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GOD'S WILL FOR MARRIAGE IN GENESIS 2:18–23 AND MARITAL OUTCOMES AMONG NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS

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ARTICLE INFO
Article No.: 0431
Accepted Date: 04/07/2026
Published Date: 20/07/2026
Type: Research

ABSTRACT
Contemporary Christian marriages in Nigeria continue to face challenges arising from marital conflict, declining commitment, cultural pressures, and divergent interpretations of biblical teachings on marriage. These realities underscore the need to re-examine God's original intention for marriage as revealed in Scripture. Although previous studies have examined Christian marriage from theological, sociological, counselling, and psychological perspectives, limited scholarly attention has been given to integrating an exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 with contemporary marital outcomes within the Nigerian Christian context. This study examined God's will for marriage through an exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 and explored its implications for marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians. The study adopted a qualitative exegetical research design, employing the historical-grammatical method to analyse the literary, historical, grammatical, and theological dimensions of the biblical text. The analysis was informed by a critical review of 10 peer-reviewed journal articles and five major biblical commentaries, interpreted within the framework of the Biblical Covenant Theory of Marriage. The analysis suggests that Genesis 2:18–23 presents marriage as a divine covenant founded on companionship, mutual dignity, complementarity, covenant commitment, and shared purpose. It further indicates that these theological principles provide an enduring framework for understanding and evaluating contemporary Christian marriages in Nigeria, particularly in relation to marital stability, relational unity, spiritual companionship, and covenant fidelity. The study concludes that Genesis 2:18–23 remains the foundational biblical text for understanding God's will for marriage and that renewed commitment to its theological principles provides a biblically grounded framework for strengthening Christian marriages within the Nigerian Church.
Keywords: God's will for marriage, Genesis 2:18–23, biblical exegesis, marital outcomes, Biblical Covenant Theory, Nigerian Christians.

Introduction

Marriage occupies a central place in biblical theology because it is presented not as a human invention but as a divine institution established at creation. Unlike contemporary conceptions that often define marriage primarily in legal, social, or cultural terms, the biblical narrative portrays it as an expression of God's intentional design for human companionship, mutual responsibility, and covenantal living. Genesis 2:18–23 is particularly significant in this regard because it records the divine initiative in creating the first marital relationship and establishes theological principles that subsequently shape biblical teaching on marriage throughout both the Old and New Testaments (Wenham 22; Hamilton 5). Consequently, any theological reflection on Christian marriage must begin with the creation narrative rather than with later cultural or ecclesiastical developments.

The continued relevance of Genesis 2 is evident in the growing concern over marital instability within contemporary Christian communities, including Nigeria. Although marriage remains highly valued in Nigerian society, Christian families increasingly face challenges associated with marital conflict, domestic violence, emotional separation, declining commitment, and, in some instances, divorce. According to the *Nigeria Population Commission* (NPC), approximately 10% of ever-married women aged 15–49 are divorced, separated, or no longer living with their spouses, while reports of intimate partner violence remain a significant concern among married women. These realities suggest that the mere profession of Christianity does not automatically translate into marriages that reflect biblical ideals. Rather, they call for renewed theological engagement with Scripture to determine whether contemporary Christian understandings of marriage remain faithful to God's original intention.

Scholarly interest in Genesis 2:18–23 has consequently shifted from describing the institution of marriage to examining its continuing theological and practical significance. Classical commentators generally agree that the passage establishes marriage as a relationship characterized by companionship, covenant, and mutual belonging, even though they approach the text from different exegetical perspectives (Mathews 44; Walton 88). More recent scholarship has extended this discussion by exploring the implications of Genesis for marital stability, premarital counselling, covenant theology, and Christian family life (Chukwuma 17; Akinola 14; Kristiawan, Pujiati, and Kiedong 19). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that Genesis 2 remains indispensable for understanding Christian marriage. However, they also reveal that the conversation has increasingly moved beyond textual interpretation toward practical application, creating the need for a closer integration of both dimensions.

At the same time, important interpretive questions remain unresolved. One of the most debated concerns is the meaning of the Hebrew expression *ʿēzer kĕnegdô*. While traditional readings have frequently associated the term with female subordination, more recent exegetical studies argue that it denotes indispensable partnership, mutual correspondence, and relational equality (Agana 90; Albrecht and Nass 19). This debate is not merely linguistic; it continues to shape Christian understandings of gender relations, authority, and marital responsibility. Within the Nigerian context, these interpretive differences are particularly significant because biblical teaching on marriage often interacts with deeply rooted patriarchal traditions. As Ademiluka argues, marital tensions sometimes arise when cultural assumptions are presented as biblical mandates rather than being critically examined in light of Scripture (1–18). This observation suggests that some contemporary marital challenges may be rooted as much in interpretation as in practice.

Recent interdisciplinary studies also indicate that theological commitment has measurable implications for marital relationships. Research consistently associates shared spiritual practices, covenant consciousness, and spiritual intimacy with stronger marital commitment and relationship satisfaction (Klausli et al. 15; Leavitt et al. 635–55). While these studies enrich contemporary understanding of Christian marriage, they primarily examine spirituality from psychological or pastoral perspectives rather than through sustained exegetical engagement with the foundational creation text. Consequently, the relationship between the theology of Genesis 2:18–23 and contemporary marital outcomes, particularly within the Nigerian Christian context, remains insufficiently explored.

It is this gap that the present study addresses. Rather than treating Genesis 2:18–23 merely as a historical account of the first marriage, the article examines the passage as the primary biblical articulation of God's will for marriage. Through historical-grammatical exegesis and critical engagement with contemporary scholarship, the study argues that the theological principles embedded in Genesis 2:18–23 provide a coherent biblical framework for understanding companionship, covenant commitment, mutual dignity, and relational unity. By relating these principles to contemporary discussions on marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians, the article contributes to ongoing conversations in biblical studies and practical theology while demonstrating the continuing relevance of the creation narrative for Christian marriage today.

Statement of the Problem

Although Christian marriage has been widely studied from biblical, theological, sociological, and counselling perspectives, an important scholarly gap remains. Existing exegetical studies on Genesis 2:18–23 have largely focused on lexical interpretation, gender roles, or the institution of marriage, while studies on marital outcomes have predominantly emphasized psychological, social, and therapeutic factors. Consequently, limited scholarly attention has been given to demonstrating how the theological principles embedded in Genesis 2:18–23 provide a coherent biblical framework for understanding contemporary marital outcomes, particularly within the Nigerian Christian context.

This disconnect between biblical exegesis and contemporary marital discourse limits the application of Scripture to current marital realities among Nigerian Christians. Accordingly, this study undertakes an exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 to examine God's will for marriage and to explore how its theological principles illuminate contemporary marital outcomes within the Nigerian Christian context.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine God's will for Christian marriage through an exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 and to explore its implications for marital outcomes within the Nigerian Christian context. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. examine the theological principles of God's will for Christian marriage as revealed in Genesis 2:18–23 through an exegetical analysis;
2. evaluate the relationship between the theological principles of Genesis 2:18–23 and contemporary marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians;
3. propose biblical implications of Genesis 2:18–23 for strengthening Christian marriages in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. How does the exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 illuminate God's original design for Christian marriage?

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2. In what ways do the theological themes emerging from Genesis 2:18–23 help explain contemporary marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians?
3. To what extent can the theological principles of Genesis 2:18–23 provide a biblical framework for strengthening Christian marriages in Nigeria?

Literature Review

God's Will and the Theology of Christian Marriage

Biblical scholarship consistently presents marriage as a divine institution established by God rather than a social arrangement created by human society. Within this theological tradition, God's will for marriage is understood as His revealed purpose for companionship, covenant commitment, mutual responsibility, and human flourishing. Genesis 2:18–23 occupies a unique place because it records the first marriage and establishes the theological foundations upon which later biblical teaching concerning marriage is built. Classical exegetes generally agree that the passage portrays marriage as part of God's created order, although they differ in emphasis regarding its theological implications (Mathews 34; Walton 56; Keil and Delitzsch 5–24). Collectively, these studies establish that Christian marriage derives its authority from divine revelation rather than changing cultural norms.

A second area of scholarship has focused on covenant theology. Rather than understanding marriage merely as a legal contract or social institution, scholars increasingly interpret it as a lifelong covenant grounded in faithfulness, mutual obligation, and divine accountability. This perspective emphasizes that companionship, relational unity, and covenant commitment are inseparable dimensions of God's design for marriage and remain central to Christian theological reflection.

Gender, Partnership, and Complementarity

Another dominant theme concerns the interpretation of gender relationships in Genesis 2. Much of this discussion centres on the Hebrew expression *ʿēzer kĕnegdô* and its implications for marital roles. Contemporary scholarship increasingly rejects interpretations that equate "helper" with inferiority, arguing instead that the expression denotes corresponding partnership, mutual dependence, and shared dignity (Agana 90–110; Albrecht and Nass 6). Within the Nigerian context, this debate has acquired practical significance because cultural understandings of patriarchy frequently influence biblical interpretation. Ademiluka argues that marital disharmony often results when patriarchal traditions are mistaken for biblical teaching rather than being evaluated against the broader theological vision of Genesis (13). These studies collectively shift attention from hierarchy to covenant partnership as the dominant theological motif of the creation narrative.

Biblical Theology and Contemporary Marital Outcomes

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship has increasingly examined the relationship between spirituality and marital outcomes. Studies consistently associate shared spiritual practices, covenant consciousness, and spiritual intimacy with stronger marital commitment, greater relationship satisfaction, and healthier family life (Klausli et al. 12; Leavitt et al. 655). Although these studies make important contributions to understanding Christian marriage, they primarily explain marital outcomes through psychological and pastoral frameworks rather than through sustained exegetical engagement with Genesis 2.

Within Nigerian scholarship, researchers have emphasized the importance of biblical principles for addressing contemporary marital challenges. Chukwuma interprets the concepts of "leaving" and "cleaving" as theological foundations for marital stability (5–17), while Akinola argues that Genesis 2 should provide the principal framework for Christian premarital counselling

(14). Similarly, Ogidis highlights covenant perseverance as an essential biblical response to marital instability among Nigerian Christians (60). Although these studies demonstrate the continuing relevance of Scripture for Christian marriage, they generally examine isolated theological themes rather than offering a comprehensive exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23.

The reviewed literature demonstrates broad scholarly agreement that Genesis 2 provides the theological foundation for Christian marriage and that spirituality contributes positively to marital relationships. Nevertheless, two important gaps remain. First, exegetical studies have largely concentrated on lexical, doctrinal, or gender-related questions without systematically relating the theological principles of Genesis 2:18–23 to contemporary marital outcomes. Second, empirical and pastoral studies on marital outcomes rarely integrate their discussions with sustained exegetical analysis of the creation narrative, particularly within the Nigerian Christian context. This study addresses these gaps by bringing biblical exegesis and contemporary theological reflection into a single analytical framework, thereby demonstrating how the theological principles of Genesis 2:18–23 illuminate marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the Biblical Covenant Theory of Marriage, which understands marriage as a sacred covenant established by God rather than a relationship created solely through human agreement. Within biblical theology, a covenant is a solemn and enduring relationship characterized by faithfulness, mutual obligation, and accountability before God. Applied to marriage, the theory maintains that the marital union derives its identity, purpose, and permanence from God's covenantal design rather than from changing social expectations or individual preferences. Consequently, Christian marriage is interpreted as a lifelong relationship founded on companionship, mutual commitment, complementarity, and covenant fidelity.

The Biblical Covenant Theory is particularly appropriate for this study because it aligns directly with the theological emphasis of Genesis 2:18–23. The creation narrative presents God as the initiator of the first marriage, establishing companionship and relational unity as expressions of His divine purpose. The theory therefore provides an interpretive framework for examining the theological principles embedded in the passage and for understanding marriage as a relationship whose meaning is determined by divine revelation rather than by culture or personal autonomy.

An alternative perspective commonly employed in contemporary discussions is the social-contract view of marriage, which regards marriage primarily as a legal or social agreement entered into voluntarily by two individuals and sustained largely by mutual satisfaction or negotiated obligations. While this perspective is useful for explaining the legal and sociological dimensions of marriage, it does not adequately account for the theological claims of Genesis 2:18–23, where marriage is portrayed as God's institution rather than a human construct. Because this study is concerned with God's will for marriage as revealed in Scripture, the social-contract perspective provides only a partial explanatory framework. By contrast, the Biblical Covenant Theory is better suited to interpreting the creation narrative because it recognizes the divine origin, covenantal nature, and enduring purpose of marriage.

The framework also provides a coherent basis for relating biblical theology to contemporary marital outcomes. If marriage is fundamentally covenantal, then companionship, mutual dignity, faithfulness, relational unity, and shared spiritual responsibility are not optional ideals but essential expressions of God's design. Accordingly, the exegetical analysis undertaken in this study interprets Genesis 2:18–23 through the lens of covenant theology in order to examine how these theological principles illuminate contemporary marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians. The Biblical Covenant Theory therefore serves as the principal analytical framework

for explaining the relationship between God's revealed purpose for marriage and the realities of Christian marital life within the Nigerian context.

Empirical Review

Recent empirical research increasingly demonstrates that marital outcomes among Christian couples are shaped by an interaction of spiritual, relational, psychological, and socio-cultural factors. While earlier studies often emphasized communication, personality, or economic conditions, more recent investigations acknowledge that religious commitment and shared spiritual practices contribute significantly to marital satisfaction and stability. International evidence indicates that couples who intentionally cultivate spiritual intimacy and perceive marriage as a sacred covenant generally report stronger attachment, greater commitment, and higher relationship satisfaction (Klausli et al. 16). These findings provide empirical support for the proposition that spirituality remains an important dimension of marital well-being.

Within the Nigerian context, however, empirical evidence reveals that positive marital outcomes depend not only on religious commitment but also on the effective management of interpersonal and contextual challenges. Onyela, Adams, and Odobo, in a study of Christian couples in Kosofe Local Government Area of Lagos State, identified communication breakdown, financial pressures, cultural differences, household responsibilities, and inadequate conflict-management strategies as major causes of marital conflict. The study further showed that unresolved conflicts often weaken marital stability and recommended biblical counselling, effective communication, and professional mediation as essential interventions for sustaining healthy Christian marriages (Onyela, Adams, and Odobo 35).

Similarly, Aderounmu's investigation of Christian couples within the Lagos West Baptist Conference identified sexual intimacy as a critical determinant of marital harmony. The study argues that neglect of sexual intimacy frequently contributes to misunderstanding, emotional distance, and persistent marital conflict despite high levels of religious participation. This finding suggests that healthy Christian marriages require not only spiritual commitment but also responsible attention to relational and emotional needs within the marital covenant (Aderounmu 8).

Beyond conflict management, empirical studies have also examined factors associated with marital satisfaction. Asekun and Alaba found significant relationships between psychosocial variables and marital satisfaction among married couples in Lagos Metropolis, concluding that emotional adjustment, interpersonal understanding, and social support substantially influence marital quality. Their findings demonstrate that stable marriages emerge through the interaction of multiple relational factors rather than through demographic characteristics alone (Asekun and Alaba 12). Likewise, Lomotey's study on faith-based marriages reported that educational mismatch and age differences may influence marital satisfaction when they generate disparities in expectations, communication, and decision-making. Nevertheless, the study maintains that shared religious commitment moderates many of these challenges by strengthening mutual understanding and marital resilience (Lomotey 718).

The increasing influence of digital technology has also attracted empirical attention within Christian marriage research. Ogidiolu and Aderounmu found that excessive social media engagement and technology-related sexual conflicts contribute to distrust, reduced spousal communication, and marital tension among Christian couples in Lagos State. Their findings highlight how emerging technological realities create new pressures on Christian marriages and underscore the need to apply biblical principles to contemporary relational challenges (Ogidiolu and Aderounmu 72).

Collectively, these empirical studies demonstrate that marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians are influenced by spirituality, communication, conflict management, sexual intimacy, psychosocial adjustment, educational compatibility, and emerging digital behaviours. However, the existing literature primarily explains these variables from psychological, counselling, or behavioural perspectives, with comparatively little attention given to the theological principles underlying Christian marriage. Consequently, limited empirical scholarship has integrated these contemporary marital realities with a sustained exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 as the biblical foundation for understanding God's will for marriage. This study addresses that gap by interpreting contemporary marital outcomes through the theological framework established in the creation narrative.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative exegetical research design to examine God's will for marriage through a critical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23. The study relied exclusively on secondary data derived from the biblical text and relevant scholarly literature. The exegetical analysis employed the historical-grammatical method, which involved examining the literary context, historical background, grammatical structure, lexical features, and theological significance of Genesis 2:18–23. Particular attention was given to key Hebrew expressions, especially *ʿēzer kĕnegdô* ("a helper suitable for him"), in order to determine their meanings within the original literary and historical context and their implications for Christian marriage.

The documentary materials comprised 15 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2026 (except for a few seminal works included for historical and theological context) and five major biblical commentaries on Genesis. The literature was identified through systematic searches of Google Scholar, ATLA Religion Database, JSTOR, Scopus-indexed journals, and publishers' online databases using keywords such as Genesis 2:18–23, Christian marriage, God's will for marriage, biblical theology of marriage, marital outcomes, covenant marriage, marital satisfaction, and Nigeria Christian marriage. Only peer-reviewed publications directly related to the theological interpretation of Genesis 2, Christian marriage, or contemporary marital outcomes were included. Publications lacking direct relevance to the study, non-academic materials, conference abstracts without full texts, and duplicate publications were excluded.

The five biblical commentaries were selected purposively because they represent widely recognized and authoritative contributions to evangelical Old Testament scholarship and provide complementary historical, grammatical, literary, and theological interpretations of Genesis. Their sustained engagement with the Hebrew text and their extensive use within contemporary biblical scholarship make them particularly suitable for an exegetical investigation of Genesis 2:18–23. The selected journal articles were likewise chosen because they addressed either the theological dimensions of Christian marriage or empirical issues relating to marital outcomes, with particular attention given to recent Nigerian and African scholarship to ensure contextual relevance.

Data were analysed through thematic theological analysis. Exegetical observations from the biblical text were compared with insights from the selected literature to identify recurring theological themes relating to companionship, covenant, complementarity, mutual dignity, and marital commitment. These themes were subsequently interpreted within the framework of the Biblical Covenant Theory of Marriage to explain how the theological principles embedded in Genesis 2:18–23 illuminate contemporary marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians.

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Analysis and Discussion

Research Question 1: How does the exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 illuminate God's original design for Christian marriage?

The exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 suggests that God's will for Christian marriage is expressed through several interconnected theological principles that collectively define the nature, purpose, and ethical expectations of the marital relationship. Rather than presenting marriage as a cultural innovation, the passage portrays it as a divine institution originating from God's sovereign initiative. Consequently, marriage derives both its legitimacy and its moral obligations from God rather than from societal conventions or individual preferences.

The first theological principle revealed in the passage is divine intentionality. Genesis 2:18 begins with God's declaration, "It is not good that the man should be alone," marking the first instance within the creation narrative where something is described as "not good." The statement is significant because the deficiency identified is relational rather than material. Before human beings recognized loneliness, God Himself identified companionship as an essential component of complete human existence. Wenham (43) argues that this declaration demonstrates God's active concern for human flourishing, indicating that marriage originated from divine wisdom rather than human necessity. Similarly, Hamilton (15) maintains that God's initiative in providing a companion establishes marriage as part of His perfect creation order rather than a social arrangement developed through human experience. It may therefore be deduced that God's will for marriage begins with His intentional provision for human relational fulfilment rather than merely addressing biological or economic needs (Wenham 28; Hamilton 19).

Closely related to divine intentionality is the principle of companionship. The Hebrew expression *ʿēzer kĕnegdô*, commonly translated as "a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18), has generated considerable theological debate. Traditional interpretations have frequently understood "helper" as implying functional subordination. However, lexical and contextual analysis suggests a different conclusion. Albrecht and Nass (10) argue that the term *ʿēzer* is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe God's help toward humanity, thereby conveying strength, indispensable assistance, and support rather than inferiority. Agana (101) similarly contends that the accompanying expression *kĕnegdô* emphasizes correspondence, suitability, and equality between the man and the woman. Consequently, the passage does not depict woman as an assistant created to serve man's interests but as God's provision of an equal covenant partner capable of fulfilling the relational incompleteness identified in verse 18. This interpretation challenges hierarchical readings that have historically influenced some Christian traditions, including sections of the Nigerian Church where patriarchal cultural assumptions have occasionally been merged with biblical interpretation (Ademiluka 8).

A third principle emerging from the passage is complementarity without inequality. The creation of the woman from the man's side (Gen. 2:21–22) carries profound theological symbolism. Classical commentators consistently reject interpretations suggesting superiority or inferiority based on the order of creation. Keil and Delitzsch (14) observe that the woman was neither taken from the man's head to dominate him nor from his feet to be dominated, but from his side to symbolize equality, intimacy, and shared humanity. Mathews (4) similarly argues that the creation narrative establishes ontological equality while recognizing functional complementarity within marriage. The exegetical analysis therefore indicates that God's will does not erase distinctions between husband and wife but frames those distinctions within mutual dignity and reciprocal responsibility. This understanding is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where cultural expressions of patriarchy have sometimes overshadowed the biblical emphasis on partnership and

mutual honour. Ademiluka (12) cautions that marital disharmony frequently arises when cultural authority structures are mistaken for biblical mandates, resulting in relationships characterized by domination rather than covenantal mutuality.

The narrative further reveals the theological principle of divine participation in marriage. Unlike subsequent biblical marriages initiated by families or individuals, the first marriage is directly initiated and officiated by God Himself. The woman is brought to the man by God, emphasizing that marriage originates through divine agency rather than autonomous human decision-making. Walton (81) interprets this action as demonstrating that marriage belongs fundamentally to God's created order and therefore remains accountable to His purposes. Theologically, this implies that God's will extends beyond approving marriage as an institution to actively defining its character and purpose. Such an understanding challenges contemporary tendencies to redefine marriage according to prevailing social values while neglecting its theological foundation.

Another important principle evident in Genesis 2:18–23 is covenantal unity. Adam's declaration, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23), represents more than an expression of admiration; it constitutes a covenantal recognition of shared identity. Wenham (29) understands this declaration as affirming the establishment of a new relational bond distinguished by permanence and solidarity. This interpretation reaches its fullest expression in Genesis 2:24 through the concept of becoming "one flesh," which Chukwuma (9) interprets as requiring both relational attachment between spouses and detachment from competing influences. Although verse 24 lies immediately beyond the primary textual focus of this study, it functions as the inspired theological conclusion of the creation narrative and therefore illuminates the implications of verses 18–23. The analysis consequently suggests that God's will for marriage is directed toward the formation of an exclusive and enduring covenant rather than a temporary association based upon convenience or personal fulfilment.

The analysis also indicates that marriage is fundamentally purposive rather than merely romantic. The creation narrative presents companionship as a divine vocation involving mutual assistance, stewardship, and shared participation in God's creative purposes. This understanding contrasts with contemporary conceptions that frequently reduce marriage to emotional satisfaction or personal compatibility alone. Akinola (7) argues that Genesis 2 provides a theological framework in which companionship, covenant commitment, and shared responsibility remain inseparable elements of Christian marriage. Likewise, Ogidis (63) maintains that biblical marriage should be understood as a covenant of perseverance, requiring sustained faithfulness that transcends changing emotional circumstances. Such interpretations reinforce the theological deduction that God's will calls married couples to pursue covenant fidelity rather than merely individual fulfilment.

Taken together, the exegetical analysis demonstrates that Genesis 2:18–23 presents God's will for Christian marriage through the interrelated principles of divine intentionality, companionship, equality, complementarity, covenantal unity, and shared purpose. These principles collectively provide the theological foundation upon which subsequent biblical teachings on marriage are constructed and offer an important interpretive lens for evaluating contemporary Christian marriages. Within the Nigerian Christian context, where cultural expectations sometimes compete with biblical ideals, the passage invites a renewed understanding of marriage as a divine covenant characterized by mutual dignity, enduring commitment, and faithful obedience to God's original design rather than by patriarchal privilege or cultural expediency.

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Research Question 2: In what ways do the theological themes emerging from Genesis 2:18–23 help explain contemporary marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians?

The theological analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 suggests that the quality of Christian marriage is intrinsically connected to the extent to which God's original design is understood and practised. Although the passage does not directly address contemporary marital challenges, its theological principles provide an enduring framework for interpreting the realities of Christian marriage within the Nigerian context. Rather than functioning merely as an account of the first marriage, Genesis 2 establishes normative principles capable of informing contemporary discussions on marital stability, companionship, commitment, and relational well-being.

One significant deduction arising from the exegetical analysis is that marriages grounded in companionship and mutuality are more consistent with God's original intention than relationships characterized by domination or inequality. Genesis 2:18 identifies companionship as the primary reason for the creation of woman, indicating that marriage is fundamentally relational before it is functional. Contemporary Nigerian studies similarly demonstrate that healthy interpersonal relationships remain central to marital stability. For example, Onyela, Adams, and Odobo's investigation among Christian couples in Lagos State identified communication breakdown, financial pressures, cultural expectations, and ineffective conflict-management strategies as major contributors to marital conflict (40). These findings suggest that marital instability often emerges when relationships depart from the mutual partnership and shared responsibility envisaged in Genesis. Likewise, Ademiluka (18) argues that patriarchal interpretations of biblical texts sometimes reinforce unequal power relations that undermine the covenantal mutuality intended in the creation narrative.

The analysis further suggests that the principle of complementarity promotes cooperation rather than competition within marriage. The creation of woman as *ʿēzer kĕnegdô* signifies correspondence and mutual dependence rather than hierarchical superiority. Albrecht and Nass (12) maintain that the Hebrew expression describes an equal covenant partner whose presence completes the relational purpose of creation. This interpretation challenges marital practices in which gender roles are shaped more by cultural expectations than by biblical theology. Consequently, marriages are more likely to reflect God's intention when husbands and wives recognize one another as equal in dignity while embracing complementary responsibilities within the covenant relationship.

Another important theological implication concerns covenant commitment and marital perseverance. The creation narrative presents marriage as God's initiative rather than a temporary human arrangement. Such a covenantal understanding assumes permanence, faithfulness, and shared responsibility. This perspective remains particularly relevant in light of contemporary marital realities in Nigeria. According to the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2023–24, approximately 10 percent of ever-married Nigerian women aged 15–49 are divorced, separated, or no longer living with their spouses, while experiences of spousal violence remain a significant concern among married women. Although these outcomes cannot be attributed to a single cause, they indicate the continuing challenges confronting family life. Ogidis (46) therefore argues that a stronger understanding of marriage as a covenant of perseverance can strengthen marital resilience, while Oyeniyi (12) maintains that Christ's appeal to Genesis reaffirms God's enduring intention for lifelong marital fidelity.

The creation narrative also highlights the importance of shared spiritual responsibility. Although Genesis 2 does not explicitly prescribe spiritual disciplines within marriage, it portrays marriage as a relationship established within God's presence and ordered according to His purpose.

Contemporary empirical evidence supports the significance of this theological principle. Klausli et al. (14) demonstrate that shared spiritual practices strengthen spiritual intimacy and attachment between spouses. Within the Nigerian context, Lomotey's study of faith-based marriages further indicates that shared religious commitment helps couples navigate challenges associated with educational differences and age disparities by strengthening mutual understanding and commitment (725). Together, these studies suggest that spiritual commitment enhances marital resilience when it is expressed through faithful covenant living rather than merely religious affiliation.

The analysis likewise highlights the continuing relevance of relational unity and responsible boundary-setting. Although Genesis 2:24 extends beyond the immediate textual focus of this study, it provides the theological conclusion to the creation narrative by emphasizing the formation of a new family unit. This principle remains significant in Nigeria, where extended family expectations and communal obligations frequently shape marital relationships. While family support is an important feature of African society, excessive external interference may weaken the independent covenant identity envisaged in Genesis. The findings of Onyela, Adams, and Odobo (24) similarly indicate that unresolved interpersonal tensions and external pressures often contribute to persistent marital conflict among Christian couples.

Furthermore, the theological principles emerging from Genesis challenge contemporary tendencies to evaluate successful marriages primarily in terms of material achievement or social status. Although economic pressures undeniably affect many Nigerian households, empirical evidence suggests that relational quality remains a stronger predictor of marital satisfaction. Asekun and Alaba found that psychosocial factors such as emotional adjustment, interpersonal understanding, and social support significantly influence marital satisfaction among married couples in Lagos. Similarly, Aderounmu's study among Christian couples in the Lagos West Baptist Conference identifies healthy sexual intimacy as an important factor in reducing marital conflict and strengthening marital harmony. These findings reinforce the theological insight that enduring marriages are sustained by faithful relationships rather than by material prosperity alone.

Overall, the analysis indicates that the theological principles of Genesis 2:18–23 remain highly relevant for understanding contemporary marital outcomes among Nigerian Christians. Positive marital outcomes are best understood as the practical expression of marriages shaped by companionship, mutual dignity, covenant commitment, relational unity, and shared spiritual responsibility. Conversely, many of the marital challenges evident within contemporary Nigerian society, including conflict, relational breakdown, and weakened commitment, may be interpreted as reflecting tensions between God's covenantal design and prevailing cultural, economic, and interpersonal pressures. Genesis 2:18–23 therefore continues to provide a robust theological framework for evaluating and strengthening Christian marriage within the Nigerian context.

Research Question 3: To what extent can the theological principles of Genesis 2:18–23 provide a biblical framework for strengthening Christian marriages in Nigeria?

The exegetical analysis of Genesis 2:18–23 provides several theological implications that may contribute to promoting healthier Christian marriages within the Nigerian context. These implications emerge not as new doctrinal formulations but as practical expressions of God's original intention for marriage as revealed in the creation narrative. They offer a biblical framework through which churches, Christian families, and marriage ministries may evaluate and strengthen contemporary marital relationships.

A primary implication is the need to re-establish marriage as a divine covenant rather than merely a cultural institution. The creation narrative consistently portrays God as the initiator of

marriage, thereby indicating that its meaning and purpose originate from divine revelation rather than societal expectations. Within many Nigerian communities, marriage is often influenced by cultural traditions, extended family interests, economic considerations, and communal expectations. While these cultural realities may contribute positively to family life, the theological analysis suggests that they should remain subordinate to God's revealed design for marriage. Ogidis (61) argues that understanding marriage primarily as a covenant of lifelong faithfulness rather than a social arrangement strengthens perseverance during periods of marital difficulty. Consequently, churches may need to place greater emphasis on covenant theology in marital teaching and discipleship.

A second implication concerns the promotion of mutual dignity and partnership between spouses. The analysis of *ʿēzer kĕnegdô* indicates that woman was created as a corresponding partner rather than a subordinate assistant. This interpretation challenges cultural attitudes that equate biblical headship with domination or unequal human worth. Ademiluka (7) argues that many marital conflicts among Nigerian Christians arise from patriarchal interpretations that obscure the biblical emphasis on reciprocity and sacrificial responsibility. Similarly, Albrecht and Nass (6) demonstrate that the creation account affirms equality of personhood while recognizing complementary responsibilities within marriage. It may therefore be deduced that healthier Christian marriages are likely to flourish where husbands and wives consciously relate to one another as equal covenant partners who share mutual honour, responsibility, and accountability before God.

The passage also underscores the importance of intentional companionship and relational presence. God's declaration that "it is not good that the man should be alone" identifies companionship as the foundational purpose of marriage before issues of procreation, social organization, or economic partnership are introduced. This theological priority carries important implications for contemporary Christian families in Nigeria, where occupational demands, migration, financial pressures, and ministry responsibilities may reduce opportunities for meaningful spousal interaction. The analysis suggests that cultivating companionship through communication, emotional support, and shared life is not merely beneficial for marriage but reflects God's original intention in creation. Recent studies by Klausli et al. (16) and Leavitt et al. (635-640) further indicate that shared spiritual practices and relational intimacy reinforce commitment and strengthen marital relationships, observations that are broadly consistent with the theological vision of Genesis.

Another important implication concerns biblically grounded premarital and marital counselling. The theological principles emerging from Genesis 2 provide an essential foundation for preparing Christian couples for marriage. Rather than concentrating primarily on wedding ceremonies or cultural expectations, premarital instruction may benefit from greater emphasis on covenant commitment, mutual responsibility, companionship, and shared spiritual purpose. Akinola (14) contends that Genesis 2 constitutes the primary theological framework upon which effective Christian premarital counselling should be constructed. Likewise, Chukwuma's interpretation of "leaving" and "cleaving" highlights the necessity of helping prospective couples establish appropriate relational boundaries while cultivating enduring commitment to one another. Such biblical formation may better prepare couples to navigate the complex realities of contemporary marriage (17).

The analysis further implies that biblical interpretation within the Church requires continual theological reflection. Some marital challenges experienced by Nigerian Christians appear to arise not from rejection of Scripture but from selective or culturally conditioned

interpretations of biblical texts. Genesis 2:18–23 invites the Church to interpret marriage through the broader theological themes of companionship, covenant, equality, and shared purpose rather than through isolated proof texts. This interpretive approach may assist pastors and church leaders in addressing issues such as marital conflict, domestic abuse, and gender relations with greater biblical balance and theological integrity.

Finally, the passage suggests that promoting healthier Christian marriages requires a renewed commitment to God's original design as the normative standard for marital life. While contemporary Nigerian marriages are shaped by diverse social, economic, and cultural realities, Genesis 2:18–23 continues to present a theological vision that transcends changing contexts. The analysis therefore implies that lasting marital health is less dependent upon conformity to cultural expectations than upon sustained faithfulness to God's revealed purposes of companionship, covenant commitment, mutual dignity, complementarity, and shared spiritual responsibility. These principles remain relevant for contemporary Christian marriages because they originate not from human tradition but from the Creator's intention at the beginning of human history.

Conclusion

This exegetical study has shown that Genesis 2:18–23 should not be read merely as a historical account of the origin of marriage but as the primary theological paradigm through which Christian marriage is to be understood and evaluated. The significance of the passage lies less in its description of the first human relationship than in its enduring revelation of God's intention that marriage should embody companionship, mutual dignity, covenant faithfulness, complementarity, and shared responsibility. A major insight emerging from this study is that many of the challenges confronting Christian marriages in Nigeria are not simply social or economic problems but also theological ones. When cultural expectations, patriarchal assumptions, or contemporary individualistic values redefine marriage independently of the biblical witness, the covenantal vision presented in Genesis becomes weakened. Consequently, the study argues that meaningful responses to marital instability within the Nigerian Church require not only pastoral or counselling interventions but also a renewed theological understanding of marriage grounded in Scripture. By bringing biblical exegesis into dialogue with contemporary theological and empirical scholarship, this study demonstrates that Genesis 2:18–23 remains a living theological resource for interpreting present-day marital realities. Its enduring relevance lies in providing a biblical standard against which Christian marriages may be examined, nurtured, and strengthened. The study therefore concludes that the most sustainable path towards healthier Christian marriages in Nigeria is not the adaptation of Scripture to changing cultural expectations, but the continual reorientation of marital life towards God's original covenantal design revealed in the creation narrative.

Recommendations

1. Churches should review the biblical content of their marriage preparation programmes to reflect the theological principles identified in Genesis 2:18–23. Since this study demonstrates that companionship, mutual dignity, complementarity, and covenant commitment constitute God's original design for marriage, premarital instruction should include systematic teaching on these themes rather than focusing primarily on wedding ceremonies or marital roles. This will help prospective couples develop a biblical understanding of marriage before entering the covenant.
2. Church leaders and Christian counsellors should intentionally address cultural interpretations that conflict with the exegetical meaning of Genesis 2:18–23. The study shows that marital disharmony may arise when patriarchal traditions are presented as biblical mandates rather than cultural practices. Counselling and discipleship ministries

should therefore distinguish clearly between biblical teaching and cultural expectations by emphasizing the mutual partnership and shared dignity reflected in the creation narrative.

3. Christian couples should cultivate covenant-centred marital practices that reinforce the theological principles identified in this study. Since the analysis indicates that shared spiritual responsibility, covenant fidelity, and relational unity are central to God's will for marriage, couples should intentionally strengthen these values through regular prayer, joint Bible study, open communication, mutual decision-making, and responsible management of external family influences. Such practices provide practical expressions of the covenant relationship established in Genesis 2:18–23 and contribute to healthier Christian marriages within the Nigerian context.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Future scholarship should further explore how biblical teachings on marriage can be faithfully interpreted and applied to contemporary marital challenges while remaining sensitive to the cultural realities of Nigerian Christian communities.

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