

**Marriage and Divorce**  
**Matthew 19:1—9**

At the end of Chapter 17 Jesus announce His upcoming death by the hands of the leadership of Israel. This is the second recorded instance of Jesus telling His Disciples that He was going to die. The first time He did so was in Matthew 16 and the Disciples immediately denied that this would happen. The Disciples greeted the second announcement of His death with sadness. They were coming to the realization that their Messiah was going to die, although they didn't fully understand what He was telling them.

Jesus finishes Chapter 18 speaking of forgiveness. When Peter asks how many times forgiveness should be offered to an offender Jesus tells him 490 times (70 x 7) which relates to how many years God has offered forgiveness to Israel in accordance with Daniel's prophecy. At the end of the 490 years the Tribulation is scheduled to commence signaling the end of the offer of forgiveness to Israel.

Chapter 19 begins with a taunt by the Pharisees. The Pharisees hate Jesus because they see Him as usurping their authority (Matthew 12:14; John 11:48). Their goal at best is to discredit Him in front of the people and ideally permanently take care of the problem by killing Him as a blasphemer. The Pharisees think they can make Jesus appear foolish by tricking Him with a question about divorce. First, some background.

**Origin of Marriage**

God instituted marriage right after Eve was formed from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:22—24). Here we see God setting the rules of marriage to be between a man and a woman and it is strongly implied that they should remain as husband and wife for the entirety of their lives. Jesus quotes this verse in Matthew as He reiterates the rules of marriage. He adds that whatever God has joined together let no man separate making it clear that marriage is to be for life.

As always, man has taken something good and twisted it for his own purpose. We are seeing the corruption of a God-instituted union and the destruction of the family by godless men who use a corrupt wisdom to allow men to marry men and women to marry women. Since their hearts are evil it is impossible for them to make God-honoring decisions. Unfortunately, this is normal behavior and it should not shock us when godless people act according to their evil hearts. We need to be separate from the world while being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. If your life does not contrast with the world then you are lacking spiritually and need to give the Lord control (Romans 1:28—30; Ephesians 5:15—17).

**Marriage in Israel**

The first step to becoming married in Israel was the betrothal. We think of this today as the engagement period but it was actually closer to a binding contract that would normally lead to marriage. The couple was legally bound to be married. The couple was considered to be married at the end of the betrothal period (During the time of Jesus the betrothal period was around one year long). There was no special ceremony performed at the end of the betrothal period however, the event was often observed with a celebration followed by a feast.

**Divorce in Israel**

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), but in His mercy He has allowed the husband to divorce his wife instead of living with a person that can't be tolerated. There seems to be two steps in the divorce process (Matthew 5:31). The first is when the man sends his wife away. This can be compared to being separated today. The second is the actual divorce when a certificate of divorce is drawn up legally spitting the husband and wife. If the wife marries another man she is never to go back and marry the first husband (Deuteronomy 24:1—4).

## Biblical Example

Mary and Joseph exemplify how the system of marriage worked. Their betrothal was a binding promise of marriage. Before they were officially married, Mary was found to be pregnant with Jesus. Since it appeared that she was unfaithful, Joseph had the legal right to send her away and give her a certificate of divorce. (Matthew 1:18—24)

## Marriage as a Picture

God deals with Israel in accordance with the Mosaic law. God and Israel were betrothed to be married but since Israel played the harlot and had a relationship with gods from the nations around her, God put her away and issued a certificate of divorce (Jeremiah 3:1—10). The northern 10 tribes (Israel) was the first to be punished for her sins of loving other gods. God divorced her and had the Assyrians carry her out of the Promised Land (740 B.C.). This was an example to Judah (lower two tribes). Judah continued to worship other gods until God used the Babylonians to pour His judgment upon them beginning around 597 B.C.

Notice that God sent her away then gave her a certificate of divorce (Jeremiah 3:8). This left her free to go to another god of their choice. Instead of marrying another god (by worshipping only that god) Israel worshipped many gods, never staying true to any one god. If Israel had chosen one other god as their god then she would not have been able to go back to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and God would not be able to remarry Israel because that went against the Law (Deuteronomy 24:1—4). Hosea speaks of this time of divorce when Israel is called “Not My people” (Hosea 1:10). God will once again call Israel “My People” after He purifies Israel through the Tribulation (Zechariah 13:9) and takes the righteous remnant into the Kingdom to celebrate His marriage to her with a great feast called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7—9). Israel is the bride and Christ is the Bridegroom. The Church is never called the bride but is compared to a bride. (Ephesians 5:22—24; 2 Corinthians 11:2).

## Divorce Today

In this day of Grace the biblical rules of divorce are very similar. God still hates divorce because it breaks the picture of His relationship with Israel and His relationship with the Church, the Body of Christ. Marriage was designed to be everlasting. God also intended for families to remain as a unit and not split up through divorce. Satan seems very adept at breaking families apart.

Most of what Paul wrote about divorce is found in 1 Corinthians 7 when he addresses those who are married beginning in verse 10.

**1 Corinthians 7:10** <sup>10</sup>And unto the married I command, *yet* not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from *her* husband: <sup>11</sup> but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to *her* husband: and let not the husband put away *his* wife.

Notice the phrase “put away.” This is the same Greek work used for depart. A number of translations use divorce instead of put away. It literally means to leave and the idea of divorce (as we know it) must be inferred from the context. I believe this verse is written concerning a woman who leaves her husband without an official divorce. Verse 11 seems to indicate that the woman should not remarry thereby making this verse about divorce. However, this same verse speaks of reconciliation with her husband implying they were never divorce but just separated.

I believe verse 27 does speak of divorce. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to remain in whatever position they find themselves after becoming saved. If you are a slave then stay a slave unless the opportunity to become free is presented. If you are a virgin then don't seek to become married, if you are married then don't seek to be divorced and if you are divorce don't seek to become married. Paul immediately follows his instruction in verse 28 saying that if you marry then you have not sinned. I believe this pertains to both the virgin and the divorced person.

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