



The Status and Position of Women in Ancient Civilizations and Among the People of the Book (Jews and Christians)

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ABSTRACT :

The study of the status and position of women in ancient civilizations and among the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) reveals diverse interpretations and developments throughout history. Women in various societies, from ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome to the religions of Judaism and Christianity, held varying statuses. While in some civilizations women enjoyed relative rights and even played prominent social roles, in many others, they were considered subordinate and dependent on men, often deprived of their basic rights.

Judaism and Christianity, due to their cultural influence, have played a significant role in defining the historical status of women. The sacred texts and religious interpretations of these faiths have consistently offered specific perspectives on women. Some of these views have depicted women as sources of error or inferior to men, influencing the social and cultural laws of those societies. At the same time, examples of respect and reverence for women can also be found in the histories of these religions, highlighting a complex and contradictory outlook on women.

Analyzing this subject not only provides a better understanding of human history and culture but also illustrates how social and religious beliefs have influenced the lives and rights of women over the centuries. This examination can serve as a basis for comparing the status of women across different religions and civilizations and for critically evaluating historical perspectives in the pursuit of justice and equality.

Keywords: women, Ancient Civilization, people of the book, Jews, Christians.

Introduction :

For centuries, women endured immense suffering and oppression that were, in truth, heavy and painful. Much of this oppression was imposed by lawmakers who relied solely on human reason and knowledge without connecting to divine guidance. As a result, they inflicted injustices on women that bring shame upon humanity when recounted. Their errors stemmed from viewing themselves as independent of divine guidance and attempting to secure human happiness—particularly for women, the most complex creation of all—through imperfect human knowledge alone. Additionally, certain profiteers took advantage of these situations to achieve unworthy goals, sometimes even going so far as to distort divine commands and messages.

Montesquieu, in his book *The Spirit of the Laws*, writes that in Japan, courts would punish female criminals by stripping them naked in public squares and forcing them to walk like animals in front of crowds. Such are the painful truths that history has witnessed. These examples underline the importance of studying the social position and status of women in pre-Islamic civilizations.

The Torah and the Bible bear witness to these perspectives. For example, the altered Torah states in the Book of Ecclesiastes that “a woman is bitterer than death.” It also suggests, “A man who is righteous before God is one who does not have a wife... Among a thousand men, one worthy man can be found, but among all women, none can be found.” Similarly, Christianity suggests that to attain the highest levels of virtue, one must remain unmarried and avoid taking a spouse.

These examples illustrate both the distortion of truths regarding women and the injustices that have been inflicted upon them.

Study Questions :

1. How was the status of women defined in ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome?
2. What differences existed between the rights of women and men in ancient societies?
3. What is the perspective of Jewish sacred texts (such as the Torah) regarding women?

4. Did ancient civilizations hold positive views about women that were absent in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism and Christianity)?
5. How was the status of women defined in the early teachings of Christianity?

Study Objectives

The objective of this research is to examine the status and position of women in ancient civilizations and the religions of the People of the Book (Judaism and Christianity). This study aims to:

- 1- Analyze the perspectives of ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome regarding the role and rights of women.
- 2- Assess the differences in the rights and status of women and men in ancient societies.
- 3- Explore the depictions presented in the sacred texts of Judaism (such as the Torah) and related interpretations concerning the role of women in family and society.
- 4- Identify the status of women in the early teachings of Christianity and how it differs from other civilizations and religions.
- 5- Provide a comparison between the positive perspectives of ancient civilizations on women and the beliefs of the People of the Book religions.

Research Methodology :

Documentary Method (Library Research) in this method, written sources such as books, scientific articles, sacred texts (Torah, Bible), religious commentaries, and historical writings are used. The goals of this method are: Collecting information about the status of women in ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome, Analyzing the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity and examining related commentaries, reviewing previous research on the status of women in these civilizations and religions.

Section One: Women in Ancient Civilizations

Civilization is a collective achievement, formed with contributions from all elements of society. Women, who make up half of humanity, have undeniably influenced the rise, flourishing, and decline of civilizations, regardless of the degree of their participation. This reality necessitates an examination of women's roles in every civilization, ancient and modern. Below is a concise overview of women's status in these contexts.

First Topic: Women in Mesopotamian Civilizations

Archaeological research reveals that Mesopotamia and the land of Chaldea were the oldest centers of civilization, dating back to 5,000 BCE. In this region, the civilizations of Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria developed consecutively, each with its own unique features. Here, we focus specifically on the role and status of women within each of these civilizations.

Second Topic: The Status of Women among the Sumerians

It appears that the Sumerians recognized certain rights for women, allowing them to engage in trade and manage their own assets. In cases of infertility, women could even purchase a maidservant for their husbands to bear children. During the Assyrian period, Sumerian women were required to wear full veils and face coverings when leaving the house, whereas maidservants were not permitted to cover their faces. A maid could only wear a veil if her master publicly declared, in front of four witnesses, that she was his legal wife.

Polygamy, allowing one woman to have multiple husbands, was permissible until the Sumerian king Urukagina (2378–2371 BCE) prohibited it. Additionally, marriages were typically arranged by parents, with daughters having no right to object.

Topic Three: The Status of Women in Babylonian Civilization

In Babylonian society, women were often treated as common property, frequently bought and sold. Sexual promiscuity was prevalent, and even religious spaces were not immune to sexual disorder, with the practice of "sacred prostitution" being common until Constantine abolished it around 325 BCE. Hammurabi's Code, known for its precision and fairness, allowed husbands under Article 117 to sell or mortgage their wives. This article stated: "If a husband faced imprisonment due to debt and sold his wife, son, or daughter, or handed them over to a creditor for servitude, they were required to serve in the buyer's house for three years, regaining their freedom in the fourth year." Inheritance laws in Hammurabi's Code were also extremely unjust, distinguishing between children of free-born wives and those of maidservants, giving all assets to the free-born wife and her children, while the maidservant and her children received nothing.

Topic Four: The Status of Women in Assyrian Civilization

The condition of Assyrian women was even harsher than that of Babylonian women. Despite their legal recognition to control their own property, Assyrian merchants outside their country's borders could engage in both conventional and temporary marriages (sigha). Husbands had the right to sell their wives and children or hand them over to a creditor for servitude.

Modesty and the wearing of veils were obligations for Assyrian women, symbolizing chastity and honor. However, if a maidservant or prostitute wore a veil, they faced the penalty of having both ears cut off and their clothing confiscated, which would then become the property of the informant who

reported them to the authorities. Observers who failed to report such a case could be tied back-to-back with the maidservant or prostitute, stripped of their garments, flogged fifty times, and forced into servitude for the king for an entire month.

Section Two: The Status of Women in Ancient Egyptian Civilization

In ancient Egypt, men were pleased by the birth of a son but felt sorrow and distress at the news of a daughter's birth, with their expressions visibly changing. In fact, out of a fear of having a daughter, they developed methods to identify the gender of the fetus and would often abort female fetuses before birth. Ancient Egyptians strongly insisted on keeping women confined to the home. Women could rarely leave their homes except for serving in temples and palaces, where they lived in extreme subservience. It seems that women from the common classes had minimal social influence or roles outside the family. In contrast, women of the ruling class or respected families learned reading, poetry, devotion to gods, and religious ceremonies, even sacrificing to the gods. Some even achieved the position of priestess, and between the 11th and 7th centuries BCE, a few reached governing roles. Relationships between young men and women were unregulated and disordered, with women sometimes proposing marriage. Polygamy was almost an exclusive privilege for pharaohs, allowing them to have many children. In the royal household, while polygamy was practiced, there was always a chief queen or "first lady," with other wives considered secondary, enjoying only comfort and luxury. Infertility was grounds for divorce. However, women did have economic rights and could manage and trade their property independently.

Section Three: The Status of Women in Ancient Indian Civilization

Although India was advanced in knowledge, civilization, and culture since ancient times, the condition of women was no better than in other nations. Like in many other societies, before marriage, a woman was considered the property of her father; after marriage, she was viewed as the property of her husband. Upon her husband's death, she would often be dressed in fine clothes and adorned as if for a wedding and then burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre. Women were not allowed to inherit property, and they could be married off without their consent. The Indian people believed women were the source of sin and moral disgrace and did not recognize them as independent human beings.

In ancient India, women were considered both lovable and yet inferior. A Hindu legend may illustrate this perception: when the divine craftsman set out to create woman, he realized he had exhausted all materials in creating man. Thus, he formed woman from leftover scraps of creation. Their laws stated: "Destiny, certain death, hell, deadly poison, snakes, and scorching fire—all are preferable to a woman." This view influenced their treatment of women, who were seen as superfluous beings within the universe's order.

According to the ancient Indian legal code Manusmriti, written by the legendary ancestor Manu, celibacy was recommended to Brahmins as a path to perfection, urging them to abstain from any form of sexual pleasure. Hindu mythology also tells of how, when God wanted to create woman, He found the materials exhausted, so He created her from residual scraps from man's creation.

In Hinduism, marriage was mandatory, and a man without a wife had no social status. Long-term virginity was seen as a disgrace. Parents were expected to arrange marriages before their child's sexual impulses might lead them to make unapproved unions, which were believed to bring disappointment and bitterness. The Manusmriti mentions *gandharva* unions (based on mutual consent), which were considered to stem from lust and were allowed but not respected.

India's warm climate often led to early puberty, creating a social and moral challenge. To manage this, childhood marriage became a norm, which prevented premarital relations. Marriage in ancient India could occur in many ways: through kidnapping the bride, purchasing her, or obtaining her consent, though consent-based marriages were seen as less honorable. Many women preferred being "bought" or even abducted, as these methods were socially respected. The Manusmriti accepted eight types of marriage, ranking marriage through "kidnapping" or "love" as the least honorable, while "purchase" was seen as the most practical for union formation.

The Indian lawmaker believed that ultimately, only those marriages that were economically based would endure. At one point in Indian history, the word "marriage" was synonymous with "purchasing a woman." One writer, around 20 CE, recounts a strange and astonishing tradition: "Those who could not marry off their daughters due to poverty would bring them to the marketplace accompanied by the sounds of trumpets and drums (the same instruments used in war to announce readiness), gathering people around them. Any man who approached would first be shown the woman's back down to her shoulders, then the front. If the girl met the man's preference and agreed to be purchased, he would marry her under certain terms."

It might be helpful to mention another part of Manusmriti that describes the role of women. Manu, in a tone reminiscent of early Christian theology, says about women: "Woman is the source of dishonor, the root of quarrels, and the origin of earthly life; therefore, beware of women." This ancient Indian perspective on women's character led Indian women to submissively refer to their husbands as "lord," "master," or even "my god." In public, they would walk a short distance behind them and rarely spoke to them directly.

An Indian woman was expected to express her devotion through the smallest acts, such as preparing meals, eating only after her husband and sons had finished, and kissing her husband's feet at bedtime. According to Manusmriti, "A woman who does not obey her husband will be reborn as a jackal. Megasthenes, a writer from the time of Chandragupta, notes: "Brahmins keep their wives uninformed about any philosophy, for if women are educated and taught to view pleasure, pain, life, and death philosophically, they would either become corrupt or no longer remain under men's control.

The Manusmriti also stated that three individuals were not entitled to financial support: the wife, daughter, and slave. Whatever they earned belonged to their master, and a woman could only keep her dowry and gifts received at marriage for herself. Polygamy was permitted in Indian society and encouraged among the elite, as maintaining multiple wives and passing on one's abilities and talents to future generations was considered a worthy practice. The story of Draupadi, who married five brothers simultaneously, reflects a curious custom from those times of "polyandry"—a woman marrying multiple husbands, typically brothers—a practice that persisted in Ceylon until 1859 and still exists in some mountainous villages in Tibet. In Indian families, the man was considered the owner of his wife and children, and in some cases, he could sell or expel them from the home.

The Manusmriti also mandated that a woman must always be under the guardianship of a man throughout her life—first her father, then her husband, and finally her son. A husband could divorce his wife for infidelity, but a woman could never divorce her husband. Among the customs of ancient India was

the practice of *sati* or widow-burning, where, upon a husband's death, his wife was either burned alive alongside him or buried alive. Additionally, historical accounts reveal another remarkable custom: occasionally, respectable families would dedicate one of their daughters to temple prostitution, similar to the way a son might be dedicated to the priesthood.

This provides an overview of the status and conditions of women in Indian civilization in general. It is also necessary to present specific information on the position and rights of women in Aryan, Brahmin, and Buddhist communities in India.

Topic One: Women in Aryan Society

The Aryans were the first to enter the land of India, around fifteen centuries before Christ, bringing with them the beliefs of the Persians. In the early Vedic era, Aryan women enjoyed many rights and freedoms, including the right to choose a husband, the right to intimacy, and freedom to participate in dance gatherings. They also joined men in religious ceremonies and offered gifts and sacrifices to the deities. If a husband left his wife a widow, she had the right to remarry without any conditions. In Aryan society, marriage could take place by abducting the bride from her family, purchasing her, or through mutual agreement between the bride and groom. However, women preferred to be purchased and paid for, as it increased their perceived value, especially if the husband abducted them from their family.

Topic Two: Women among the Brahmins

Among the Brahmins, marriage was compulsory, and an unmarried man was viewed as an outcast in society. Similarly, it was considered shameful for a daughter to remain unmarried for too long. Therefore, parents would often consider marriage arrangements soon after a child was born. The ideal marriage among the Brahmins was one without emotional or affectionate motivations, as they believed the union should occur before the child developed any intense sexual inclinations. Marriages based on mutual agreement were seen as less virtuous, with such couples regarded by the Brahmins as driven by passion.

Topic Three: Women in the Buddhist Era

Buddha often advised his followers to stay away from women, viewing them as a source of temptation and the origin of mischief. He was hesitant about allowing women to join his teachings, fearing it might weaken his doctrine. Will Durant notes:

Buddha, like Christ, lacked confidence in his ability to resist temptation in the presence of women. Hence, he showed great hesitation in admitting them into the Buddhist faith.

Ananda, Buddha's close disciple, once asked him:

- Master, how should we behave towards women?
- Buddha replied, Act as if you have never seen them.
- Ananda asked, but if it becomes unavoidable to see them, what should we do?
- Buddha answered, do not speak to them.
- Ananda persisted, and if they speak to us, Master, what should we do?
- Buddha cautioned, be extremely wary of them.

Section Four: Women in Chinese Civilization

The status of women in ancient China was not significantly better than that of their Indian counterparts. Daughters were considered a burden to their fathers because raising and educating them involved effort and expense without any direct return. Fathers often wished for nothing more than for their daughters to grow up, marry, and serve another family, bearing children for her husband's household rather than her own. Consequently, fathers prayed for the birth of sons.

A man valued his wife primarily as the mother of his sons, not for her beauty or intellect. Her worth was measured by her ability to bear children, work diligently, and obey her husband. It is believed that, before the time of Confucius, Chinese society was matriarchal, with mothers holding the central role in the family. This prominence stemmed from the belief that mothers were the source of life and power in the household. In earlier times, children were identified by their mothers' names rather than their fathers'.

The rise of feudalism in China likely diminished women's political and economic status, replacing matriarchy with a rigid patriarchal system. Polygamy was common among the Chinese, regarded as a means to enhance family lineage and ensure continuity. They even had a saying: Listen to your wife, but never believe her.

Section Five: Women in Persian Civilization

In ancient Persian civilization, women enjoyed significant freedoms. They could interact freely with men, move about with unveiled faces, own land, and manage their property. They were even permitted to oversee their husband's affairs, either in his name or as his representative. The Sassanian era is considered a pinnacle of ancient Persian civilization, making it a focal point for understanding the status of women during that time.

In the Sassanian Empire, it was believed that women lacked legal personality. They were not recognized as individuals with rights but were instead treated as objects that could belong to someone or be under someone's authority. Women were entirely under the guardianship of the head of the household, referred to as the *katak-khoday* (head of the house), who could be a father, husband, or, in their absence, a successor. The authority of the household head was rarely restricted, and all gifts given to women or children, or anything they earned through their efforts, legally belonged to him.

This familial structure was the foundation of Sassanian society. Men faced no legal limitations on polygamy and could marry as many women as they desired and could afford. Ordinary men, constrained by their financial means, typically had only one wife. In contrast, nobles and wealthy men, owing to their economic advantage, could maintain large harems. Historians categorize marriages during this period into three types: padishahzan (primary wife), chakarzan (secondary wives or concubines), and marriages involving familial or borrowing arrangements, including incestuous unions.

Under Sassanian laws, women were considered incapable of managing their own affairs due to their perceived lack of wisdom. They were always subject to a male guardian—whether a father, husband, son, or appointed trustee—and required their guardian's consent to marry or manage their property.

However, in the later stages of the empire, as men lost some of their traditional privileges, women began to gain new rights. According to historian Will Durant, this shift occurred because of women's strong will and determination, which compelled men to yield to them in certain aspects of life.

Section Six: Women in Ancient Greece

The Greek woman was a symbol of the lowest understanding of morality, living in extreme humiliation and disgrace. In ancient Greece, women lacked social identity and played no role in the flourishing civilization of the "Golden Age." They were confined to their homes and often treated as commodities for pleasure. A Greek historian wrote: "A woman's name, like her presence, should remain confined within the house."

The renowned Greek orator Demosthenes stated: "We desire courtesans for pleasure, concubines for our daily needs, and wives for legitimate children." Women in Greece could be sold or gifted. In fact, Demosthenes' own father reportedly gave his wife to one of his friends, and Socrates is said to have lent his wife to the orator Alcibiades.

According to the customs of the time, if a man had passed his youth, it was his duty to find a young man to cohabit with his wife. However, if a woman engaged in any sexual relationship without her husband's consent, she could be killed.

In Greek society, women were bought and sold like slaves and had no rights to ownership, association, or even life itself when under the authority of their fathers or husbands. Fathers or husbands had the right to sell, lend, or even kill their wives and daughters at will.

Topic One: The "Queen Wife" and the "Concubine Wife"

This type of marriage was specific to the aristocracy and the wealthy class. In noble households, there were two categories of married women:

1. The "Queen Wife: These women held the highest rank and were referred to as "Queen Wife." They belonged to the same social and familial status as their husbands and were considered the lady of the house. However, they had no involvement in financial or legal matters, as these responsibilities were exclusively managed by the husband. The "Queen Wife" received a daily allowance from her husband and, after his death, was entitled to an inheritance equal to that of her sons or the sons of other "Queen Wives."
2. The "Concubine Wife: These women were of a lower social status than their husbands and served more as helpers and supporters to the "Queen Wife." Despite their lower position, they were entitled to a dowry and received an annual allowance as long as they were able to work. They also had the potential to be promoted to the position of "Queen Wife." Until that promotion, however, they remained under the authority of the "Queen Wife."

The husband was obligated to care for the "Queen Wife" for the rest of her life, to support their sons until adulthood, and to oversee their daughters until marriage. The "Concubine Wife," in contrast, did not have these privileges. Only her male children were recognized and accepted into the family.

Topic Two: Borrowed Marriage

This type of marriage, also referred to as "temporary marriage," involved a woman who already had a husband. In this arrangement, a man could temporarily lend his primary wife to another man who expressed a socially acceptable desire for her, often citing a need for help in raising his children.

In such agreements, the husband's consent was the only requirement. The woman's approval or disapproval had no bearing or validity in the temporary transfer to another man. The duration of the arrangement was determined solely by the men involved and could extend for a very long period.

In a "borrowed marriage," only the temporary transfer of the woman was stipulated. Her wealth and property remained with her first husband and were not passed on to the second man. Any children born during this period of temporary marriage were considered the children of the woman's first husband, not the biological father, who was viewed only as the temporary spouse. However, throughout the duration of the "borrowed marriage," the temporary husband held custodial rights and guardianship over the woman.

Topic Three: Marriage with Relatives

In ancient Iranian society, marriage with close relatives was considered permissible under the pretext of preserving the purity of family lineage and blood. This practice was referred to as Khvedodah. It was claimed that such marriages could erase grave sins. For example, a figure named Ardaviraf reportedly married his seven sisters, and Bahram Chobin also married his sister.

"Patriarch Marbaha," a figure from the era of Anushirvan, is quoted as saying: "The justice upheld by the worshippers of Ahura Mazda allows a man to marry his mother, daughter, or sister."

He also mentioned examples cited by Zoroastrians to justify and sanctify this practice. During that time, marriage with close relatives was not considered inappropriate. Instead, it was regarded as a virtuous and commendable act, earning significant religious merit and rewards.

Professor Christian Bartholomae states: "It is astonishing to read about a father who, upon his eldest son reaching maturity, would marry one of his wives to him. Or in the case of inheritance disputes, when the issue was resolved by the marriage of the heirs—siblings, a brother and sister inheriting from a common parent."

Bartholomae further explains that many contemporary Zoroastrian scholars are eager to reinterpret their ancient religious texts to distance their prominent historical figures from sibling marriages. However, some religious texts explicitly praise such practices. For instance, one notable figure—celebrated as a precursor to Dante in exploring heaven and hell—is mentioned as having married his seven sisters. Initially, these sisters were hesitant to let their brother and husband embark on such a perilous journey, referring to his celestial ascent and descent into hell.

Section Seven: The Status of Women in Roman Civilization

Roman law allowed men to even kill their wives. Although, with the progress of Roman civilization, the strict treatment of women eased somewhat, granting them relative freedom. However, this led to the widespread prevalence of corruption, immorality, and promiscuity among women. In Roman civilization, which was established four centuries before Christ, women were not considered part of the human community or even members of the family. Families were exclusively composed of men, and women had no right to present complaints in court. They were also forbidden from conducting business; their transactions were not officially recognized or documented. Moreover, if a man deemed it necessary to kill his wife, his decision was valid, and there were no barriers to executing it.

Although Romans made significant advances in law and jurisprudence—so much so that one of the contemporary legal systems, recognized for its scientific and philosophical significance, is named after them (the Roman-Germanic legal system)—they considered women unworthy of resurrection on the Day of Judgment due to a lack of a "human soul." Women were seen as complete embodiments of the devil and various harmful spirits, intertwined with deceit and evil. They were regarded as traps designed to capture hearts, corrupt minds, and lead intellects astray. Thus, women were treated harshly, forbidden from laughing or speaking freely, and their mouths were kept shut except for essential needs. The Roman saying, "You cannot call a donkey a horse, nor a woman a human," reflected their view of women.

In Rome, a man was the absolute and unquestioned ruler of his wife and family. He alone held the authority over the life and death of his wife. If his wife or children committed a crime, he had the power to sentence them to death. In this context, Cato, a Roman figure from the 2nd century BCE, stated: "The husband is the ruler over his wife, and his authority knows no bounds. He can do whatever he wishes. If the wife errs, he punishes her. If she drinks wine, he condemns her. If she acts dishonorably, he kills her."

In Rome, women were treated as worthless slaves with no societal value. They were regarded as undeveloped and immature beings who, according to the law, always required a guardian or supervisor. A woman remained under the authority of her husband as long as he lived, and after becoming widowed, she came under the guardianship of her eldest son.

Marriage in Rome was typically for the purpose of having children, and in the fields, children and women were considered part of the property. Marriages were arranged by the parents of both the bride and the groom, and sometimes individuals were betrothed during childhood. In any case, the consent of both fathers was essential, and without it, marriage did not take place. In ancient Roman law, marriage was compulsory, but in 413 BCE, when "Camillus," the censor of Rome, imposed taxes on unmarried men, this law lost its validity. There were two common types of marriage among the Romans: one where the woman and her dowry were handed over to the husband or his father, and the other without the transfer of the woman and her dowry.

The first type of marriage, as mentioned, could occur either through a one-year cohabitation agreement, by purchase, or through a ceremony where the couple shared bread and sweets. The second type of marriage did not require religious ceremonies and was based solely on the mutual consent of the bride and groom.

In the case of a marriage by purchase, it appears that the groom would "buy" the bride. In the presence of a government official, the groom would place a coin on a scale, signifying the price of the bride, which was then handed over to her parents. Over time, marriage by purchase, which was once common, gradually declined and eventually reversed, with the dowry of the woman effectively "buying" the husband. This dowry generally remained under the husband's control, but in the event of divorce or the husband's death, it was returned to the wife.

In marriages that took place through the "bread and sweets" ceremony, divorce was difficult. In the first type of marriage, the right to divorce was solely the husband's. However, in the second type of marriage, divorce was possible at the will of either party, without the consent of the other. In ancient Rome, a father could force his daughter to separate from her husband, even if the daughter did not want a divorce.

According to the law of Emperor Justinian, if a husband and wife wished to separate, they were required by law to agree that, after the divorce, they would live in a monastery. In the event of divorce, neither party could remarry for a year and a half. If the two did not separate, and one of them died, the surviving spouse was required to avoid remarriage for two years after the death.

Adultery was so common that it rarely attracted attention, unless it was used for political purposes to cause scandal. Over time, the harsh and rigid divorce laws were abolished. It is said that "every noble woman was divorced at least once." From then on, men married primarily to acquire a substantial dowry or to connect with the wealthy elite. A Roman named "Cato" lamented these multiple marriages, observing that the Roman Empire had become a "marriage agency." These unions were often political, and once men achieved their goals, they would seek another wife to climb another step in social rank or increase their wealth. Men easily divorced their wives and separated from them, without needing to give a reason. They simply sent a letter to the woman, announcing her freedom and their own.

Section Eight: the Status of Women among Pre-Islamic Arabs

When we look at the environment of pre-Islamic Arabia, we find that women's rights were trampled upon in many aspects. Women, whether daughters, wives, or sisters, had no established rights to inheritance or earnings. They could not freely manage their own personal wealth. Worse than this, women in pre-Islamic Arab society were inherited as property. When a man passed away, his son would inherit his father's wives along with his property, and the son would use them as his father had. Similarly, if a man died and left children who were not from his wife, the eldest son could express interest in marrying his father's widow. In that case, he would throw his cloak over her, and if he did not, the widow had the right to marry whomever she wished. In pre-Islamic Arab society, women had no rights over their husbands. There were no defined limits on the number of divorces or marriages, and no system to prevent husbands from being violent toward their wives. Women had no say in choosing their husbands, but according to some historical

accounts, only the elites and nobility of the tribe would consult their daughters about marriage. The Arabs of the pre-Islamic period regarded the birth of a daughter as an ill omen. Therefore, a father could, if he wished, bury his newborn daughter alive. If he did not do this, he would at least feel shame and embarrassment and would hide from the people of the city, believing that his efforts had been wasted. The emotional impact of having a daughter would linger for a few years in the father's heart, but once the daughter reached the age of six or seven, she would be married to any young man from the tribe who was approved by her father and could afford the marriage dowry.

The only thing that an Arab woman in this era could take pride in was that a man would protect her and defend her honor. If anyone insulted the woman, her husband would seek revenge. The lover of a woman or her husband would be ready to fight the entire world to defend her honor if necessary. However, despite this, a woman in pre-Islamic Arab society was essentially considered property, much like other goods, belonging to her father, husband, or son. She would be inherited along with other possessions. Women were expected to bear many sons for their husbands, as it was their duty to produce warriors. In pre-Islamic Arab society, a woman was often just one among many wives, and the husband could send her out of the house whenever he pleased.

Part One: Women in the Scriptures of the People of the Book

The term "People of the Book" refers to Jews and Christians, whom Allah (SWT) mentions in the Qur'an. They have scriptures and writings that contain certain provisions regarding women, some of which align with Islamic law, while others contradict it.

Part Two: The Status of Women in Judaism

The Jewish people regarded women as insignificant and worthless. Jews would often include in their daily prayers the words: "Blessed be Allah, the Creator and Sovereign, who did not create me a woman." One of the common sayings among them about women was: "If you see a donkey climbing stairs, a woman also gains intelligence." In terms of the disrespect and violation of women's rights, including the seizure of their dowries and possessions by men, the Hebrews were no different from other nations. Jewish law allowed a poor man to sell his daughter as a slave or maidservant in order to resolve his financial problems. One of the sayings of the Jews regarding testimony is: "The testimony of one hundred women is equal to the testimony of one man."

There was no specific limit on the acquisition of maidservants or the number of wives. Many of their prominent figures, including kings and prophets, had dozens, or even hundreds, of wives and concubines. For example, in the Old Testament, it is mentioned that Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) had 700 wives and 300 concubines, and these women captivated his heart. The intention here is not to confirm this as truth, but rather to highlight the religious perspective in Jewish writings concerning women and marriage. It is understood that this account does not align with the infallibility and nobility of the prophets.

The Torah does not specify an exact number for polygamy, but in the Talmud, it is permitted for ordinary people to have up to four wives, provided the dowry for each subsequent wife is greater than the previous one. The Talmud, by analogy to Jewish scriptures, permits leaders of the Jewish people to have up to eighteen wives.

For even the most trivial reasons, Judaism permits divorce. For instance, "if the husband is not satisfied with his wife," or according to some rabbis, even if the wife cooks poorly or burns the food, this could be grounds for divorce.

The Torah prohibits a man from remarrying his divorced wife if she has married another man after their divorce. Indeed, the Jews have a custom mentioned in the Torah that states: If a husband dies and has no children, it is obligatory for the brother of the deceased to marry his widow. If they have a child after the marriage, the child must be named after the deceased and attributed to him, not to the new husband, who is the brother of the deceased. If the brother of the deceased refuses to marry his brother's widow, the widow has the right to complain to the elders of Israel, who will pressure him to marry her. If he still refuses, she is permitted to remove his sandal and spit in his face, an act known among the Israelites as "the house of the bare foot" or "the sandal removed."

This custom suggests that a wife is not merely the property of her husband but the property of the entire tribe. Among the Jews, another form of injustice towards women is that they do not inherit from their deceased husbands unless the deceased has no sons or grandsons. Even in this case, the widow is not allowed to marry someone from another tribe or clan to prevent her inheritance from passing to another tribe.

Just as Jews prohibit women from entering the priesthood or participating in religious congregations on the grounds of impurity or the fear that it might lead to sacred prostitution within temples, they also argue that allowing women in religious practices could open the door to the corruption of religions and Eastern civilizations.

Part Three: The Status of Women among Christians

Men of the Church, in their sermons on various occasions, have made exaggerated statements about the violation of women's rights, which later became the standards and criteria for lawmakers concerning women. For instance, Chrysostom said: "A woman is a curse that must exist, a natural deception, a beloved misfortune, a danger at home, a destructive temptation, and a secret mystery." Or, as one monk said to priests to discourage them from marrying: "If all the fields or gates were made of paper... if all the trees were pens and if all the writers who knew how to write well were gathered, we could not expose all the evils and disgrace of women."

The laws of the Christian Church regarding women's participation in religious ceremonies or any judicial body of the Church were no more favorable than Jewish laws. The reasoning was that such duties were specifically for men, and based on what Paul said: "Truly, woman is the cause of sin, and thus from this perspective, she is an incomplete member, an imperfect part of the Christian nation. Therefore, a woman is not made in the image of God's glory but in the image of man who was made in God's glory." These statements seem to be a strong reaction to the widespread corruption, prostitution, and moral decay that existed in Roman society, which we previously discussed. Thus, Churchmen held women responsible for this immorality, and they decreed that marriage was a type of impurity that should be avoided, and remaining single was considered better than marriage.

When the Churchmen saw that the Romans were struggling with the issue of divorce, where women could be divorced for the slightest reasons and most women had been divorced at least once in their lives, Christianity prohibited divorce. However, Christians still faced many problems that could only be solved through divorce, as these issues have always existed with the advent of humanity and will continue to do so, such as one partner's bad temper, long absences, the man's inability to provide for his wife, the woman's infidelity, or a serious illness of one of the partners, among other such matters.

Christian views on divorce are divided into two categories:

- 1- Catholics firmly believe that divorce is forbidden, even if a woman has committed adultery. However, they permit separation on physical grounds, but neither party is allowed to remarry. They refer to what is stated in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus Christ says: "What God has joined together, let no man separate." In the Gospel of Mark, it is also stated: "A woman and a man, after marriage, become one flesh, and after marriage, they no longer return as two separate bodies, but are one body. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate."
- 2- Both Orthodox and Protestant Christians consider divorce permissible in the case of adultery committed by the wife. However, they deem marriage after divorce forbidden for both parties, citing Christ's words: "Whoever divorces his wife, except for the cause of adultery, causes her to commit adultery."

All Christian denominations agree on the following:

It is forbidden for both men and women to marry after divorce, and they refer to the Gospel of Matthew, which states: "Anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

In the Gospel of Mark, it also states: "Anyone who divorces his wife or marries another commits adultery, and any woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery." However, the human need for marriage forced Christian nations to permit divorce. Italy, which was more committed to Christian teachings than other Western countries, legalized divorce in 1970. Legal experts view Italy's decision as a precursor to the actions of other Christian countries that still consider divorce illegal. In England, until 1805, women remained economically dependent on their husbands, and were considered part of their husband's property, meaning they could even be sold by their husbands.

The French Civil Code, which Europeans consider the foundation of modern law, used to classify persons who could not own property as children, the insane, and women. In 1938, the law was amended for the benefit of women, but it still presented issues that were not fully addressed until 1966, when French women gained economic independence for the first time.

Conclusion :

The rights of women in ancient civilizations and among the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) have always been influenced by social and religious beliefs. In most ancient societies, women were considered subordinate and dependent on men, and had limited rights. While in some civilizations, such as ancient Egypt, the status of women was better, in other civilizations like Greece, Rome, or among pre-Islamic Arab tribes, women experienced severe restrictions and oppression.

Among the People of the Book, especially in early Judaism and Christianity, women were in weaker positions and had fewer rights than men. Although over time, changes have occurred in the laws and attitudes towards women in these religions, in general, the rights of women in the religions of the People of the Book have been more limited compared to men.

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