

**Concubine** (Heb. *pilegeh*, derivation uncertain), a secondary or inferior wife.

1. **Roman and Greek.** Among the Romans it was only at a comparatively late period that concubinage acquired any kind of legal sanction, and the *concubine* came to be substituted for the *mistress*. Among the Greeks, however, the distinction between wife and concubine was early established, the former being for the begetting of legitimate children and taking charge of the affairs of the house, the other for performing daily ministrations about the person.

2. **Hebrew.** Concubinage early came into general practice; for we read (Gen. 22:24) of Bethuel, the father of Rebekah, having not only his wife Milcah, but also a concubine, Reumah, who bore him four children. Indeed, concubinage substantially appeared when Abraham took Hagar as a sort of wife, by whom Sarah hoped he would have children—to be reckoned, in some sense, as her own, and to take rank as proper members of the family (Gen. 16:1, sq.). In the next generation of the chosen family we find no mention of a state of concubinage; Isaac seems to have had no partner to his bed but Rebekah, and no children but Esau and Jacob. But the evil reappears in the next generation in an aggravated form; Esau multiplying wives at pleasure, and Jacob taking first two wives and then two concubines.

Nor was the practice ever wholly discontinued among the Israelites, for we see that the following men had concubines, viz., Eliabaz (Gen. 36:12), Gideon (Judg. 8:31), Saul (II Sam. 3:7), David (II Sam. 5:13), Solomon (I Kings 11:3), Rehoboam (II Chron. 11:21), Abijah (II Chron. 13:21). Indeed, in process of time concubinage appears to have degenerated into a regular custom among the Jews, and the institutions of Moses were directed to prevent excess and abuse by wholesome laws and regulations (Exod. 21:7-9; Deut. 21:10-14). The unfaithfulness of a concubine was considered as criminal (II Sam. 3:7, 8), and was punished with scourging (Lev. 19:20). In Judg. 19 the possessor of a concubine was called her "husband," her father is called the "father-in-law," and he the "son-in-law," showing how nearly the concubine approached to the wife.

Sometimes, to avoid debauchery, a female slave would be given to the son, and was then considered as one of the children of the house, and retained her rights as concubine even after the marriage of the son (Exod. 21:9, 10).

Christianity restores the sacred institution of marriage to its original character, and concubinage is ranked with fornication and adultery (Matt. 19:5; I Cor. 7:2). Still the practice of concubinage yielded only in the slowest and most gradual manner even to our Lord's explicit teachings.

