


'āzab' 'Leave' and dābaq 'Cleave' in Genesis 2:24 and Marital Stability

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Abstract

The concluding section of the second creation account in Genesis 2 records the creation of man and the institution of marriage. After God created man, he observed the need for man to have a companion. Then, God made woman out of a rib from man. Genesis 2:24 lays bare the prerequisites for a stable marital relationship. It establishes God's perfect design for marriage. The injunctions expressed in the text are fundamental for a functional husband-wife relationship. The text submits that marriage requires a man's leaving of his parents in order to create a new family. It teaches that marriage is an inseparable union. This paper employs literary exegetical method to interpret the concepts 'leave' and 'cleave' and their socio-theological significance in achieving marital stability. In this paper, the terms 'leave' and 'cleave' are interpreted 'detachment' and 'attachment' respectively. Although the instruction to 'leave' and 'cleave' was given to the man, this article submits that both a man and woman should 'leave' and 'cleave' for a peaceful marital relationship. The act of leaving one's parents prepares a husband and wife for an independent family union. Husbands and wives are to detach themselves from people and influences which challenge peace in the family. They are to demonstrate oneness in all their affairs as this helps to strengthen the bond between them. This article unequivocally submits that marital bliss is attainable when both parties are committed to observing these basic principles.

Keywords: Genesis 2:24, leave, cleave, stability, marriage.

Introduction

In the first creation account, the expression *wayar' 'ēlōhīm kī ṭōḇ* (and God saw that it was good) and other similar expressions were recurrent. It appears in seven (7) verses of Genesis 1 (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25 and 31). The expression establishes the beauty of God's creation. Clarke (1996) explains that the expression is the judgment which God pronounced on his own works. They were beautiful and perfect in their kind. They were in weight and measure perfect and lacking nothing.

However, the second creation account records that God observed a problem with one of his creatures. He expressed his concern for man's loneliness. Among all the creatures, man was incomplete; he needed a suitable helper, a wife, to become that which God intended him to be. Kelly and Clendenen (2003:1084) aver that;

The creation of the male alone had not yet fulfilled God's purpose for man as the image of God. This expresses no failure on God's part; instead, it instructs us that a male creature alone is not the perfect creation that God had in mind.

In Gen. 2:18, the expression *lō' ṭōḇ ḥēyōt̄ hā'ādām l'badō* (it is not good that the man should be alone) showcases that loneliness does not have any desirable quality. By nature, man is a social being; so, he needed a companion with whom to express his true nature. Man's original nature is rarely expressed in consistent solitude. Clarke (1996) notes that as man was made a social creature, it was not proper that he should be alone; for to be alone, i.e., without a matrimonial companion, was not good. to them.

In the second part of Genesis 2:18, God proposed to make a befitting companion for man; someone to

complement or complete him, a being created out of something taken from man and is dependent on him (Martin, 2017). The words *'ezer k'negdô* (a suitable helper) signifies 'a counterpart of himself', 'one formed from him' and 'a perfect resemblance of his person'. God proposed that the woman should be a perfect resemblance of the man, being in all things like and equal to himself (Clarke, 1996). Thus, a special act of creation was necessary; so, God created woman.

In the second creation account, the creation of the first woman is described in details, whereas, the first creation account (Genesis 1:27) simply records that God created both male and female. Genesis 2:21-22 records that God caused the man to fall asleep, then he took one of his ribs and made woman out of the one rib. Hence, at the beginning of their existence, they were one. The narrative about the creation of woman and the pronouncements made by the man in v. 23 (This, at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken) constitute the origin of marriage. Hence, the institution of marriage is an aftermath of God's concern for the loneliness of man. Thomas and McCresh (2003:12) aver that "God's observation that it is not good for the earth creature to be alone leads to the creating of a helper corresponding to him".

A careful reader of the Bible may observe the change in literary style in Genesis 2:24, the conclusion of the story which started from Gen 2:18. Similarly, Obiorah (2016:527) submits that "Gen 2:24 concludes as well as explains the divine action narrated in verses 18-24. The passage has been recognized as a narrative on the divine institution of marriage and the beginning of human family". While v. 24 gives basic guidelines on marriage, v. 25 points to the original state of the man and the woman whom God created as an introduction to the narrative in Genesis 3, about the fall of man.

Genesis 2:24 explicitly expresses the core demands of a stable marital relationship. It brings to light the divine injunctions for husbands and wives who desire marital bliss. In the study, the concepts 'leave' and 'cleave' are literarily and socio-theologically examined in the context of stable marital unions. The researcher upholds that for a marriage to be blissful, both partners should be committed to these basic guidelines. Marital harmony is not a one-man affair; it takes the dedication of two responsible humans. God desires that the marriage that he instituted between the first man and woman should be peaceful and satisfying. Therefore,

the injunctions in Gen 2:24 are paramount for achieving utmost satisfaction in a marriage.

Context of Genesis 2:24

The book of Genesis contains interesting accounts about the creation of the world. The creation narratives display the greatness of God and the beauty of his creation. The declaration *wayar' 'elôhîm kî tôb* (and God saw that it was good) was God's judgment at the conclusion of any of his creative works. In the first creation account recorded in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, the expression 'and God saw that it was good' was recurrent. In Genesis 2, which records the second account of creation, the expression 'and God saw that it was good' was completely missing. However, in Gen 2:18, the word *tôb* (good) was used with a negative particle *lô'* (not). God expressed his concern for the loneliness of man and thereafter, made a woman to be the man's helper. The expression *'ezer k'negdô* (a suitable helper) does not mean that the woman was to be the man's servant, parent or keeper. Rather, she was to complement him, working alongside him.

Genesis 2:24 substantiates and concludes the narrative on the institution of marriage and origin of family life. The change in literary style observable in Genesis 2:24 is also a delimiting factor. Narration techniques are completely missing in v. 24; such that, it is important to ascertain whether the pronouncement was made by God or man or an editorial addition to Genesis 2. Obiorah (2016) writes that the layout of v.24 shows that even if it were uttered by the man, there is a significant shift in the mood of the two adjacent verses; that is, verses 23 and 24. The adverb *'al-kên* (therefore) in v.24, signals an explanatory and conclusive assertion that is a consequence of the previous statement. Similarly, Von Rad (1996) notes that v. 24 is not a continuation of the first man's speech, but rather a concluding word of the narrator, a short epilogue. The statement *ya'ázāb- 'îš 'et- 'ābîw w'e'et- 'immô* (A man leaves his father and mother) establishes the primary purpose of the entire narrative. Genesis 2:24 explicitly brings to light the import of the discussions in the preceding verses. The narrative in Gen 2:18-24 is an aetiology, i.e., it was told to answer a definite question. Hence, Gen 2:24 can be rightly termed to be a conclusion of an aetiology. One of the features of aetiological stories is that it usually ends with an explanatory addition which gives more insight into the narrative. This aetiological conclusion submits that marriage should be between one man /one woman and that marriage should be indissoluble.

Undoubtedly, Genesis 2:24 has a pride of place in most discourses which center on marriage; both scholarly and ecclesiastically. In the last verses of Genesis 2, one sees the

origin of many of the Bible's key teachings about marriage. Similarly, Soungalo (2006:12) avers that "The foundational text for the entire Christian philosophy of marriage and the family is Genesis 2:24". The text is significant and emphatic in bringing to light the basic conditions for a stable marriage union. A distinguishing feature of this verse is that it shows the basic order in the formation of any marriage union. Against this backdrop, in Genesis 2, only v. 24 is suitable for a study on the fundamentals of a peaceful marriage relationship, because the text lays bare the basic principles which should be inculcated by any man or woman who desires a sustainable marital happiness.

Close reading of Genesis 2:24

The first part of Gen 2:24 raises some concerns to many curious readers of the Old Testament. The Old Testament culture upheld a patrilocal system of marriage, in which a wife goes to live with her husband's family or people after marriage; hence, it is strange that Gen. 2:24 records 'A man leaves his father and mother'; whereas, going by the cultural realities of the Old Testament times, it is the woman who should leave her father and mother. Von Rad (1996:85) supports that "the statement about forsaking father and mother does not quite correspond to the patriarchal family customs of ancient Israel, for after marriage, the wife breaks loose from her family much more than the man does from his". Since it is the wife who leaves home to join her husband, it is preferable to translate 'āzab as 'forsake' (Wenham, 1987). These concerns further suggest that the expression *ya 'āzāb- 'iš 'et- 'ābîw w'et- 'immô* (A man leaves his father and mother) is beyond literary interpretation. It should not only be understood as making a mere movement from one's parents' abode. Thus, Hughes (2005:105) states that "Leaving is not something merely geographical, moving away from the parental home, but something that is psychological- breaking away from the original parental ties".

The import of the expression is that marriage is meant to form a more intimate and stronger relationship between a man and woman, than that which exists between parents and their children. Assohoto and Ngewa (2006:14) explain that "the type of intimacy that God has set up here is so close that it cannot be in competition with the second closest human relationship, that between parent and child". Thus, a marriage involves forsaking one's parents to be attached to one's spouse. Forming a new family requires independence, responsibility and maturity. Furthermore, marriage relationship is meant to be more permanent than parents-children relationship. According to Barnes (1870), the

expression is designed to establish the inviolability and permanence of the conjugal relation.

A careful study of Genesis 2:24 reveals that the key action words are presented in a significant sequential order. The text creates a beautiful picture of the step-by-step approach to a happy marital union. The first action word 'āzab (leave) is better understood in the light of the succeeding action words. 'āzab is followed by other verbs which explain its purpose in the context of the text. Genesis 2: 24 records that a man leaves his parents in order to cling to his wife, and then, become one flesh with her. When a man becomes one flesh with his wife, they attain a life of innocence and excellence.

From the beginning, God's plan is that marriage relationships should be a life-time affair. In Matthew 19:1-12 and Mark 10:1-12, Jesus refers to Gen 2 in his teaching on divorce. These two New Testament texts strengthen the indissolubility of marriage. More so, God's design for a marriage union is that one man is joined to one woman. The creation narratives report that God removed one rib from the man and made one woman. Assohoto and Ngewa (2006) note that;

God formed the woman from the man's rib, close to his heart, to establish the intimate link between them in their very creation. By this, the woman considers the man as part of her very being and the man sees the woman as the help he needs, without whom he is incomplete (p. 14).

Therefore, the marriage union ordained by God cannot exist in a polygamous or homosexual relationship. Any marriage union which involves anything other than 'one man and one woman' is outside God's original design and as such, condemned by God. This is captured by Kelly and Clendenen (2003:1082): "Marriage is a sacred, covenantal union of one man and one woman formed when the two swear before God an oath of lifelong loyalty and love to one another, the sign and seal of which is sexual intercourse".

The qal perfect action word 'āzab (leave) is literally synonymous with the terms separate, forsake, neglect, abandon and desert. It connotes a state of detaching oneself from someone whom you earlier owed allegiance to. It refers to the end of a relationship which existed between members of a group. The expression 'A man leaves his father and mother' literally means that the act of leaving should be done by the man alone. It is acceptable for a man to live with his parents as long as he is single. But when the time comes, he must separate from them and enter into a new relationship with his wife (Soungalo, 2006). Some of the questions which arise are: Why does the text emphasize so much on the male gender?

Does this suggest that a bride should not also leave her parents?

An explanation that could be given for the emphasis on the man's leaving of his parents is that being the head over the woman, the man has the authority to make decisions and influence his household. Thus, if he does not leave his parents, they will ultimately be the persons presiding over his home. According to Omah (2019), fathers are the authority figures of every home. They have the authority to take final decisions. Because a man is the head of his family, God holds him responsible for the activities of his family. Furthermore, Obiorah (2016:529) explains that

Man is the only active partner in the narrative. The woman remains passive throughout, even when the man exclaimed as if in ecstasy before her: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (v.23).

Therefore, the man's leaving of his parents to join his wife sustains and continues the tempo of the narrative. The emphasis is not on who leaves, male or female, but on the act of leaving. Obiorah's position is also understandable when one recalls that, being the first man created, Adam had no father and mother. This also justifies the scholarly claim which upholds that v. 24 is an editorial addition. Thus, both the man and woman should forsake their parents in order to properly form a new family. Hughes (2005:25) notes that "Even if only one partner obeys, there can be a tremendous improvement, but if both partners respond, then marriage can become the nearest thing to heaven on earth".

A new family cannot be well formed in one's parent's house. The influences of one's parents could tamper with the formation of the new home. However, does the act of leaving imply that the two partners should abandon their parents and show no more concern for them? Does the command to leave one's parents contradict Exodus 20:12 which admonishes that one should honour one's parents? Moreover, in traditional societies such as Israel, where honouring one's parents is the highest human obligation next to honouring God, this remark about forsaking them is very striking (Wenham, 1987). The significance of 'leaving' in Gen 2:24 is that the two partners cease to be under the authority of their parents to establish for themselves a new authority structure. Hale and Thorson (2007:134) assert that "the man and his wife are to put each other's welfare ahead of anyone else's. One's relationship to one's spouse takes precedence over all other human relationships". In forming their new household, a man and his wife do not withdraw their allegiance and responsibilities towards their parents but preference should be given to the

demands of the new relationship than the earlier one. Marriage is meant to bring about a break with the former parental interference and control. The highest loyalty and commitment of the two partners should be to each other.

The verb *dābaq* (cleave) expresses the necessity for a man to 'āzab (leave) his father and mother. Till a man separates from his father and mother and of course, some other relationships, he does not fully possess the potentials needed to (*dābaq*) 'cleave' unto his wife and then, start his household. Hale and Thorson (2007:134) assert that in Gen 2:24, "the verb *dābaq* establishes the permanence of marriage. Husband and wife are to be united – literally 'stuck' to each other". It suggests that strong passion should characterise marriage. When a man cleaves to his wife, he establishes that he is incomplete without her and that he desires an intimate and permanent relationship with her. Other meanings of *dābaq* are to 'cling', 'follow', 'join', 'hold unto', 'fasten oneself to' and 'stick'. The act of cleaving strengthens one's commitment in sustaining a new relationship. It portrays an intentional and conscientious effort to succeed in a new relationship. Luck (2009) opines that the idea of cleaving is a whole-hearted commitment to another in an inseparable union. Parents-children relationship is affected by marriage whereas husband-wife relationship is inseparable; only death detaches a husband and wife from each other.

The concluding part of Genesis 2:24 substantiates the message in the earlier part of the verse. It gives the core reason behind the message in the preceding parts. A man and woman cannot become one flesh if they have not left their parents and stuck unto each other. The expression *w^ehāyû l^ebāsār 'eḥād* (and become one flesh) does not only denote the sexual union that follows marriage, or the children conceived in marriage, or even the spiritual and emotional relationship but also affirms that just as blood relations are one's flesh and blood, so marriage creates a similar kinship relation between a man and his wife. They become related to each other as a brother and sister are (Wenham, 1987). A marriage relationship is beyond a mere recognition that one's partner is a human being as oneself. 'To become one flesh', according to Madugba (2010:4) means that "Two people, share everything they have, not only their bodies and material possessions, but also their thoughts, feelings, joys, sufferings, hopes, fears, successes and failures". It emphasizes the importance of continuing the original oneness between the man and woman. It further expresses the equality of the man and woman before God. Swaggart (2013:5) opines that "God did not take the woman out of man's feet to be stepped on as an inferior; nor out of his

head to be put on a pedestal as a superior; but from his side, close to his heart as an equal”.

Unity is fundamental in the union between a man and woman; a state of sharing common faith, passion and value. It is a state of having no separate or independent rights, privileges, cares, concerns; each being equally interested in all things that concern the marriage. Soungalo (2006:12) notes that “the husband and wife are no longer two individuals, existing side by side, but must become one entity, sharing each other’s lives”. In marriage, oneness implies that the man and the woman recognize themselves as partners, not competitors.

Discourse on Genesis 2:24 and marital stability

Achieving a stable marital relationship is largely dependent on the extent to which the husband and wife are committed to the marriage. Marital stability is hardly attainable when only one partner keeps to the marriage guidelines. Once marriage is undertaken, both partners are expected to accept full responsibilities of the union. For a marriage to be stable, there are basic pre-requisites which must be followed. Even in a marriage relationship where the husband and wife are financially capable, these basic guidelines are still paramount for a healthy and sustainable relationship. These pre-requisites are explicitly expressed in Genesis 2:24. This section attempts to discuss the message of the pericope as fundamentals to marital happiness.

Although Genesis 2:24 is particularly directed to the husband, the researcher submits that both husband and wife should completely desist from being negatively influenced by their parents and unite with each other. Akanni (2015) opines that husbands and wives easily succumb to the pressure mounted up by in-laws, neighbours, and friends, if they were not fully united with each other. According to Wenham (1987:71), “In marriage, a man’s priorities change. Beforehand, his first obligations are to his parents: afterwards, they are to his wife”. A line must be drawn between the families from which both partners originated from and the new family which is being formed. ‘Leaving one’s parents’ does not connote that one should not hearken to pieces of advice from one’s parents. It does not also imply that marriage should make one to cease from assisting one’s parents. Detaching oneself from one’s parents is the ability to overcome undue interferences from them. It signifies the state of being able to take decisions without being influenced by one’s parents. Marriage is meant to free one from the control of one’s parents. It makes one assume a level of responsibility and independence from one’s parents. Leaving one’s parents makes it possible for a husband

and wife to transfer their loyalty from their parents to each other. Loving and caring for each other must take priority in their lives over doing the same for their parents. However, there are some situations which might necessitate that a partner pays more attention to one’s parents for a period of time, such as, ill health or old age. The emphasis is that husbands and wives should always be devoted to each other, unless there are genuine situations which demand a shift of attention to one’s parents.

There are husbands who, because of inability to find a residence of their own or for some other reasons, continue living with their parents, together with their wives. Such situations rarely allow a husband and wife to be fully in control of their relationship. According to Hughes (2005:110), “Living with in-laws or having them live with you can put undue strain on any family”. The two partners might find it difficult to fully express their affection for each other. It is not good for a husband and wife to live with either of their parents, most especially, in the formative years of the marriage. Undoubtedly, if a husband does not physically leave his parent’s house, it will be very difficult for him to subdue interferences from them. Extreme cases of interferences from one’s parents might lead to either separation or divorce. Similarly, Ezuma (2009:91) notes that “Undue interference by relations may cause harm to the marriage. Every relation, including the mother, father, brothers and sisters are secondary to the marriage”. Hence, the two partners should resist any interference from their parents, relatives and other persons. Living together is also very fundamental in the act of ‘cleaving’, most especially in the formative years of a marriage. It is usually difficult for a husband and wife to completely unite with each other if they reside in different locations. Ugwuoke (2018:13) maintains that “A husband and wife are meant to live together and do things in common. They should try as much as possible to live together because the eye cherishes that which it sees. Living some distance away from each other could create some vacuum in marital relationship”. It gives room for suspicion and lack of emotional support.

The terms ‘leaving’ and ‘cleaving’ are interwoven. If a husband and wife detach themselves from their parents, they will be able to fully unite with each other. According to Okoli (1998:21) “The ability to leave enhances the chances of cleaving. Moreover, leaving become useless, if cleaving does not follow”. ‘Cleaving’ is an act of giving oneself to a new relationship. It signifies a complete commitment to hold unto one’s spouse. Anyanwu (2012) notes that if a husband and wife cleaved unto each other, the result is that they live

intimately together as a unit, sharing life's anticipations, disappointments, struggles and joys. It brings about peace and companionship in a marriage union. Kelly and Clendenen (2003) opine that the companionship which is shared between a husband and wife strengthens physical, psychological, mental and emotional health. Oneness within marriage is expressed in genuine acts of love. In every instance of genuine love, there is an element of sacrifice; some extra conscientious efforts are made to please each other. When the two partners sacrifice themselves for each other, it breeds love, understanding, forgiveness, patience, humility, joy, truth, peace and hope.

If a husband and wife cleaved unto each other, it enhances communication and transparency. Bright and Mayor (2001) aver that communication breakdown leads to unstable marriage. Communication breakdown usually leads to separation /divorce and some other marital problems. Similarly, Diara (2019:54) notes that "Christian couples should not live in masks whereby they hide the truth about themselves from each other. Oneness cannot be achieved without effective communication". Talking with point and purpose is an essential ingredient of effective communication (Hughes, 2005). The message which is being communicated should be clear and direct; the tone should also be courteous. It is of utmost importance to ask for clarifications when the message is not clear or well understood by either the husband or wife.

Marital oneness enables the partners to know about each other's thoughts and plans. It makes it possible to reveal how each person feels about a given action or situation. It usually brings about trust and casts out resentment. A husband and wife should make frantic efforts to communicate because healthy communication is a sign of unity, happiness and love. Communication results in growth; it brings relief and healing. Whereas, inadequate and ineffective communication creates friction and anxiety in marriage (Heward-Mills, 2012). Therefore, husbands and wives should be willing to discuss issues which concern them, rather than withdrawing into silence. For a marriage to be stable, husbands and wives need to be honest in all things and at all times. They should know about each other's career, business, finance and sexual needs. They should help each other to engage in healthy communication by asking questions. Sometimes, a husband and wife are prevented from being honest with their partner for fear of hurting their partner's feelings. Communication should always be based on truth, without minding whether

someone is hurt or not. Moreover, husbands and wives should cultivate the habit of expressing the truth in love.

Conclusion

In contemporary times, many factors such as, in-laws' interference, character deficiencies and peer /media influence have been attributed to the increase in the rate of dysfunctional marriage relationships. Among other effects, the end results of an unstable marriage relationship are separation/divorce and improper upbringing of children. The effects go beyond the families, to the society at large. The creation account clearly indicates that the family is the central unit of the society and that its character and maintenance is largely determined by marriage. As a basic unit of the society, the family controls other units in the society. Every influence that weakens the family and makes it difficult for it to function effectively will ultimately weaken the society. Any effort to solve the problem facing any nation without dealing with their roots in the family is bound to fail. Healthy marriages give birth to healthy societies. A healthy society is a product of the painstaking commitment of husbands and wives to achieve genuine and sustainable marital bliss.

The basic guidelines towards achieving a stable marriage union are in Genesis 2:24. The text exemplifies and establishes God's perfect design for marriage. The pericope maintains that marriage should be between one man and one woman, marriage should be permanent, and that husbands and wives are to put each other's welfare ahead of anyone else's or anything. For a marriage to stand the test of time, both a husband and wife are expected to constantly detach themselves from the influences of other relationships and completely unite with each other. True and lasting marital harmony cannot be achieved, if the two partners fail to leave and cleave. If there is no oneness, the marriage is bound to suffer. Each of the partners has to be committed in order to have a sustainable marriage union.

Although some other factors contribute to crises in marriage, this article submits that there is no pleasurable union when these basic pre-requisites are not in place. This article is a clarion call for husbands and wives to retrace their steps to the dictates of God on marriage. Therefore, alongside the efforts of various non-governmental establishments to ensure peace between husbands and wives, academic contributions aimed at instructing husbands and wives to inculcate the basic guidelines which are recorded in Gen 2:24 are apt.

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