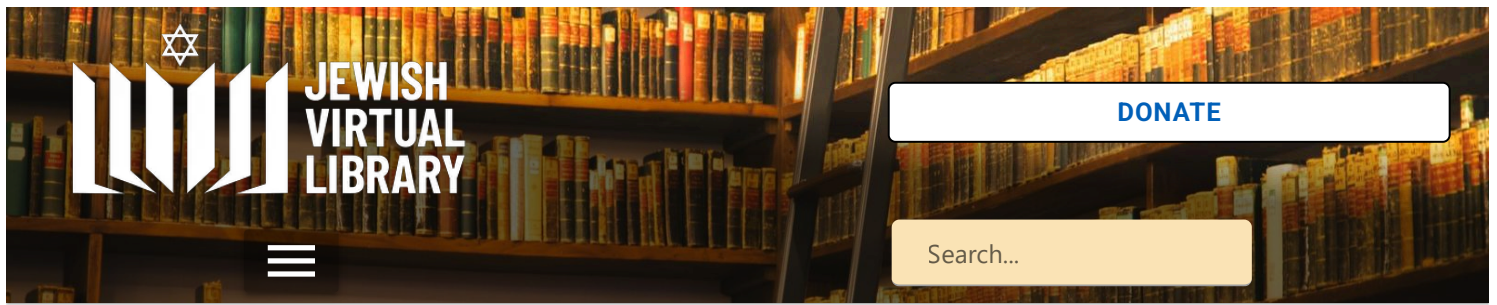




[The Holocaust Wing](#) / [Rescuers](#) / [Other](#)

Incest



Play Article

Print

In the Biblical Period

The idea of what constituted a prohibited degree of kinship for sexual relations seems to have broadened during the biblical period. Among the ancestors of [Israel](#) there occurred an unusual number of marriages that are incestuous by later standards; evidently this was not merely condoned, but favored, as ensuring good stock (cf. Gen. 24:3–4; 38ff.; 28:1ff.). Thus Abraham married his paternal sister (Gen. 20:12 against Lev. 18:9), Jacob married two sisters (Gen. 29:21ff. against Lev. 18:18), and Amram, Moses' father, married his aunt (Ex. 6:20, against Lev. 20:19). As late as the time of David, marriage to a half sister was condoned (II Sam. 13:13). The standard of the laws thus reflects a tendency (that reached its culmination in post-biblical legislation) to broaden the scope of incest with the passage of time. Rabbinic theory recognized this, justifying the patriarchs' disregard of the [Torah](#) prohibitions on the ground that they were subject only to the *Noachide law of incest, which was far less comprehensive than that of the Torah (Sanh. 58a–b; Maim. Yad, Melakhim, 9:5).

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

BIBLICAL PERIOD:

E. Neufeld, *Ancient [Hebrew](#) Marriage Laws* (1944), 191–212; D.R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage* (1953), 20ff.; E.A. Speiser, in: A. Altmann (ed.), *Biblical and Other Studies* (1963), 62–81; Z. Falk, in: *Tarbiz*, 32 (1963), 19–34. IN [JEWISH](#) LAW: M. Mielziner, *The Jewish Law of Marriage and Divorce* (1901²), 33–41; L. Blau, in: *Abhandlungen... Chajes* ([1933](#)), 6–21; E. Neufeld, *Ancient*

Hebrew Marriage Laws (1944), 191–212; ET, 1 (1951³), 204–11, 214, 321–4; 2 (1949), 23f., 257–61; 4 (1952), 745–52; 6 (1954), 106–15. **ADD. BIBLIOGRAPHY:** M. Elon, *Ha-Mishpat ha-Ivri* (1988), 1:109, 175, 185, 196, 208, 248, 251, 282f, 297, 312, 318, 353, 396, 414, 434, 456f, 468, 655, 659, 670, 692f, 697, 711, 723, 808; idem, *Jewish Law* (1994), 1:122, 194, 207, 220, 230, 234, 289f, 293, 333f, 353, 373, 380f, 426; 2:483, 505, 529, 556f., 811, 815, 828, 854f., 860, 878, 892, 990.

Sources: [Encyclopaedia Judaica](#). © 2007 The Gale Group. All Rights Reserved.

[Anti-Semitism](#)

[Biographies](#)

[History](#)

[Israel](#)

[Israel Education](#)

[Judaic Treasures](#)

[Maps](#)

[Myths & Facts](#)

[Politics](#)

[Religion](#)

[The Holocaust](#)

[Travel](#)

[U.S.-Israel Relations](#)

[Vital Statistics](#)

[Women](#)

[About](#)

[Bookstore](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Links](#)

[News](#)

[Publications](#)

[Timelines](#)

[The Virtual Jewish
World](#)

[Virtual Israel
Experience](#)

[Contact](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Donate](#)

Sign Up to Stay Informed

[Subscribe](#)

[Donate](#)



The Jewish Virtual Library is a project of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization. | © 1998–2026 American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise

The Jewish Virtual Library is a free educational resource. This site may display limited advertising to help support operations. Advertising is not the primary purpose of this site. This site includes links to external third-party resources that JVL's editorial team has selected for their educational value.

Privacy Preferences

We and our partners share information on your use of this website to help improve your experience. For more information, or to opt out click the Do Not Sell My Information button below.

Consent

Do Not Sell My Information
