish, however, between sociological and biological parenthood with emphasis on the former. For example, the Ashantis would say *akromfo nwo ba* (the thief does not give birth to a child). By that they mean that a child conceived by an adulterous woman shall belong to sociological father and not the biological father who pays damages (Sarpong 1974).

While all children are precious to the Akans, girls are invaluable as maintainers of the lineage. But in olden days men desired boys for two reasons. First, they will carry and pass on their *ntɔn* (spirit) to future generations. Second, as it is the father who names children, usually after their parents and ancestors, their sons maintain their family names (Sarpong 1994). But a woman is synonymous with family.

5.8 INHERITANCE

We noted above that a husband and wife keep separate estates and belong to different families all their life as family is defined only in terms of matrilineal descent. Rattray (1927:4) notes that the uncle is heir to all personal properties but waives that right in favour of the deceased’s next eldest brother. Usually inheritance among the Akans follow the following order of preference within the norms of matrilineal succession (Rattray 1923:41-2).

a) For males: maternal uncle, brother of deceased (in order of seniority), mother’s sisters sons in order of seniority, nephews etc. till all males are exhausted, then females and finally male slaves, then females before slaves.

b) For women: sisters by seniority, her own daughters by seniority till all females are exhausted then males and finally female slaves.
Slaves in Ashanti invariably get absorbed into the family within one or two generations. That is probably the reason why the Twi speaking Akans have this proverb. *Obi nkyere obi ase* (no one authorized to reveal mother’s genealogy. Thus it is almost impossible to illicit genealogical information.

The Akans do distinguish between personal property of an individual and family property. The former may be given to others, including a man’s children during his lifetime. But he can never dispose of family property. Family property is always held in trust for future generations (Obeng 1986:57). In recent times this rule is not being followed and some heads of family do sell family land which invariably become a source of litigation among family members. He can only use it as a pledge to raise a loan for the benefits of the family. With regard to personal property and even with regard to who should be a successor within the matriarchy, a dying declaration (*nsamanse* is binding if there are witnesses.

5.9 SUMMARY

While one could continue describing the characteristics of the Akans in general we would do so at the expense of our particular focus on the Ashantis. Moreover, with little variation what prevails in Ashanti will be reflected in other Akan tribes. The foregoing outline has therefore presented only main coordinates of Akan tradition and customs which form a background to a more detailed study of family and marriage life among traditional Ashanti. We have noted the following about the Akans:

i) They constitute the largest ethnic grouping in Ghana.

ii) They are matriarchal to the core. Descent and kinship is traced through the woman/mother.
iii) The Akan understanding of personhood is as follows: A child comprise (a) blood from the mother which alone defines descent and kinship; (b) the father provides Nton or Spirit, and (c) the child inherits the soul on the day of birth.

iv) Dual exogamy is practiced. One cannot marry a person of the same ‘blood’ which is a taboo and an offence to the ancestors; and a person of same Nton cannot be espoused.

v) The role of the father is important in raising children but limited beyond that since the child neither belongs to his family nor can it inherit from him. Instead maternal uncles play a much bigger role in determining major issues pertaining to the family.

vi) While the Akans share some commonalities with primitive societies regarding the role and status of women, the strict matrilineal system prevents the domination of women prevalent in most traditional societies. In marriage she does own her own property, may not live with the husband in his house and can initiate divorce. In certain decisions such as the nomination of successors the proverbial ‘Aberewa’ (old lady which refers not only to the aged woman but anyone who succeeds the eldest on her death) is almost decisive. There is no preference of male children above females. If anything at all the opposite may hold.

vii) In the day-to-day running of the household however, the father is recognized as the head and women undergo the same domestic chores of women all the world over and are expected to serve their husbands.

viii) Marriage is primarily for children but strictly speaking there is no illegitimate child as every child has abusua (family) as it is the blood of the mother that determines that.
CHAPTER 6
TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE AMONG THE ASHANTIS

6.1 INTRODUCTION
In the preceding chapter we presented an overview of some traditions of the Akans of Ghana to which the Ashanti constitute the largest and most well known group. In this chapter the focus is on traditional marriage in Ashanti including the purpose of marriage; types of relationship and preferred marriage (cross-cousin marriage); attitude towards sexuality in general and prohibited and incestuous relationships; the age of marriage and the role of parents in the choice of spouse; prevalence of polygamy; the process of marriage from the *rite de passage* to consummation of the relationship and the role of ‘bride price’ as well as rules regarding divorce, remarriage, widowhood and levirate marriage.

The Ashanti or *Asante* kingdom was founded at the end of the seventeenth century by Osei Tutu, the first *Asantehene* (King of the Ashantis) with the help of his priestly friend and constitutional adviser – *Okomfo Anokye* (The Priest Anokye). It is to the genius of these two friends that the Ashanti Kingdom was founded out of a coalition of small states which formed an alliance to overthrow their *Denkyira* overlords at the battle of *Feyiase* in 1700. Over the ensuing 50 years the Ashantis went on to conquer territory after territory till their empire occupied an area larger than present day Ghana (Labi 2000). Ashanti was therefore, from beginning a politico-military alliance with its binding principles being:

i) The golden stool (*Sika Dwa Kofi*) literally meaning the golden stool which was conjured from heaven on Friday as the soul of the Ashanti nation.
ii) Kumasi as its capital and the Chief of Kumasi as the Asantehene (King of Ashanti) and commander-in-chief.

iii) A council (Asanteman Council) with representation of all the Asante paramountcy who govern their territories with relative autonomy. Each of the principal ones were commanders of wings of the Ashanti standing army.

iv) An annual festival (Odwira) and lunar (42-day) Adae festivals for special veneration of ancestors, especially those worthy to have a black stool carved in their memory, and for calling on the gods.

The Ashanti imperialism went hand in hand with their own love for self-rule and fierce resistance to colonialism. The British only succeeded in annexing Ashanti to their colony in 1901 but not without a marked degree of internal autonomy and being allowed to preserve their culture including non-violability of the Golden Stool. Thus probably the Ashantis are the only colonized traditional empire that entered the 20th century with their culture and tradition largely intact. Today they boast of unparalleled 'pomp and pageantry' with the King of Ashanti accorded state visit status to countries as varied as imperial United Kingdom and republican United States of America.

But it is the gold of the Ashantis which gave Ghana its pre-independence name of Gold Coast that immortalized their name in the world of business through Ashanti Goldfields, one of the world's leading mining conglomerates, quoted on stock markets from Johannesburg to London and from New York to Sydney. The Ashantis are justifiably self confident, brave and non-sycophantic people. However, in this chapter our pursuit
of the Ashantis will be limited only to their traditional marriage norms and rules.

6.2 THREE KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING ASHANTI TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

There are three fundamental issues that connect what would seem peculiar marital relationships among the Ashantis which in one form or another all the authorities allude to (Rattray 1923, 1927 and 1929; Nkansa-Kyeremateng 1986, and 1999 and Warren 1986). These are:

i) The concept of personhood.

ii) Matrilineal kinship system, and

iii) Preference of extended family above the nuclear in all social relationships.

Since these have been discussed broadly in Chapter 5 reference will only be made as to how they govern marital and domestic life of the Ashantis at relevant points.

It will be recalled that a person is made up of mogya (blood) of the mother, nton (Spirit) of the father and ḋкра (Soul) acquired on the day one is born. The ḋкра plays no significant role in Ashanti marriage. The mogya defines one’s abusua which is used to describe both the extended family and the larger clan. Hence the Ashantis are strictly matrilineal in kinship, succession and inheritance. Their concept of personhood and kinship largely define rules of exogamy.

6.3 DOUBLE EXOGAMY

An Ashanti cannot traditionally marry anyone of the same mogya (blood) and that means a member of the clan no matter how distant they may be. It is a taboo against the gods and ancestors to ‘mix blood’. If unknowingly
a couple of the same clan married they are to dissolved the relationship or face banishment or even death. The rule was invariably applied in ancient times and even today no Ashanti will knowingly marry a clansman or clanswoman. It is the first line of enquiry in initiating all romantic relationship.

Despite the limited legal position of an Ashanti father his children may not marry a person of his ntɔn. Such people are considered to be siblings. Since the ntɔn (spirit) is transmitted only through the man the second of endogamy rule implies one cannot marry any of the children of the male siblings of the father as they would have the same ntɔn as you. Therein lies the most peculiar characteristic of the Ashantis when it comes to marriage. A man can marry the father’s niece or uncle’s daughter and vice versa. This is what is termed cross-cousin marriage. Cross-cousin marriages are preferred among the Ashantis.

6.4 CROSS-COUSIN MARRIAGE
The Ashanti’s sum up their preference for cross-cousin marriages in their proverbs se wanya no wofa ba anaa wo se (papa) wɔfaase anware a, wɔ nua ne no. (S/He becomes your sibling only when you don’t get your uncle’s child or your father’s nephew/niece to marry). Cross-cousin marriage is marriage between relatives who do not share the same mogya and ntɔn (blood and spirit). That means your uncle’s child or your father’s nephew/niece. This is because your uncle’s child by virtue of clan exogamy has a mother outside your clan hence not a member of your family. Neither does s/he share the same ntɔn with you since s/he is not your father’s offspring or that of his male siblings. Similarly, your father’s nephew or niece has a father from a clan different from yours and her mother is not of your blood (your mother’s family).
The Ashantis call their father’s male sibling’s children brothers their paternal aunt’s children. They share the same male transmitted "ntan. On the other hand they call their paternal aunts’ children wives and correspondingly their paternal aunt "ase (in-law). (For more details on cross-cousin marriage see Rattray, 1927 chapter 29).

Why should Ashanti parents and uncles desire cross-cousin marriage. For mothers there is never a problem in the case of their daughter because the seed of any marriage belongs to the matrilineal family. But when their sons marry their brother’s (MoBro) daughters they have one advantage of keeping a niece home who would otherwise go to her matrilineal family. But it is fathers and uncles who advocate strongly for cross-cousin marriages. A father by marrying his daughter to his nephew or uncle marrying his children to his nephews/nieces increase their prestige and keep their children and nephews/sons together at home. Rattray (1927) notes that if cross-cousin marriages are continued by two generations even where father’s and uncle’s interest seem to clash in the first instance, things even out in the second round.

However, the major factor in Ashanti that fuels the preference of cross-cousin marriages is that even though they are strictly matrilineal they are not matriarchal in that the head of the family is not the female. It is the uncle (mother’s brother) who is the abusua panin (Head of Family) and it is his interest in this case that is overriding. It is in the interest of the maternal uncle who wants his daughter to marry his nephews and sons to marry his nieces. In so doing he achieves two things:

i) In the case of his sons marrying his nieces he maintains family names. This according to Rattray (1927) is the main reason for that kind of cross-cousin marriage. For even though children do
not take their father’s surname in Ashanti generally, it is the father that names the child and that after his father, grandparents and ancestors.

ii) As noted above it keeps niece and daughters whichever is the case at ‘home’.

In cross-cousin marriage ‘an uncle, chief or king, if he compels his niece to marry his son ensures not only that his blood comes back (which would be whomsoever she marries), but also that the offspring of his niece by his son possesses his ntɔn (spirit, which alone makes it possible for him to name that child after himself or after an ancestor’ (Rattray 1927:223). However, marriage of a grandchild is forbidden. ‘It will be found that where cross-cousin marriages have taken place a grandfather will be of the same abusua (blood) and ntɔn (spirit) as the granddaughter, after whom she might be named, who was the wife of her granddaughter’ Rattray (1927:223) adds.

With the foregoing we are now in a position to list prohibited marriage applying the double endogamy principle. The Ashantis had no tradition against marrying the ‘foreigner’ on the basis of race/tribe or religion. But in an age of no mass transportation marrying from afar was discouraged for practical reason as a favourite song of Ashanti girls at play indicate:

*Kwan ten ten aware menko o! (2x)*

*Ekypen na meko asembi asi makyi a mεydεn*  
*Kwan ten ten aware memko o!*

(Distance marriage I won’t go into it.  
In case I leave and something happens at home, what shall I do.  
Distance marriage I won’t go into it).
6.5 PROHIBITED MARRIAGE

Once we realize that consanguinity is forbidden but is limited to maternal kinsfolk and to a limited extent people of the same ntɔn a list of prohibited sexual relationships among the Ashanti become easy to understand. Marriage with these people by a man is strictly prohibited (Rattray 1923:37):

i) Grand mother or grand aunt (maternal).
ii) His mother
iii) His sister
iv) His mother’s sisters, mother’s sister’s daughter, mother’s sister’s daughters’ daughter.
v) His sister’s daughter
vi) His daughter’s daughter
vii) His daughter’s grand daughter.
viii) His grandmother, grand-aunt.
ix) His father’s sister
x) His father’s brothers’ daughter, father brother’s son’s daughter
xi) His grand daughter
xii) Anyone of the same abusua (blood) whether really kindred or not.

The three factors which govern unions and marriage prohibitions (in all the above) are:

i) The clan (abusua) is always exogamous
ii) The ntɔn is always exogamous
iii) The prohibition ruling out all grandchildren in the classificatory sense (Rattray 1923:38).

The Ashantis believe that incest in each of the above cases are outrages and hateful to the powers upon which fertility of humans and soil depend and hence without drastic punishment the whole clan would suffer (Rattray 1927).
6.6 TYPES OF APPROVED MARRIAGES

The cross-cousin marriage, however, is part of six categories of marriages recognized under Ashanti traditional law (Rattray 1929). Even though other authorities such as Warren (1986), Sarpong (1977) and Obeng (1986) describe types of marriage they are either dependent on Rattray or are less comprehensive. We will therefore follow Rattray as the primary source. Ashanti traditional marriage fell into one of the following categories:

i) *Adehye Wadeɛ* or Marriage of a free man to a free woman. Even though the tendency these days is to apply the term to a Chief marrying a free woman solely we agree with Rattray that the term traditionally applied to all common marriages between two free people.

ii) *Afona or Afana wadeɛ* marriage between a free born man and a slave usually the master or a member of his family.

iii) *Awowa wodeɛ* or pawn marriage whereby a woman is given in marriage to secure money to pay the debt of the extended family. For such marriage on paying for the debt it is then regularized as *adephye wadeɛ*. Marriage itself does not annul the debt, the service of the woman covers only the interest.

iv) *Ayeter wadeɛ* or surrogate marriage. This is now a dying custom except among chiefs. It occurs when a substitute wife, usually a younger sister of a deceased wife, is provided to take the place of a dead woman. This practice seems to underscore the fact that marriage is between families which even death does not annul.

v) *Kunu wadeɛ* or levirate marriage whereby the successor of the husband, in this case his brother or nephew marries the widow. Levirate marriage is still practiced in rural communities among the Ashantis but virtually extinct in urban areas. Rattray (1927)
notes that not only is levirate marriage considered proper, it was an obligation failure to undertakers bad omens resulting from vengeance of the late brother’s ghost.

vi) *Mpena wade* which Rattray translates as ‘mating of lovers’. Actually it means a stable ‘live in relationship’ in modern parlance. Strictly *mpena* simply means a concubine and *mpena wade* is romantic sexual relationship between a consenting adult man and a woman without going through the formalities of marriage. The fact that it is described as ‘awadee’ marriage among the Ashantis is an indication of the loose manner that traditional marriage was held.

To the above list we may add Asiya *waade* or betrothal which among the Ashantis could be at birth or even at conception with parents pledging a daughter in marriage. In fact traditionally, couples may agree before their wives get pregnant that if they had opposite sexes they will give their children in marriage. But usually betrothal is of a younger girl even a baby to an already grown man or young adult. The man would start acts of kindness to the girl’s parents and the girl will be taught to call him husband. The man may provide the parents with her upkeep till puberty when the girl is given in marriage. No sexual relationship is allowed until the girl reaches puberty after which the marriage is consummated.

As expected sometimes the girl refuses to marry the obviously older man. This could cause a lot of misunderstanding. While a suitor cannot retrieve the acts of kindness, they usually demand a refund of a capital expenditure item or quantifiable upkeep money and cost of helping her to learn a trade. Normal pre-marital engagement of grown
ups (Jewish betrothal) usually lasted few weeks and did not have the force of marriage in Ashanti but were the first step of customary rites of being married.

6.7 AGE OF MARRIAGE AND ‘NUBILITY RITE’

There is no preferred marriageable age for boys among traditional Ashantis. It’s a matter of being mature enough to take care of a wife and that means anytime in the late teens though it would seem few married in their teens. Neither did any kind of initiation right exist for men as in many traditional societies. The Ashantis did not practice circumcision. In fact any form of mutilation was eschewed and considered a deformity which would debar a royal from ascending to the throne. Thus the only mark one would find on an Ashanti would be the result of a small incision on the cheek to apply medication which in days gone by was believed to stop children from having convulsion.

Similarly, no form of mutilation was allowed on women and genital circumcision would be abhorred. Women at puberty however went through a colourful and open rite. This ceremony which marks a girl reaching puberty is described in detail in Sarpong (1977) book titled ‘Girls Nubility Rites in Ashanti’. At puberty the mother makes known of her daughter’s first menstruation to the Queenmother and womenfolk of the village. Libation and thanksgiving are made to the Supreme God, Asaase Yaa (Mother Earth), spirits of the gods and ancestors for helping the girl to become a woman. The girl is totally shaved – head, armpits and pubes-dressed in the best clothes with breasts and upper body exposed wearing golden ornaments and chains. She takes her position in the village square under an umbrella each day for it between 5 to7 days (the menstrual period) of celebration and singing by girls of the village. She is fed on Ḍe
and *kosua* (mashed plantain or yam and boiled eggs). There is no secret
initiation or teaching that takes place as such but the *bra* (menstrual)
songs by the girls and women folk are full of advice. At the end of the
period she is taken to the riverside to wash. She then sits again in the
village square to receive gifts and congratulations. From that day she
becomes de facto a grown up woman.

The puberty rites introduce her to the larger community as a mature
woman. If a girl is not already betrothed she is expected to become so
after this ceremony. If she has been married as a child wife (*asiwa*), the
husband is immediately informed and the marriage is consummated
thereafter. A girl who has gone through the nobility rites earns the right to
be called ‘*eno’* (the equivalent of ‘Mum’ in English).

6.8 SEXUALITY AMONG THE ASHANTIS

Up till the puberty right, a girl who is promiscuous is looked down with utter
disdain and should she become pregnant was either sentenced to death or
banished with the accomplice. In the olden days a girl was expected to
enter marriage chaste and show signs of virginity through a virginity test of
stained sheet on the first night the couple has sex. Failure to meet the test
would either result in divorce or a rocky marriage at best (Nkansa-
Kyeremanteng 1996). That contrasts with the generally lax attitude to sex
among traditional Ashantis to the extent that even adultery – except with
the wife of *Asantehene* (the King of Ashanti) – was a civil matter at the
discretion of the husband to divorce a wife or accept damages.

The Ashantis had not many religious or social taboos regarding sexuality
but with one exception. No sin was as serious or horrible as incest (*mogya
fra*). Essentially incest occurred when people of the same clan or
extended matrilineal family mated. Otherwise even cohabiting adults were regarded as a married couple (*mpena awade*) even though the husband in such a case could not claim damages in the case of adultery. Also sexual relationship with a woman during her menstrual period was seen as a taboo because it is offensive to the gods and ancestors. It is supposed to render all magical powers of amulets, talisman etc. impotent. As a result during menstruation, a wife is not supposed to cook for the husband or even live in the same house. Usually there will be an out room in every house called *bra dan* (menstrual room) where such women moved to live in during menstruation.

Also a woman is considered unclean during the 40 days after child birth and would often stay with the mother or in maternal home from the period of confinement until 40 days after delivery.

6.9 POLYGAMY

It is believed that the long periods of separation after having a baby is one of the causes of the prevalence of polygamy among the Ashanti. Polygamy is an accepted practice among Ashantis. Of course 'polygamous institution of marriage is found in almost every African traditional society' (Mbiti 1974:81-2). Generalizing about the whole region, Dorjahn (1959:185) states that 'the quantitative data thus indicates that for all Sub-Saharan Africa, the mean number of wives per married man is 1.5' and that it is 'this cultural mechanism of celibacy and the differential mean age of first marriage which arbitrarily exclude persons of each sex from the marriageable individuals, together with mortality differences are what make polygamy possible'.
In Ghana as a whole, Birmingham, Naustadt and Omaboe (1967) record that 74% of marriages were monogamous, 20% had two wives and 3% of men had 3 or more wives. They did not provide specific statistics regarding polygamy among Ashantis but there is no reason to expect it to differ from the national average. The findings of Hagan (1992:197) at Winneba, a non-Ashanti Akan town was that in 1972, 73% of all married women were in monogamous relationships and 27% were polygamous. While the Ashantis practise polygamy, Warren’s view (1986:19) that polygamy is ideal for the Akan is an exaggeration and with that Rattray agrees (1927:95). We are of the view that the level of prevalence of polygamy in Ashanti would be the same as the national average. The fact is that an unmarried woman is socially anomalous in traditional Ashanti; that the number of children was an honour to a woman and an economic prestige for the husband; that there were long periods of abstinence after birth all contribute to promote polygamy. (See O. Donovan 1966, for full list of reasons why people adopt polygamy in Africa generally).

But there were countervailing factors against ordinary folks marrying more than one wife. Even when account is taken of the fact that men generally marry younger women and that slaves supplied an additional pool of women. The wives of a polygamous man are called rivals (kora). Few women take kindly to their husbands having additional women to them. A man has to placate the first wife (mpata) and seek her consent before he can take a second wife. If he does not, she could divorce him. Moreover, there is always a limit to the number of women to supply polygamous wives. All that could be said is that traditional Ashantis accepted polygamy and where a man was childless he was supposed to have additional wives.
6.10 THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE CHOICE

In the next two sections we will explore intimacy in marriage in Ashanti, the role of parents and the family in spouse selection and the central role of having children in traditional marriage.

i) Intimacy


What then is the role of love and intimacy in marriage among the Ashantis? In answering this it is critical to distinguish between first marriages from those of consensual second and latter life marriages among grown ups. In the case of the latter the author found out that having children often is not an important consideration unless they had no children in a prior relationship. Rather, the predominant considerations as such marriages are love and intimacy between the couples. The marriage ceremony however, always involved the extended family. Secondly, grown up couples, provided they obey the rules of consanguinity as defined among the Ashantis have freedom of sexual association, and generally simple marital customs of the Ashantis became even less elaborate. Moreover, ‘commercial considerations’ becomes a major consideration for some women.

In the case of younger folks and first marriages the role of the parents and matrilineal system assume greater role and for good reason. In the first place, girls, marry at very early age, almost immediately after puberty.
Mpena aware (concubinage) among young people we noted was eschewed by the society. Pregnancy before puberty rites was punishable by death or banishment and therefore traditional love and intimacy at early age was unthinkable. The parents, especially the father, was expected to find a wife for his son and pay the 'bride price'. No respectable parent of a girl would give their daughter in marriage without the formal request and performance of customary rites by the boy’s parents. Thus parents played a major role in determining the choice of partners for their children.

This process invariably included background check of the prospective partners in terms of:
- treatment of spouses especially wife beating in their families
- presence of serious ailments in the family such as epilepsy, lunacy, 'pre-mature deaths'.

The principle seems to be ‘marriage first, love second’ with the relationship between the two families more important than love between the couple.

The role of the parents is almost total in the case of asiwa awadi (childhood marriage/betrothal). The girl given in marriage at birth would have had no part in the decision at all. Traditionally the child would be brought up from infancy to call the man, 'my husband'. It was almost a matter of course that at puberty the marriage would be consummated. In recent times, however, the practice is almost extinct as in growing up many girls refuse to marry the suitor. Even in ancient times refusal would be allowed after all forms of pressure. In that case provision as monies advanced for her upkeep would have to be refunded.

Even in the distant past asiwa awadi (child marriage) was not the norm. The common form of marriages were teenagers being attracted to each
other and seeking their parents' consent or parents searching for a wife for their boy. In this latter case the parents identified a suitor and gauged the interest of their boy in the girl. Except among royals, in which case the likelihood of polygamy was high and hence marrying even a person one is not in love did not matter much, the parents would then persuade their son who invariably would accept the girl. The second, and equally prevalent form of marriage was that the young people will 'fall in love' first. The boy would then approach the parents to initiate the marriage process. Barring any of the above concerns emerging during the search or unless the parents have another suitor in mind, they would oblige. The boy would start indicating his love to the girl her mother by giving small gifts and by acts of kindness such as occasionally going to help on the farm of the prospective bride's parents.

It may, therefore, be concluded that love and intimacy were important in traditional Ashanti marriage but not the all important factor except in the case of marriage between grown ups usually after divorce. In all other cases, the interest of the matrilineage and the influence of parents were the major determinants with 'love and intimacy' between the couples playing a secondary role. This is because marriage was seen as an affair between families (Rattray 1927 and Warren 1986).

ii) The central role of children in marriage
There is no question however that in first marriages the total psychology and expectation of both the spouses and their families is to have children. Childless married couples are subject of derision. The man is called by the vulgar 'wax penis' (kote krawa)' (Rattray 1923:67). Even young children may disrespectfully refuse to go on errands for such a couple, something which is otherwise unpardonable in Ashanti. So consumed are traditional
Ashantis with passion for children that, de facto, a marriage is contingent until a child is born. Childlessness is a ground for divorce by either the man or the woman with the former often opting rather for a second or multiple wives. Mbiti’s (1974:25) statement that ‘the greatest threat to happy marriage in Africa is childlessness’ is very true of the Ashantis.

The Akans horrified is for any given family to become extinct since there will be no one to tend the ancestral shrines. ‘This horror underscores the attitude toward childlessness and divorce from barren women... A marriage is never complete until a child is born’ (Warren 1986:11). Another quotation will suffice to reinforce the above view of the role of children in marriage: ‘Childlessness is the greatest of all personal tragedies and humiliations for both male and female in Ashanti’ (Fortes 1950:262).

As a result of the above, all prayers and libations to the ancestral spirits include requests for more children. Having children up to 30, is a parting blessing on a newly married couple. In fact, a woman’s standing in society is positively correlated to the number of children she has and having a tenth child is not only an honour but a cause for celebration. The matrilineal family of the woman mark it by presenting badu gwan the sheep for the tenth born to the husband. Even before the tenth is reached the 6th and 9th are marked as lucky children with the 9th child in particular having abamo (a pot containing the husband’s hair and other concoctions believed to have spiritual power) created which is venerated life long.

A host of other rituals and actions pertain to childbirth which we cannot pursue further without digressing from the theme of marriage among the Ashantis. It will, therefore, suffice to conclude that having children was and remains a principal purpose of marriage among traditional Ashantis.
Love and intimacy were important considerations but secondary especially in first marriages. Parents in choosing a spouse for their sons or giving their daughters in marriage do so in anticipation of their first grandchild in ten months. Ashanti law prevents execution of a female sentenced to death until after birth (Rattray 1927). In almost all cases the interest of the family overrides that of the couple with marriage seen as a concern of two families.

6.11 ADULTERY

It is probably this emphasis on having children that adultery, except when it involves a wife of the King, is treated by the Ashantis as a civil and not a criminal case. When a wife commits adultery it is a legitimate cause of divorce. However, the husband has the option to demand damages from the offender and may continue to keep his wife. Even if the wife becomes pregnant as a result of the adulterous relationship, the husband has the right to keep the baby for the Ashantis say Okromfoɔ nwo ba (a thief does not give birth to a baby) (Sarpong 1974). This is not to deny that adultery is a serious offence among the Ashantis, but to underscore the paramountcy of having children to a couple.

6.12 THE PROCESS OF MARRIAGE

We are now in a position to focus on the process of getting married which starts with the choice of spouse outlined above. We will now present the steps between identification of a partner to the consummation of marriage, including the Ashanti ‘bride price’ and marriage ceremony.

i) Courting and Betrothal

A lot of informal customs and actions precede marriage once the two young people have shown interest in each other and or their parents have
given their approval with regard to a prospective partner. That this informality is not emphasized in the literature may explain the extreme simplicity of the formal aspect of Ashanti marriage. All the authorities concur that there was simplicity of marriage among the Ashantis compared with, for example, the nubility (puberty) rites of girls. Sarpong (1974:83) writes: ‘It (the marriage rite) consists essentially in the paying of the bride wealth and the acceptance of them by the girl’s family’.

Parents usually chose the spouse for their children. But once a young man has identified a girl he intends to marry, he makes known his intention to his father usually through the mother. Not much overt courting takes place before the parents and their families have given their consent to the marriage. It is interesting to note that the role of the matrilineage is already apparent. Background checks noted earlier are made on the girl’s family with particular reference to history of unclean diseases (such as leprosy), general criminality, hereditary diseases, wife abuse and anything the families may consider undesirable. Once the background checks prove satisfactory the girl’s family are informed who also do their own background checks with the maternal uncles sometimes playing a decisive role. Formal courtship begins. Unless it involves a girl who has not reached puberty the time between the beginning of courtship and marriage is relatively short.

No sexual relationship is expected or tolerated, but open courting begins once the parents show no objection. Given that traditionally marriages are usually within the locality, the families would have known each other for generations and therefore the checks are almost instantaneous (Nkansa-Kyeremateng 1996).
ii) Betrothal and Marriage Rites

Dovlo (1962) speaking about marriage in Ghana generally seems to have captured the major steps of marriage among the Ashantis. It consists of three stages as follows:

- Knocking (formal asking for the hand of the girl in marriage from parents and matrilineage)
- Asking (marriage ceremony), and
- Taking (consummation).

The first step is equivalent to betrothal, the second marriage ceremony and of course the third seals the act.

Opoku (1993) captures the details of the phases entailed in formalizing marriage in Ashanti despite in his book of 'Marriage Among the Akans'. The formal process of marriage begins after both families are satisfied with the prospective suitors when the family of the boy (that is the father) performs the 'knocking at the door' ceremony called aponyibo or aboboamubo. That is he formally goes to ask for the hand of the girl. According to Opoku (1993:127)

He provides drinks, such as rum or whiskey, to the girl's family and gives a bottle of rum to the girl's father. A token gift of money is also made to the girl's mother and this is customary fixed at (one British Guinea £1.10). A similar gift may be made to other women in the mother's family, as well as cash gifts for the girl's brothers and male cousin.

The items in the above quotation may be typical but wide variations are accepted as to the sum and gifts. Poor people could marry with only token gifts and payments. As at all customary ceremonies, prayers are said and libation poured to the spirits and ancestors.
The above constitutes betrothal which usually lasts few weeks. During that period the couple are not expected to consummate their relationship. Pregnancy before the performance of full customary rites attracts a fine (kwaseabuo sika – that is a fine for treating the girl’s family as fools). Then traditionally full customary rites will not be permitted until after the child is born. If the marriage does not take place after the child is born, the man is expected to pay akwangya sika (send off money).

The final marriage ceremony takes the form of payment of tiri nsa (head rum) or tiri aseda (appreciation fee). Once that is received and libations poured the couple are legally married.

The boy’s father may make gifts similar to those that took place at the betrothal to various members of the girl’s family. Opoku (1994:128) notes that ‘a stamping fee of 80 pessewas’ (equivalent then to 80 British pence) was added in former times. It is only the tiri nsa which is refunded when divorce occurs.

Rattray (1927 and 1929) calls the tiri nsa the (bridewealth). But that carries with it an undesirable and unintended meaning among the Ashantis. In the first place, the amounts involved were small and for all intent and purposes, only a token. As we will find below, the Ashanti wife is neither the property or even a member of the man’s family. Marriage only secures for the man exclusive sexual access and domestic support. At all times the woman’s Abusua Panin (head of her matrilinage) and/or brothers and uncle retain more control over her than the husband. They alone in olden times could pawn her or sell her offspring. The husband has no such rights. We, therefore, summarise that the tiri nsa served to
legalise the marriage which in Ashanti is more of a partnership than a ‘two become one’ relationship.

iii) Marriage Ceremony and Consummation

After the tiri nsa a date is fixed on which the maternal aunt of the boy comes for the wife for her newphew. Alternatively the wife is escorted by the mother to the abode of the husband in the evening. She will leave her behind after conversing with in-laws. If the girl’s brothers and maternal cousins had not received a traditional payment of seven shillings of Akontagye Sekan (cutlass/machet for brothers in law presumably to help them farm in lieu of losing their sister’s help) plus a drink they would symbolically block her departure until that is done.

Opoku (1994) records that on the day of departure there is merry making and consumption of marriage meal known as aduane kese (big meal). It is prepared by the bride and sent to the groom’s house to be enjoyed by him, his relatives and friends. However, our investigation shows that that was an exception rather than the rule among the Ashantis. In fact, the author in 16 years witnessed only one such incident in a typical Ashanti village. Thus the unusual simplicity of marriage in Ashanti comprising mainly two stages - asking for the hand and payment of the tiri nsa - is confirmed. To the Ashantis marriage is a natural transition from childhood to adulthood. Thus even puberty right of the girl is far more elaborate than marriage rites. In sum Ashanti customary marriage rites are simple and private. Usually no public celebration goes with it. Customary rites are recognized at the national level under the ‘Matrimonial Causes Act’ (Kumekpor 1975).

iv) Tiri Nsa

It is now time to go into details as to what constituted the tiri nsa (head money) or tiri aseda (appreciation fee). Rattray (1927:81)
has captured for us the various rates that prevailed at the beginning of the 20th century of how much money and gifts were paid (tiri nsa) during the marriage ceremony in Ashanti as follows:

1. For a royal princess of the reigning house, an adehye, a pareguan weight of gold dust (value about £8).

2. For a daughter of the reigning King (ohene ba) the weight in gold dust of osua ne domma (value about £2 7s) plus kukuo mienu (two pots of palm wine).

3. For a chief’s grandchild (ohene nana) gold dust to the value of suru ne dommafa (value £1 3s.6d.), and wine.

4. For a chief’s grandchild (ohene nana ba), gold dust to the value of nsanu ne soafa (16s, that is, 13s, + 3s) the extra 3s. being used to purchase wine.

5. For an ordinary person, a commoner, awiamfo (lit. ‘someone in the sun’) nsuansu ne ntaku (that is 10s + 6d) the extra 6d. again for rum or wine.

6. For a slave girl (afuna), domma ne ntaku anan (i.e. 7s.+ 2s) the odd 2s. for wine.

This bride price was paid in the case of No.6 to the master; Nos.1-4 to the King of Ashanti, who gave one-half to the bride’s clan; No.5 to the mother’s clan.

In addition to gold dust or cash payments the future son will make customary gifts of antelope meat, salt, palm-wine and tobacco to the parents.
6.13 THE STATUS OF THE SPOUSES IN MARRIAGE

The relationship between the spouses in traditional Ashanti marriage and makes it unique, along with some of the other Akans in traditional societies Abu (1992:156-7) captures that very well:

The most striking feature of marriage relationship in Ashanti is separateness of spouses resources and activities and overtness of the bargaining element in the relationship with respect to house, space food, sex, money and the conjugal relationship; (and) how it derives from wider family structures and the motives of individual women and men in struggling to get what they want from spouses and lovers. The conjugal relationship is weak in residential economic and emotional terms compared with the matrilineage

In Ashanti marriage the spouses have a separate financial interest. In capital investment such as houses and cocoa farms the matrilineage has priority (Busia 1954; Danquah 1928, 1953). The wife does not inherit from the husband and the husband does not inherit from the wife. In the matrilineal system, we noted that even children inherit from their mothers and uncles and not their fathers. These are reflected in popular Ashanti proverbs such as Mpuansa Ntiama, wo nya asempa a nka nkyere wo yere (Learn from Mr. Mpuansa Ntiama’s wife betrayal and don’t tell your wife your good news). Similarly, traditionally it was not too uncommon for a bride to be told at the marriage ceremony Obarima nye sumie na wo de wo tiri ato so (A man is not a pillow for you to rest your head on) and to the man Se wonya ade ewo abusua, se wobo ka wode (if your wife acquires property it belongs to the maternal family but all her debts are yours).
While the ideal is for husband and wife in Ashanti to live under one roof in the husband’s house or family (patri-locality) that is not a requirement nor something many husbands insist on. In Agogo, one of the headquarters of Ashanti paramountcies, Fortes (1954:270) records that up to 80% of women did not live with their husbands in their homes. However, Fortes’ findings would not be representative and 40% would be the national average among the Ashantis which is still high.

The wife however, performed almost all the household chores – cooking, keeping house, fetching water from the stream (along with children), carrying farm products from the farm and firewood which remains the main source of cooking fuel. In fact, it is not uncommon for a pregnant woman, with a one year old baby at the back to be carrying a heavy load from the farm while her husband follows her holding only his machete. On arrival at home she warms water for the husband to have his bath while cooking the family dinner. If she is lucky to have ‘grown up’ children they will pound the fufu (pounded plantain, yam or cocoyam mixed with cassava – an unusually physically demanding work). Others she does it herself. The man is served before eating herself; and of course prepare for sex on demand. Thus while the status of the Ashanti woman was much superior to that of modern day women in many African societies with full legal persona, when it came to domestic work she shared the inferior status of most traditional women.

The only big difference is that she was no property of the husband and could demand divorce at will and if she does, she would cleave with everything she has acquired including her children. She, however, suffers from another disadvantage in that property she has helped the husband acquire such as working on the land and even building a house is
presumed to be his unless she explicitly made a cash contribution or an agreement of joint ownership was put in place. Recent legislation now makes it binding that the matrimonial home and a third of deceased spouse’s property goes to surviving spouse. But it was silent in the event of divorce. We had noted earlier also that while polygamy was allowed in Ashanti and in fact nearly a third of married women are in such relationship, polyandry is eschewed which reflects the lower status of women.

Normally Ashanti men and women keep to their sexes in the social life. Coupled with recognized belongingness to the matrilineage with which either share a lot of social activities from funerals to festivities, one can say the status a woman in traditional Ashanti society was much better than in other places but that was a matter of relativity rather than equality between the sexes.

6.14 INHERITANCE AND FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Even though having children is central to marriage in Ashanti, father-child relationship has always been weak. This is most evident when it comes to inheritance. ‘A son can never ever succeed to his father’s priorities’ (Rattray 1929:39). The rules of inheritance are clear. Women inherit women and men inherit men but within the matrilineage they must be of the same blood (family). Even in death children are not buried at the same place as their fathers ordinarily but rather in their clan’s burial grounds. So the Ashanti male will say ‘yen wo nni’ (We don’t have children to eat).

That does not mean the father is not a mere figure head. He is responsible ordinarily for training and upkeep of his children though as many as half of them are brought up in the matrilineage under mother’s
brother in most cases. The nton (spirit) of the father, supposed to have transmitted life to the child also requires respect and honour of the father’s tradition. It is the father who finds a wife for his son and pays the ‘head money’. And even after divorce children are expected to come to their father if older as typified by the saying Oyere nko na mma mra (Let wife go and children come). Nevertheless Rattray (1929:16) is right in writing that ‘An Ashanti father’s rights seem few, but on the other hand so are his obligations and legal responsibilities’. In that context it is important to note that ‘parents (including the mother) had no rights to kill or to mutilate their children. Only the king of Ashanti could do so. A father could of course chastise his children, and even sell them if in debt, but this last only with the full consent of the mother and her clan’ (Rattray 1927:101).

6.15 DIVORCE

Divorce was quite common among traditional Ashantis. It carries no social stigma. As would be expected from the weak intimacy between the spouses; the smallness of the tiri nsa (the equivalent of bride price in other traditions) easily returned on divorce; lack of joint ownership of estate; the fact that husband and wife continue to belong to their different abusua (family and clan) translate into divorce process which is even simpler than the marriage ceremony. The involvement of the extended families is required and serious efforts are made to reconcile the couple. Nevertheless, a traditional society where divorce is estimated at up to 40%, that is a high percentage. To some extent what Caldwell (1968:70) said of Ghana in general is true of Ashanti: ‘The most distinctive features of Ghanaian marriage are unstable marriage and polygamy’.

Equally significant is that the woman had the same right of divorce as the man.
Every Ashanti woman can, under certain circumstances, demand the cancellation of the marriage. The wife obtains this end, not by divorcing her husband, but by compelling him to divorce her. Should he refuse, her redress does not lie in any single legal remedy but in hundred ways and wiles common to her sex all the world over. She will make the man’s life impossible; she will refuse him marital rights; she will not cook for him; she will follow him with abuse wherever he goes, even to the latrine; she will openly and brazenly flirt with other men, taking care never to go so far that her husband could prove her guilty of misconduct and so claim from her parents a return of all his expenses. Sooner or later, therefore, the man will be glad to give her the freedom she demands’ (Rattray 1927:97).

Usually divorce will be granted without driving her to such excesses.

The grounds for divorce are well defined as follows Rattray 1929:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grounds for men</th>
<th>Grounds for women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Barrenness</td>
<td>1. Impotence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Adultery</td>
<td>2. Her own sterility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Habitual drunkenness</td>
<td>3. Adultery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ‘Under certain and peculiar circumstances, without publicly assigning any cause’</td>
<td>4. Refusal to house, clothe or feed her properly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The quarrelsome nature of a woman</td>
<td>5. Assaulting her in a lonely place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The impossibility of maintaining ordinary relations with his mother-in-law especially should she always be abusing the son-in-law.</td>
<td>Taking another wife without asking her permission provided she is the senior wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Should he discover after marriage that he has married her own ‘ntɔn’ or ‘abusua’.</td>
<td>Absence for three years without provision for her maintenance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Witchcraft</td>
<td>8. If her husband is a wizard (bonsam) confessed or found to be so by a god (bobosom).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

125
In the case of the peculiar provision for a man divorcing his wife without publicly assigning any cause ‘what really has happened in such a case is that the husband’s dearest friend has seduced his wife’ (Rattray 1992:98).

The process of divorce is as simple as it is dramatic. The man sprinkles white clay on the shoulders of the woman (gu no hyire) meaning literally to ‘throw powder on her’. In fact, that could be done on his behalf especially by a sister of his. A woman demanding divorce could go to her husband with the white clay and ask for the ritual. The only complication is when the divorce is based on suspected and unconfessed adultery in which case the woman is made to swear an oath that if she had indeed committed adultery with such and such a god should kill her.

The transactional nature of Ashanti marriage is even more evident at divorce. Accounts are settled. If he paid a debt of the family or the women herself (pawn marriage), the money is refunded but without interest. Maintenance expenses are not refundable but any other monies owed to each other are settled, and where they had joint property it is shared. Tiri nsa and marriage expense (not ex gratia gifts and part of the money used to purchase wine for ancestral spirits) are also returned. The children belong to the woman but often the older boys stay with the father. (For further details see Rattray, 1927 and 1929).

6.16 REMARRIAGE
In a society where divorce is not a stigma, neither is remarriage. Remarriage often goes with even lesser fanfare. It is not uncommon for both men and women to divorce and remarry several times in traditional
Ashanti. Thus while at anytime almost all marriageable adults would be married, many are remarriages including remarrying the old spouse even after other intervening marriage(s). The Ashantis have a saying for that: *gyentia dada ano so nye so na* (Old wood from the fire place is easily reignited).

### 6.17 WIDOWHOOD AND LEVIRATE MARRIAGE

We conclude this review of marriage in Ashanti with widowhood and levirate marriage. The Ashantis seek explanation of almost every death – other than death of the very aged – and the wife of a deceased is sometimes seen as being responsible for his ‘premature’ death due to ‘bad luck’ or something more clandestine. This is strange in that neither a wife nor her children would ever inherit from their father. This belief results in uncharitable widowhood rites. Much trouble is caused by the sisters-in-law in particular. Yet Ashanti fathers themselves are more likely to suspect their nephews rather than their wives or children of being interested in their death.

The stern widowhood rites may include forcing the widow to sleep with the corpse in the same room; having to sit on the ground when it is laid in state with her feet spread; and being expected to fast throughout the funeral which could last for up to 9 days. In the extreme, the widow could be even manhandled by the in-laws, especially by proverbial sister-in-laws who can even spray pepper into the widow’s eyes (Nkansa Kyeremateng 1966).
Yet widows often endure suffering with fortitude as it is believed that the *sasa* (spirit) of the husband is driven away from her thereby. The case of a husband who loses his wife is paltry compared with widowhood rites.
It is, therefore, ironic that traditionally the Ashantis practiced levirate marriage with the successor, usually the dead person’s brother or nephew, marrying the widow. In the past that was the norm though less so today. Children resulting from such marriage do not belong to the dead person’s brother however, as it was in Ancient Israel. In fact, on the contrary, he inherits both widow and surviving children all of whom from that day become his wife and children respectively. He is expected to treat them as such. In that regard, even when an old man dies and he is succeeded by a much younger niece, it is customary for his wife (wives) to call him husband even though the successor does not marry them. Equally the children call him father. Thus a 60 year old widow would call a 20 year old my ‘father’.

The widow, however, is not obliged to marry the successor. Once again the relative freedom and status of the Ashanti woman is recognized.

6.18 SUMMARY
Among traditional Ashantis marriage is a normal progression from childhood. Girls are expected to marry almost immediately after puberty. The whole process of marriage is largely private to the two families and simple with the equivalent of bride price in other traditional societies only a token in nature.

Endogamy rules forbid marrying a clansman as someone of the same blood. Who is a member of a clan or family is strictly defined though the mother as the Ashanti have a matrilineal descent and kinship system. Other prohibited marriages are those between those who share the same nton (spirit) through the father and male members of father’s family. Apart from these only marriage with a grandparent is against Ashanti customary
Few other sexual rules apply notable the taboo of having sex with a woman in her period and during forty days after childbirth. However, pre-puberty sexual intercourse and pregnancy before puberty rights were viewed with such disdain as to attract death sentence or banishment.

The family interest supercedes that of lovers in marriage but there is room for the young people to initiate a relationship. However, parents approval is virtually mandatory especially that of the mother and her matrilineage. It is however, the father that pay the bride price and had the traditional responsibility to find a wife for his son despite the limited role of the Ashanti father vis-a-vis the maternal uncle.

In looking for a spouse both the father and mother’s brother (uncle) prefer cross-cousin marriages.

The Ashantis share in common with other traditional societies the fact that children are the main purpose of first marriages. Sex and intimacy play a significant role only in marriage among grown ups, usually in later life and after divorce.

A most significant part of marriage is the much elevated status of the woman. She is her own persona, does not become part of the husband’s family and she does not inherit from the husband nor does her children. She can own her own estate, can initiate divorce and levirate marriage is by choice. But for the unequal burden in bearing most of domestic chores one would say she enjoyed a status unknown to many modern day wives. That is why it is ironic that they were subjected to harsh widowhood rites which they would endure as a means of getting rid of the husband’s sasa
(ghost). She was also never guaranteed an exclusive relationship with her husband as polygamy is permitted.
CHAPTER 7
ASHANTI TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE
AND BIBLICAL PATTERNS

7.1 INTRODUCTION
In this concluding chapter a comparison is made between marriage among the Ashantis and the Biblical patterns as found in the Pentateuch. We shall explain factors that account for the similarities and differences that are presented. The former is easier to do; the latter is more formidable in the sense that one can fall into the temptation of seeing patterns and similarities where none may exist. A case in point is that the name *Akan* which describes the majority of Ghanaians including the Ashantis is also the name of one of the descendant of Essau (Genesis 36:27). And yet any linkage between the two *Akans* could be as dangerous and speculative as choosing one’s destiny by tossing a coin which is pre-determined to be head or tail.

We are of the view that much of the so called findings of Joseph J. Williams (1930) in his book *Hebrewisms of West Africa* makes the same error in drawing many parallels between Ashantis and West Africans in general on the one hand and the Hebrew people on the other hand such as equating *abusua panyin* (head of family) with the tribal priesthood of the Jews; inferring from the ‘ti’ ending of Ashanti as equivalent in meaning to race in Hebrew and that Ashanti has something to do with a city located in southern Judah by name ‘Ashan’ (Joshua 15:42); equating the supreme being of polytheistic Ashantis to the monotheistic Yahweh of the Hebrew people.

However, it emerges from the analysis of the preceding chapters that both traditional societies of the Ashantis and Jews share some common family
and marriage norms that characterize simple societies while they differ at many significant points because of their kinship structure and belief systems.

7.2 A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MARRIAGE AMONG THE ANCIENT HEBREWS AND TRADITIONAL ASHANTIS

i) Source documents
Our major sources of information have been the Pentateuch in the case of the Ancient Hebrews and Rattray (1923, 1927 and 1929) in the case of the Ashanti. In terms of quality, information on traditional Ashanti marriage is more recent, more detailed and relatively more scientific having been studied by a professional anthropologist. However, critical research studies of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), Ezra's reform and priestly redactors during the Exile period captured much of the practice of the Ancient Jews. As a result, a comparative study of the two societies is possible despite the historical distance between them. Moreover, today over 60% of Ashantis and Jews recognize the Hebrew Bible as Scripture and its teaching as norms to guide societal organization. That alone makes the study worthwhile. Table 7.1 summarizes the results of our investigation.

We have chosen a tabular form of presentation as better suited to highlight the salient features of the two traditions and to avoid the danger of losing the main points in prose form. In table 7.1, column one highlights the main issue which is the subject of the comparative analysis. Columns two and three give brief summaries of what we have deduced as the family and marriage tradition in Ashanti and the Ancient Hebrews respectively. The fourth column is used for comment.
Table 7.1
A comparative analysis of Marriage among the Ancient Hebrews and Traditional Ashantis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Traditional Ashanti</th>
<th>Ancient Hebrew</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Main source documents</td>
<td>Rattray (1923, 1927 and 1929)</td>
<td>Pentateuch (First five books of the Hebrew Bible).</td>
<td>Ashanti tradition is among the best researched of traditional African peoples thus allowing comparative study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rules of Endogamy</td>
<td>One cannot marry from one's clan (abusua) or anyone of the same ntan (father and</td>
<td>Forbidden to marry outsider or foreigner who has not accepted the God of the</td>
<td>Both practice endogamy but on different basis. Among the Ashantis it is blood relation that is most important while the Hebrews were more concerned about purity of faith and by inference race.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>paternal uncle's children).</td>
<td>Hebrews (Yahweh)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Preferred and</td>
<td>Cross-cousin marriages are preferred that is marrying MOBR or FASI children.</td>
<td>Within the commonwealth of Israel, marrying within the tribe for purposes of</td>
<td>Inheritance plays key role in both cases though in Ashanti keeping daughter of MOBR at home is another factor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prohibited marriages.</td>
<td>Marrying near home is desirable for practical reasons in the past. Incest was</td>
<td>retaining inheritance was stressed. In the earlier period there is evidence of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>punishable by death or banishment with consanguinity restricted to the matrilineal</td>
<td>marriage of half sister (Abraham and Sarah) and cousins (Isaac and Rebekah) but</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>descent and people of same tribe.</td>
<td>not in latter times when Deuteronomy was written. Incest based on both maternal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and paternal near kinsmen and women.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Religion and World</td>
<td>Believe in supreme being, gods, spirits and ancestors. Ancestral worship and</td>
<td>Traces of early polytheistic background in Mesopotamia soon gave way to strict</td>
<td>Lack of religious sanction in Ashanti marriage weakens the bond. Hebrew marriage was seen as a religious act and adultery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view.</td>
<td>veneration is a strong daily practice activity.</td>
<td>monotheism. Yahweh’s laws became the social.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Purpose of marriage and the role of children.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>violation of the 'Ten Commandments'.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children are the major purpose in first marriages with sex and intimacy being secondary. Overall intimacy is not important. Female child is priced because of matrilineal descend, and kinships. The extended family interest supercedes those of the couple.</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Common emphasis on having children but preference of sex of child differed being influenced by kinship system. In Ashanti the preference is for girls and for the Jews boys. Intimacy is more important in Jewish marriage and nowhere is childlessness a cause for divorce among Ancient Hebrews as among the Ashantis.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Kinship system.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Matrilineal descend, succession and inheritance with mother and mother's brother the most important figures. The Ashantis are not matriarchal however, in that even in the matrilineal extended family the male is the head.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Patriarchal at core with authority vested in the father over both wife and children.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sense of God as Father in Hebrew concepts may account for the difference. Ashantis have 'Mother earth' parallel to the Supreme God and also the belief that only the mother contributes 'blood' at conception. The father has a limited role and responsibility in Ashanti tradition.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Types of marriage.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The following forms of marriage are recognized (i) Between free people (asiwa), (ii) childhood marriage (mpena awadie) and (vi) Levirate marriage.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The main types are: Regular marriage, concubinage, taking on a maid to wife to produce children who are supposed to belong to the wife, and Levirate marriage.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Both societies seem to allow extra-marital relationship for men even in marriage. A Concubinage was of a lower status than a wife. Bride price is paid in both societies but in Ashanti it was a token.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Polygamy.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Polygamy was and is prevalent and sometimes even seen as status symbol.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Polygamy was allowed but not the ideal. No record exists of any commoner marrying more than one wife during the monarchy though evident among the Patriarchs.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Hebrew ideal was monogamy though polygamy was practiced. For Ashantis, polygamy was common and socially acceptable.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents and family (matrilineage) played significant roles but the couple were allowed to initiate it if parents had not betrothed them at infancy or have not decided on a suitor a priori. Extended family (MOBR) and father's consent was mandatory.

Father chose wife for son as a rule.

Kinship affects relative role of parents with mother's brother as influential in Ashanti as the father. Among the Ancient Hebrews the father's role was decisive.

10. Prohibited marriage

Consanguinity based on 'clan' and *nton* (spirit) which reduces to application of rules of endogamy. All marriages with clansmen were prohibited as well as those sharing same *nton* (that is father's children and male descendants of fathers male siblings - FABR). The only other marriage considered incestuous are those that involve grandparents. Incest was punishable by death.

Consanguinity of near relatives to the fourth generation on both father and mother's side. Incest is a crime.

Both have strict rules against incest but Ashanti's count only members of matrilineage as blood relations. Marriage with paternal cousins and relatives are allowed except those who share same *nton*.

11. General attitude to sexuality

Except for sex before puberty, during menstruation and incest, Ashantis have liberal attitude toward sex between consenting adults. Even rape which is a social anathema does not attract a penal sentence normally.

Sexual immorality is a sin against God and adultery is forbidden by one of the ten commandments. But concubinage in the Pentateuch is not eschewed.

Attitude to sexuality is more liberal among the Ashantis among whom sex has little religious connotation. However, women are to enter marriage as virgins with virginity test as the Ancient Jews. Among the Jews sexual immorality takes the form of sin against God.

12. Age of first marriage.

Soon after puberty for girls. No other initiation rites beyond puberty rites. Boys marry as they are judged mature from late teens with

Early especially for girls but no stipulated time. Boys are circumcised of 8 days after birth

In both traditional societies marriage is seen as a normal progression from childhood.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13. Betrothal</th>
<th>Betrothal is a stage that is practiced but not common. Normally, only short period between asking for hand after puberty and marriage. Betrothal was a pseudo marriage without permission for sexual relations and may be broken without formal divorce.</th>
<th>Both societies practice betrothal but at different levels of significance. The Ashantis say it as a prelude to marriage; to the Hebrews it was a legally binding marriage. Courtship is not all that important in both cases.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. The process of marriage</td>
<td>Marriage is seen largely as private, simple and inexpensive event between representatives of the two families. There is little ceremony in the majority of cases besides payment of head money and rum and few gifts. However, occasionally there is celebration on the day of consummation with bridal meals. The majority consummate the marriage after the customary rite.</td>
<td>Elaborate ceremony lasting for up to a week but it would seem the marriage is consummated on the first day of the marriage feast. To Ashantis marriage is a normal step after reaching adulthood with minimal fanfare. The Hebrew wife leaves home with great celebration usually never to return to parental home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Bride Price.</td>
<td>Minimal and token with no connotation of purchase whatsoever but rather a symbol of appreciation. It is returned in case of divorce in certain circumstances.</td>
<td>Significant exchange. The <em>mohar</em> or bride price has therefore been seen by some authorities as marriage by purchase. Token bride price in Ashanti but significant among the Hebrews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Ashanti wife maintains legal persona, owes property and does not become integral with the husband's family. She has right of divorce and may live on her own or in matrilineal home while married. Her blood determines kinship, descent and inheritance. However, she shares the burden of most traditional women in bearing the burden of domestic chores. While a man is allowed to marry more wives polyandry is forbidden to her.</td>
<td>The man remained 'king' at home. Ordinarily the sexes kept to themselves during the day and a woman is expected to serve the man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Hebrew woman is either under her father or husband; does not inherit or own property except in exceptional cases and is only one step above a slave. She can play a leadership role as in the case of Deborah and Esther but that is an exception. She bears all the burden of domestic work and like her Ashanti counterpart her husband may take on other wives and concubines.</td>
<td>Same as Ashanti women in most cases and worse otherwise as marriage gave the man total authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Even by modern standards the Ashanti woman was at much superior level and in fact a daughter was preferred in most cases above a boy! The Hebrew wife had relatively lower status.</td>
<td>Being a wife in terms of domestic life, was to be second class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Remarriage.</td>
<td>Common, unregulated and without sanction. A couple could remarry after intervening marriages.</td>
<td>Allowed and regulated but not common as it is linked to divorce. Once the woman remarries even if she is divorced the old husband is forbidden to remarry her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Levirate marriage.</td>
<td>Practices but no legal or religious obligation but only a social norm. Either party may refuse it without sanction. The wife and children born are those of the living husband.</td>
<td>A social and religious duty to keep the name of a deceased brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Widowhood rites.</td>
<td>Bitter rights with husband’s family invariably mistreating the woman as cause of death or having bad luck.</td>
<td>Not much evidence found except that women might wear special apparel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7.3 ASHANTI TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE AND BIBLICAL PATTERN

The above study shows some significant commonalities between the marriage customs of the Akans and Ancient Hebrews. Both societies were child centred, practised endogamy and prohibited marriages based on consanguinity. There were customary rites to mark significant stages in the marriage process especially betrothal and marriage rites. Gifts were exchanged and the groom and/or his family paid a sum of money plus drink in the case of the Ashantis. Most people, especially girls, were married early. Both societies practiced levirate marriage and polygamy was allowed. Either the extended family or parents played decisive role in spouse selection. In both societies when it came to the nuclear family and
especially with regard to domestic work, the wife bore undue burden vis-à-vis the man. Divorce was permitted.

The foregoing would indicate that traditional Ashantis share a lot in common with the Ancient Israelites. It would seem that three factors account for that. In the first place, both societies put premium on children. In the case of the Ancient Hebrews keeping the name of the husband was paramount that is having a male heir was an overriding factor in marriage. Misery attended barren woman and levirate marriages had a purpose to produce children. On the other hand the Ashantis desire children to keep the matrilineal system going. While the male child is needed for protection and as head of family, it was the girl who mattered most as her blood defined one’s family, descent and inheritance.

The second is that it would seem that traditional societies expected every one to marry. It marked a significant turning point in the life of the people.

The third common factor which seems to explain the above similarities is that the two traditions practice strict prohibition of incest based on consanguinity.

However, the similarities soon end and as we have pointed out even where there appears to be similarity in tradition such as having children as the main purpose of marriage, the reasons differ. In other areas there are significant differences in practice. For example, the status of women is more favourable in Ashanti compared with the Ancient Hebrew. The bride price was of significant value in Ancient Israel but only a token in Ashanti. Marriage ceremony among the Jews remain a major celebration but is very simple in Ashanti. Divorce, which was permitted in Ancient Israel was a
serious religious aberration – something God hated; the Ashantis have a more liberal view of divorce, and both the woman and the man could demand it. Table 7.1 has outlined in more detail the differences between the two traditions.

The analysis shows that besides common characteristics of simple and traditional societies, the major factors that account for the differences in traditional Ashanti marriage and that of the Ancient Hebrews with particular reference to Pentateuchal times are two namely the kingship system and belief.

In the first place, the major determining factor is the matrilineal kinship and descent system of the Ashanti vis-à-vis patriarchal system of the Jews. In the case of the latter the father was priest and king and wielded authority over wife and children. In the matrilineal system not only does the woman maintain her independent persona in marriage, she belongs always to her matrilineal system. Moreover, it is her blood that determines descent, succession and inheritance with the father delegated to the marginal role of bringing up his children who may not live with him, and finding a wife for his sons but not without the consent of the mother and her brothers.

The second decisive factor accounting for the difference between the two traditions is religion and belief system. The Ashantis had few sexual and marital taboos and sex – matrimonial or extra-marital was not seen as a religious affair. They have no equivalent of the seventh commandment – ‘Thou shall not commit adultery’. Illegitimacy has little meaning as the matrilineal system took care of the child and only the mother’s blood was considered to be of importance in determining descent.
It is not so with the Ancient Hebrews. The guiding principle is the Law of Yahweh. Marriage, divorce, remarriage, inheritance were legislated in the context of Yahweh worship. Thus while sexuality was socially defined among the Ashantis it was a religious practice among the Ancient Hebrews.

It is clear from the analysis in the study that the view of marriage, women and marriage customs are closely linked to social system of the time. For one the emphasis on children in marriage is common to both traditional societies. Today, couples prefer smaller number of children. Again the relative religious belief of the Ashantis and the Ancient Israelites greatly influenced their family and marriage life. The low status of women may be another cultural phenomenon.

For Christians the above raise the question as to what extent are Biblical patterns of marriage and family life cultural preferences – which may be dated – or religious imperatives. While a dissertation of limited scope cannot answer adequately this fundamental question, our comparison suggests that many practices are culturally depended and not necessarily normative for modern Christians. These would include mate selection, the role of parents in marriage; the form of bride price and marriage ceremony. On the other hand adultery seems to have the force of a religious imperative in the Pentateuch but not so among the Ashantis. The challenge of the modern Christian with regard to marriage, as indeed in other areas of Christian living, is to read the Hebrew Bible prayerfully and with wisdom to distinguish between cultural preferences and religious imperatives. The lower position of women in both Ancient Israel and Ashanti would seem to fall under the category of cultural preferences.
Thus even in the first century of the Church Paul could write that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Galations 3:28).

7.4 CONCLUSION
Our survey of Ashanti traditional marriage and Biblical patterns indicates that they share some basic characteristics of traditional societies -- love for children in marriage, practice of rules of endogamy, early and levirate marriages and low status of women vis-à-vis men in domestic life.

However, in many ways the marriage traditions and customs differed in the two societies. The practice of matrilineal descent and kinship system among the Ashantis and the patriarchal system of the Ancient Hebrews largely explain the many of differences in marital practices. However, religion especially Yahweh worship of the Jews and ancestral veneration of the Ashantis also impacted marriage tradition. Much of the marriage traditions in the two societies however, seems to be cultural preferences rather than religious imperatives.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Male, D.W. A Brief History of Levirate Marriage as it relates to the Bible (Genesis 38: 4-11; Deut. 25: 5-10; Ruth). *Restoration Quarterly*. (27)3:129-142.


