

Q. Is interracial marriage right or wrong?

A. Christians often have very different opinions about the answer to this question. But if we approach the question with an open mind as we search the Scriptures, the answer becomes clear.

Genesis 3:20 states that Eve "was the mother of all living." In other words, all humans of all races descend from Adam and Eve. When God sent the Flood, he killed everyone on the earth but Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives; eight persons in all (Genesis 6:17–18; 1 Peter 3:20). The genes for the races on the earth today passed through the Flood in these people. After the Flood, in Genesis 11, we read how people had one language but, because they tried to build the Tower of Babel, God confounded their language and "scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth" (verses 7–8). Possibly, now isolated in smaller groups, certain genes began to dominate in each of the groups, leading to racial distinctions. Nevertheless, how the races developed is not as important to this question as how they were viewed as far as marriage.

Genesis 24 contains the account of how Abraham sent his servant to get Abraham's son Isaac a wife, Rebekah, from among Abraham's relatives back in Mesopotamia. The servant had to swear that he would not take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites among whom Abraham lived (verse 3). This has been seen by some as Abraham being against racial intermarriage as such. But understanding what God was doing in Abraham's life and family reveals Abraham's real motive.

God had promised Abraham that He would give the land of Canaan to his descendants (Genesis 15:18–21; 17:8). These descendants were the Israelites. Obviously, to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites, also meant God would take it away from the Canaanites. Before Abraham fully understood what God was doing, he and his wife Sarah agreed—because they were at that time childless—to have a child (Ishmael) with Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar (Genesis 16). Hagar was an Egyptian (verse 1), of a different race than Abraham; yet Abraham apparently had no personal qualms about this. But after the birth of Isaac to Sarah and Abraham, and after Abraham better understood what God was doing, he was careful not to allow Isaac to marry a

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woman from among the peoples whom God would cast out of the land when He brought the Israelites into their inheritance.

The reason for this is quite simple. If the difference between Abraham's family and the people of the land of Canaan became indistinct through intermarriage, God could not kick the Canaanites out and give the land to the Israelites; they would be one, indistinct people. If intermarriage began as far back in the lineage as Abraham, God would be giving the land as much to people of Canaanite blood as to Abraham's blood. That would not serve God's purpose of making Israel a type of the Christian church. Israel's physical purity or distinction from the people around them was a type of our spiritual purity (more about this later).

This explains why Isaac and Rebekah were grieved by Esau's marrying women from Canaan (Genesis 26:34–35; 28:8). But, even though he was the elder, Esau did not inherit. The Promised Land was not to be his inheritance; it was to go to the descendants of his younger brother, Jacob. And Jacob took wives, Rachel and Leah, from Abraham's family, again keeping the line pure for the sake of the inheritance.

A generation later, however, we see Judah take a Canaanite wife (Genesis 38:2). She bears him three sons. Two of them die as described in Genesis 38. The third son, Shelah lives. We don't know who he married, but he did have children (1 Chronicles 4:21–23). Joseph married an Egyptian (Genesis 41:45, 50). Even Moses married an Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12:1). Significantly, God did not consider this interracial marriage justification for Moses' brother and sister (Aaron and Miriam) to speak against him (see Numbers 12). And Salmon married Rahab of Jericho (Joshua 2), a mixed marriage that we find in the ancestry of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). But why were these later interracial marriages acceptable?

The answer is that they were so far down the line of descent that they did not threaten the inheritance. The amount of mixed blood compared to the general population of Israel was small, whereas if mixed marriages had been allowed beginning with Abraham's, or Isaac's, or Jacob's generation, by the time the Israelites entered Canaan, the amount of non-Israelite blood would have confused the promised inheritance, let alone made the Israelites hesitate about slaying people who would have been their brethren.

Later, marriages between the Israelites and Canaanites became common, but with bad results that had nothing to do with race and everything to do with religion (Judges 3:6). The mixed marriages caused the Israelites to serve the Canaanites' gods. When the faithful Israelites returned to their land after the captivity, marriage with the Canaanites was again forbidden (Ezra 9–10). The reason is clearly stated as being because the marriages had caused the Israelites to do "according to their abominations.... For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands" (Ezra 9:1–2). It was not because of racial concerns, but because of religion that the marriages were forbidden; the non-Israelite spouses were causing the Israelites to turn away from God.

So we see that in the Old Testament, God saw to it that interracial marriages did not take place when they threatened the purity of the Abrahamic line that was to inherit the Promised Land. He also had mixed marriages forbidden when they threatened to turn Israel to other gods. In this case, the mixture was a mixture of religion. Race was not the important factor.

Much of the Old Testament is a physical type of the spiritual reality revealed in the New Testament, and once the spiritual reality has come, the physical type passes away. Nowhere in the New Testament is racial intermarriage ever forbidden. A reading of the New Testament will reveal that many sins are listed for Christians to avoid, but marriages between the races is not one of them. Christian singles are not to marry outside the faith (1 Corinthians 7); doing so would make them "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Christians who married before their conversion and now find themselves married to unbelievers must stay with their spouse unless he or she is not "pleased to dwell" with them (1 Corinthians 7:12–16). But race is never mentioned. Instead of the marriage restrictions placed upon the Israelites to maintain a pure line of inheritance, we—the church—will inherit because we are a virgin bride (not defiled with false religion, pictured by sexual purity in Revelation 14:4) espoused to Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25–27). In the church, national and racial distinctions are removed (Ephesians 2:14; Romans 10:12; Colossians 3:11); all of the many peoples that make up the church become a new, "holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9–10).

In conclusion then, there is nothing in the Bible that today prevents racial intermarriage. As with any prospective marriage, however, compatibility, interests, family feelings, and societal taboos should be taken into consideration. Causing a rift between the two families involved or raising children who might become the target of ridicule in an intolerant society can create a painful strain in a marriage. On the other hand, there are many happy, Godly, and blessed interracial marriages.

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