



Taking the history of the Hebrews, Israelites, and Jews in its entirety, from biblical times until the present, there has been no single attitude or rule regarding intermarriage. In the Pentateuch (Torah), we find no prohibition against intermarriage, except for a special rule that only prohibits intermarriage with one particular group of non-Israelites, the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:3). Throughout the biblical period, intermarriages were considered valid marriages, and apparently occurred frequently. The Bible states: Joseph married the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Genesis 41:45); Moses married an Ethiopian (Numbers 12:1); David married Bathsheba, apparently a Hittite (II Samuel 11:27); and Solomon married many foreign wives, Egyptians Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, and so forth (I Kings 11:1-3).

Despite the absence in the Pentateuch of a general prohibition against intermarriage, there are a number of negative individual sentiments expressed there. Miriam and Aaron, for example, Moses' sister and brother, spoke against his marriage to the Ethiopian, but they are severely punished for questioning Moses' authority to do so (Numbers 12:1-10). Generally, the only basis for the opposition to intermarriage in the Bible appears to have been a fear that it would bring the Israelite partner to idolatry (Judges 3:5f). After a period of over a thousand years, the sentiments against intermarriage finally achieved widespread community support among the Jews under Ezra (320 B.C.E.), who prevailed upon the Jews to dissolve such unions (Ezra 9:1-10:44). Note, however, that intermarriages were not declared invalid marriages by Ezra; only that Jews should not enter into them, or that they should obtain a divorce if they had.

With the advent of rabbinic Judaism, (from about 100 C.E. through the Middle Ages,) precise laws were formulated concerning intermarriage. For the first time a Jew was formally defined as a person born of a Jewish mother, or a person who had converted according to rabbinic Jewish law. Intermarriage thus became "the marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew." Moreover, the biblical prohibition against marriage with the Canaanites was extended to include all gentiles. The rabbinic prohibition against intermarriage took the form of declaring all such marriages legally invalid. Accordingly, an intermarriage imposed no binding obligations, and such rights as obtain in a legal marriage regarding maintenance and inheritance did not hold. Orthodox Judaism, the modern ideological heir of rabbinic Judaism, observes the dictates of rabbinic Jewish law. In the State of Israel, where the Orthodox rabbinate and its courts control all matters of personal and domestic status, an intermarriage is legally impossible, for the only valid marriage of a Jew in Israel is one contracted in accordance with Orthodox Jewish law.

In Reform Judaism, intermarriages are recognized as valid, and no formal body of Reform Judaism has ever passed a resolution attempting to prohibit them, or to prohibit a rabbi

from officiating at them. There have been varying opinions in Reform, from its very beginnings in the 19th century, both for and against intermarriage. Of late, owing apparently to the influence of the Orthodox rabbinate in Israel, there has been increased feeling against intermarriages among Reform rabbis. This feeling is evidenced by the most recent resolution on intermarriage passed by the Reform rabbinical organization, the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The operative clause of this resolution reads:

The C.C.A.R. . . . now declares its opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage (i.e., intermarriage). **C.C.A.R. Yearbook, 1973, Vol. 83, p. 97.**

It is clear, however, that a significant number of Reform rabbis, both supporters and opponents of intermarriage, would maintain that any attempt to impose a compulsory position upon the Reform movement, whether by resolution or legislation, would be contrary to Reform's proper tradition of freedom and individual autonomy.

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