

Divorce and the Bible

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All scriptures are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.

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I welcome insights and comments on this topic from a Biblical perspective.
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Abstract

This paper reviews the relevant scriptures concerning the topic of divorce in order to gain an understanding of God's will for those who are divorced and for those who are remarried after a divorce. Relevant passages from the Holy Scriptures will be discussed in the general order in which they appear in the Christian Bible and are included in the text of this paper for rapid and easy reference. The New King James Version is was chosen for the English text of the Bible.

Introduction

Divorce is currently rampant in the United States of America. In 2018 the number of divorces was approximately 44.2% of the total number of marriages for the same year¹. Traditionally the Church has stood strongly against divorce and especially against remarriage after divorce. Amongst Protestant² churches there has been a trend towards allowing divorce and remarriage in more and more circumstances. This is especially manifest in a new and very broad view of the concept of 'Abandonment', which several churches have adopted by trying to make 1st Corinthians 7:15 say something that text simply does not say.

For those who wish to understand God's will in the matter of marriage and divorce, particularly as found in the Holy Scriptures, diligent study is not as important as simple child-like faith in the words of the Savior as found in Matthew 19:1ff. Or even more simply in Malachi 2:16:

"For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce..."

God hates not only divorce, but every evil that leads up to the desire to divorce and every evil side effect of divorce.

As humans, we tend to speak of the "guilty party" in a divorce - the adulterer or the abusive or neglectful spouse. The reality however is that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). In today's world, the mantra "all that matters is my happiness" is a destructive attitude unlike anything that has come before. It is this sinful attitude that leads to divorce. The Holy Spirit and the Scriptures both testify that

¹ In the U.S.A. in 2018 there were 2,132,853 marriages and a reported 782,038 divorces and annulments. This would seem to indicate that the number of divorces in 2018 was 36.6% of the number of marriages. However California, Hawaii, Indiana, Minnesota, and New Mexico don't report divorce statistics to the CDC. Since the divorce rate averages 2.9 per 1000 humans in other states, we can extrapolate the necessary data to an approximate number: The population of those five states in 2018 was: California: 39,557,045. Hawaii: 1,420,491. Indiana: 6,691,878. Minnesota: 5,611,179 and New Mexico: 2,095,428. Or a total of 55,376,021 humans. Thus an approximate additional 160,590 divorces went unreported, bringing the total divorces for the year 2018 to 942,628. Thus the number of divorces in 2018 was 44.2% of the total number of marriages for 2018.

Source of raw data for population by state: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2018/pop-estimates-national-state.html>
downloadable here: <http://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2010-2018/national/totals/nst-est2018-01.xlsx?#>

Source for marriage and divorce stats: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/national-marriage-divorce-rates-00-18.pdf>

² The official stance of Roman Catholicism is still fairly strong against divorce and remarriage, however in many instances, practicing Roman Catholics circumvent this by misusing the rules for nullifying a marriage. For the Vatican's stance see: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P87.HTM

man should first to seek to glorify God and then also to love his fellowman as himself. This Christian view is opposed to the primacy of seeking ones own happiness.

Relevant Scriptures Discussed

Genesis 2:18-25 - One Flesh

And the LORD God said, "[It is] not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." 19 Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought [them] to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that [was] its name. 20 So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. 22 Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. 23 And Adam said: "This [is] now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

We see here God's design for marriage – a man and woman come together sexually and are thereby 'one flesh'. Jesus stated, "what God has joined together, let no man separate" (see Matt. 19 below). It is important to note that sex alone is implied without any mention of a marriage ceremony or taking vows. Adam and Eve had no one conducting a marriage ceremony and had no marriage certificate. They simply became 'one flesh'.³ The original intention was that sex and the status of being married would be synonymous. Only because of sin did the words 'sex' and 'marriage' come to have such separate contexts and meanings. This is not to say that the whole of marriage consists of sex but rather the state of being married was and is intended to be qualified by the act of sex and that intercourse would initiate a marriage. This is why a wedding must be consummated and also why homosexual activity can never constitute marriage.⁴

³ Similarly, Abraham and Sarah did not seem to have a marriage ceremony (Gen. 20:12), nor did Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 24:67). Also the Benjamites who lacked wives simply grabbed girls who were dancing at one of the festivals and hauled them off to be their wives (Judges 21:16ff). Likewise, David took at least two wives for himself while he was hiding from king Saul and probably did not have a ceremony for either. However, feasting did become associated with marriage, as can be seen from Jacob's marriage to Leah (Gen. 29:22) and Samson's marriage to the Philistine girl (Judges 14:10) and from Jesus' parables (e.g. Matt 22:1ff) along with the wedding in Cana that Jesus attended (John 2:1ff).

⁴ Civil unions are wrong because they are used to give marriage rights to those who are not Biblically united in marriage. For example: the adoption of children and the right to engage in sexual activity.

By the time of Moses, betrothal was considered as serious as marriage, thus indicating that by then, a covenant relationship had become part of the marriage process. See discussion below on betrothal.

Exodus 21:2-11 - Slave marriage and divorce

If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. 3 If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. 5 But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' 6 then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever. 7 And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. 8 If she does not please her master, who has betrothed⁵ her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. 9 And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. 10 If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. 11 And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money.

This passage deals with two types of situations. The first is the indentured male servant who is given a slave wife by his master. The second is the female slave that is made to be a concubine. It is important to understand that in the Torah, Hebrew males could only serve as slaves for six years (v.2)⁶, but Hebrew females could be made slaves forever if they are taken as concubines (v.7). If a Hebrew female slave was not taken as a concubine, then she would be set free in the seventh year just like her male counterpart (see Deut. 15:12 and Jeremiah 34:8ff).

⁵ or “has not betrothed” the Hebrew word לֹא is translated as though it were לוּ . But the text may actually be referring to a master who was planning to take the slave as a concubine but decided not to do so for some reason. In other words the Master did not have sex with her and thus could not keep her as a slave for life and had to allow her to be redeemed before her normal six years was complete.

The word translated here as “betrothed” is actually “appointed” or “designated” (Hebrew root: יָעַד) and is not the same as that used in Lev. 19:20 (נִחְרַפְתָּ) or in Deut. 22:25 (הַמְאֲרָשָׁה). The nuanced differences between these Hebrew words is a topic for further study. However in this passage, the fact that she may be “redeemed” rather than just going out free, indicates that the master acquired her with the intention of making her a concubine, but then decided not to before having sex with her.

⁶ In contrast to this passage and the parallel passage in Deuteronomy 15:12, the male slave was to serve until the year of Jubilee according to Leviticus 25:39ff. One explanation is that in Leviticus, the man sold himself into slavery, whereas in the other passages, he is sold into slavery by another. Notice also there is no discussion in the Leviticus passage of the wife or children staying with the master, but rather they go free as well.

In the first situation the male indentured servant must choose between freedom and family life. The situation for men is no different today!

It is unclear in this passage if the indentured servant was forced to enter into the marriage⁷ or if he had a choice in the matter. Also it may be that he would maintain visitation rights to his wife, even if he chose freedom. As a free man, he might have the option of buying his wife out of slavery, if her master was willing to sell.

In the second situation a female slave is chosen by her master to be a concubine either for himself or for one of his sons. A concubine in the Bible is a slave-wife, and the taking of concubines was very common by those men who could afford slaves. The reason the concubine was to be a lifelong slave was because she had become “one-flesh” with her master. If her master did not provide her marital rights, then she was set free from both the marriage and the slavery. This rule was not intended to provide a pathway to divorce but rather to protect the female slave from being trapped in lifelong slavery due to one night of sex with her owner. It is true, the female slave (concubine) did not have the power to refuse her master taking her sexually, but the master was to treat her as a wife and not as a whore.

Notice that verse 10 regulates a polygyny⁸ situation. Further regulations regarding polygyny are encountered in the Torah. The modern Western reader may have a knee-jerk reaction to the Bible’s allowances for having multiple wives, but to fully understand the Biblical view of divorce, one must accept that the Bible accepts and regulates polygyny. This is not to say that having multiple wives is recommended either by the Bible or by science, but simply that, like slavery, the Bible’s rules are built around the reality of the option of polygyny. Arguments can be made from both the Bible and from science to oppose polygamy. For example, the number of male to female births is almost exactly 50/50, which means that if one man has two wives another man gets no wife. Additionally, back in Genesis 2:24, the ‘two’ become ‘one flesh’ and a man is joined to his ‘wife’ not to his ‘wives’. However due to wars, the male population would often be smaller than the female population and polygyny was the appropriate way to address the excess number of females.

Exodus 22:16-17 - Premarital sex

If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her *to be* his wife. 17 If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.

⁷ This raises the question as to whether the Israelites were breeding slaves. It is clear that the children would be at least 1/2 genetically Jewish but were still slaves in perpetuity since they were born in slavery. But slavery in the Bible is a topic for a different study, as is the study of what makes a Jew and is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁸ Polygyny is the term for having multiple wives. Polygyny was common in the ancient world. Very, very rarely was Polyandry practiced (having multiple husbands). The term Polygamy refers to both practices, but is generally used to refer to only Polygyny since Polyandry has been so rare.

Here the principle of 'one flesh' can only be over-ridden by the girl's father. The man who took her virginity⁹ had to marry her.¹⁰

Deuteronomy 22:13-29 - The Non-Virgin

If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, 14 and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, 'I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she was not a virgin,' 15 then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out the evidence of the young woman's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. 16 And the young woman's father shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man as wife, and he detests her. 17 Now he has charged her with shameful conduct, saying, "I found your daughter was not a virgin," and yet these are the evidences of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. 18 Then the elders of that city shall take that man and punish him; 19 and they shall fine him one hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days. 20 But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, 21 then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house. So you shall put away the evil from among you. 22 If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die--the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel. 23 If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, 24 then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor's wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you. 25 But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. 26 But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter. 27 For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her. 28 If a man finds a young

⁹ The NKJV properly translates the word בְּתוּלָה as "virgin". The KJV translates the word as "maid", which does not carry the correct connotation in 21st century English.

¹⁰ the phrase "he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife" consists of doubling the verb מָהַר which verb is used everywhere else in the sense of "quickness". However, here it is a different verb which is connected to the noun for "Dowry" used in the very next verse and also at Genesis 34:12 and 1st Samuel 18:25.

The parallel passage in Deuteronomy 22:29 seems to indicate that the price for a bride was 50 shekels (see note in text below), however Gen. 34:12 seems to indicate that negotiations were possible.

woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, 29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's father fifty shekels of silver¹¹, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.

Several principles are found in these verses.

1. A woman was expected to be a virgin on her wedding day.
2. The penalty for harlotry was death.
3. The penalty for rape of a married or betrothed woman was death.
4. The penalty for adultery was death.
5. Betrothal was on par with marriage regarding penalties.
6. The man who had sex with a virgin was forced to keep her as his wife.

In the Law of Moses, a man was required to marry the girl whose virginity he took, whether she gave it willingly or perhaps even under compulsion. The law did not allow the man to divorce her. This is completely in accordance with the “one-flesh” principle discussed above. Compare the parallel passage at Exodus 22:16-17.

These passages deal with an un-betrothed woman, since according to the law of Moses, marriage started at betrothal. We know that this strong view of betrothal lasted at least until the 1st century BC, for Jesus’ step father, Jacob, was considering divorce in the case of pregnant Mary. They were only betrothed, but betrothal had the same protections as marriage.

In Exodus 22:16-17, the man seems to seduce the woman, but here in Deuteronomy, he seems to more forcefully take her. However it is unclear in this passage if the girl was willing or unwilling. The statement “and they are found out” implies that this was not a case of rape. Compare the story of Dinah and Shechem in Genesis 34:1ff. Either way, the man was bound for life to the girl whose virginity he took.

Deuteronomy 24:1-5 - Certificate of Divorce

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts [it] in her hand, and sends her out of his house,

¹¹ 50 shekels of silver may have been a common price for brides or perhaps was a penalty price for the man’s behavior. The highest valued person in Leviticus chapter 27 is the adult male at 50 shekels (Lev. 27:3). Hosea bought his wife for 15 shekels plus some wheat (Hosea 3:2). By comparison, slaves were valued at 30 shekels in Exodus 21:32, and Joseph was sold as a slave for 20 shekels (Gen. 37:28) which corresponds to the value listed for someone of his age at Leviticus 27:5. Elsewhere we see that the price of a bride varied. For example, David paid Saul in Philistine foreskins (1st Samuel 18:25) and Shechem was willing to negotiate a high price for Dinah (Gen. 34:12). Also, Jacob served Laban for 7 years for Rachel (Gen. 29:20) and 7 years for Leah (Gen. 29:27). Jacob served as an indentured servant and the maximum value of an indentured servant was 50 shekels (Lev. 27:3. Note that Jacob was likely over 60, but still in his prime because of the longer life spans of the ancients) - which coincides with the bride price in this verse.

2 "when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's [wife], 3 "[if] the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts [it] in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, 4 "[then] her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that [is] an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you [as] an inheritance. 5 "When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.

Jesus acknowledged that Moses wrote this passage regulating divorce. However Jesus showed logically that divorce was not God's intention from the beginning of creation (Matt. 19:4ff - discussed below).

This passage also shows that to divorce one's wife, knowing full well she may remarry and have sex with another man and then to take her back is an abomination. This passage is referred to in Jeremiah 3:1. This is also where Jesus' words "he causes her to commit adultery" apply. This is basically the sin of 'wife swapping' or 'swinging'.

The term "uncleanness" - ערות דבר - does not refer to discovering that she was not a virgin, for in Deut. 22 the penalty is death and not divorce. The word ערות is elsewhere consistently translated as "nakedness" or similar. In other words, when her new husband got her naked, he found something he didn't expect. This may refer to some type of vaginal abnormality or other undesirable aspect that was only discovered after undressing.

In this passage, Moses is very careful to never call the second man her "husband". The NKJV twice wrongly translates v 3 by using the phrase "later husband" to translate האחרון which is literally "the latter man". In the Hebrew text, only her original

husband is referred to by the term “husband” - בעל.¹² The ESV does a much better job here:

“...and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife,...”

It is important to note that Moses is only regulating the reality of divorce and in no way is he endorsing divorce. Moses also specifically avoids endorsing the second relationship as a marriage.

1 Samuel 25:2-44 - David and Nabal and Abigail

Now [there was] a man in Maon whose business [was] in Carmel, and the man [was] very rich. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. 3 The name of the man [was] Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. And [she was] a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance; but the man [was] harsh and evil in [his] doings. He [was of the house of] Caleb. 4 When David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep, 5 David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. 6 "And thus you shall say to him who lives [in prosperity]: 'Peace [be] to you, peace to your house, and peace to all that you have! 7 'Now I have heard that you have shearers. Your shepherds were with us, and we did not hurt them, nor was there anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. 8 'Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let [my] young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever comes to your hand to your servants and to your son David.' " 9 So when David's young men came, they

¹² compare בעל האיש האחרון in verse three to בעל הראשון - the “latter man” verses “her first husband”. It is true that איש can also be translated as husband, particularly when the possessive suffix is added: אישה (“her man” aka “her husband”), but the suffix is never added in these verses to the latter man, only to the first and true husband.

It is also true that the phrase אָשֶׁר־לָקַחָהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה indicates that the second man took her as his wife, as does the fact that he might also issue her a divorcement paper. However those facts do not make the marriage legitimate. For example, see Genesis 20:3, where Abimelech “took” Sarah and was rebuked by God in a dream. God told Abimelech he was a “dead man” because Sarah already had a husband בעל. Similarly, we read concerning David and Bathsheba in 2nd Samuel 12:10 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus the phrase “to take as a wife” does not indicate legitimate sexual relations or legitimate marriage, for Uriah was still alive and married to Bathsheba when David took her to be his ‘wife’. The phrase simply refers to David’s act of adultery (and not his latter marriage to Bathsheba), by which he became ‘one flesh’ with Bathsheba while her husband was still alive.

Regarding the term בעל see also Gen. 14:13 where several men are “allies with Abram” וְהֵם בְּעָלֵי בְרִית־אַבְרָם - this is the first use of בעל in the Bible and indicates how the word is used to indicate someone bound in a covenant with someone else. The word Baal בעל is best translated as ‘master’ - These men were ‘masters of a covenant with Abram’. Elsewhere men can be masters of a city, of a house, or of a skill such as archery or even of possessing much hair (2nd Kings 1:8) or wings (Prov. 1:17). The term is also used of the pagan deity, Baal.

spoke to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David, and waited. 10 Then Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who [is] David, and who [is] the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. 11 "Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give [it] to men when I do not know where they [are] from?" 12 So David's young men turned on their heels and went back; and they came and told him all these words. 13 Then David said to his men, "Every man gird on his sword." So every man girded on his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David, and two hundred stayed with the supplies. 14 Now one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master; and he reviled them. 15 "But the men [were] very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields. 16 "They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep. 17 "Now therefore, know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his household. For he [is such] a scoundrel that [one] cannot speak to him." 18 Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred [loaves] of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted [grain], one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded [them] on donkeys. 19 And she said to her servants, "Go on before me; see, I am coming after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. 20 So it was, [as] she rode on the donkey, that she went down under cover of the hill; and there were David and his men, coming down toward her, and she met them. 21 Now David had said, "Surely in vain I have protected all that this [fellow] has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that [belongs] to him. And he has repaid me evil for good. 22 "May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who [belong] to him by morning light." 23 Now when Abigail saw David, she dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground. 24 So she fell at his feet and said: "On me, my lord, [on] me [let] this iniquity [be]! And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. 25 "Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name [is], so [is] he: Nabal [is] his name, and folly [is] with him! But I, your maidservant, did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. 26 "Now therefore, my lord, [as] the LORD lives and [as] your soul lives, since the LORD has held you back from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now then, let your enemies and those who seek harm for my lord be as Nabal. 27 "And now this present which your maidservant has brought to my lord, let it be given to the young men who follow my lord. 28 "Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant. For the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord fights the battles of the LORD, and evil is not found in you throughout your days. 29 "Yet a man has risen to pursue you and seek your life, but the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; and the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, [as from] the pocket of a sling. 30 "And it shall come to pass, when the LORD

has done for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, 31 "that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. But when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant." 32 Then David said to Abigail: "Blessed [is] the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! 33 "And blessed [is] your advice and blessed [are] you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand. 34 "For indeed, [as] the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!" 35 So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person." 36 Now Abigail went to Nabal, and there he was, holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart [was] merry within him, for he [was] very drunk; therefore she told him nothing, little or much, until morning light. 37 So it was, in the morning, when the wine had gone from Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became [like] a stone. 38 Then it happened, [after] about ten days, that the LORD struck Nabal, and he died. 39 So when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed [be] the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept His servant from evil! For the LORD has returned the wickedness of Nabal on his own head." And David sent and proposed to Abigail, to take her as his wife. 40 When the servants of David had come to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her saying, "David sent us to you, to ask you to become his wife." 41 Then she arose, bowed her face to the earth, and said, "Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." 42 So Abigail rose in haste and rode on a donkey, attended by five of her maidens; and she followed the messengers of David, and became his wife. 43 David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and so both of them were his wives. 44 But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who [was] from Gallim.

In today's society, wicked people would have encouraged Abigail to leave her cruel and unpleasant husband. Modern, unfaithful churches would have allowed her to divorce under the unbiblical concept of emotional abandonment. However this noble and wise woman was committed to her husband and to his well-being for life. She literally saved her husband, Nabal, and his entire household by her wisdom.

Righteous David did not propose to her, flirt with her or take her as his wife until her foolish husband was dead. According to the Bible, any woman who leaves her first husband and marries another man is an adulterous. See for example Romans 7:1-3, discussed below. Any church that allows a woman to divorce and remarry participates in her adultery.

2nd Samuel 3:13-16 - David takes Michal back

And [David] said, "Good, I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you: you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face." 14 So David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give [me] my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." 15 And Ishbosheth sent and took her from [her] husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. 16 Then her husband went along with her to Bahurim, weeping behind her. So Abner said to him, "Go, return!" And he returned.

Previously, King Saul had given his daughter Michal to David for a wife (1 Sam. 18:27). But later, when Saul had caused David to flee and become an outlaw, Saul gave Michal to Paltiel (1st Samuel 25:44).

Perhaps Saul justified giving Michal to a second husband because Saul was intending to kill David, or because David had left Michal behind when he fled. However, when David became king, he took her back from her second husband. The divorce granted by an unjust government, did not override David's right as her husband. David never gave her a certificate of divorce. Her new marriage was not valid and was only adultery, albeit perhaps in ignorance, especially on the part of her new husband. Thus it was annulled. Paltiel may have been liable to death, but found mercy, possibly because David did not wish to punish anyone for something allowed under the previous monarchy.¹³

In this passage we see a few principles found in other Biblical passages. The first is that fathers have the sole right to give their daughters in marriage. Second, only husbands are allowed to divorce, for Michal was not allowed to divorce David. Even though Michal had been given by her father to a new husband, that marriage was not legitimate, for David had never divorced her. The government has no right to override God's word, nor does anyone else. Biblically, only the husband has the right to give a certificate of divorce. (This is discussed further below).

2nd Samuel 11:1 - David, Bathsheba and Uriah

2 Samuel 11:1-27 - It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out [to battle], that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 2 Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman [was] very beautiful to behold. 3 So David sent and inquired about the woman. And [someone] said, "[Is] this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she

¹³ David was known to consistently support Saul's authority as king, even when Saul was trying to kill David. Saul was God's messiah and David respected that. The side benefit was that David was setting his own kingship up for success by establishing respect for the throne.

was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. 5 And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I [am] with child." 6 Then David sent to Joab, [saying], "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7 When Uriah had come to him, David asked how Joab was doing, and how the people were doing, and how the war prospered. 8 And David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah departed from the king's house, and a gift [of food] from the king followed him. 9 But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. 10 So when they told David, saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Did you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" 11 And Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? [As] you live, and [as] your soul lives, I will not do this thing." 12 Then David said to Uriah, "Wait here today also, and tomorrow I will let you depart." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. 13 Now when David called him, he ate and drank before him; and he made him drunk. And at evening he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house. 14 In the morning it happened that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent [it] by the hand of Uriah. 15 And he wrote in the letter, saying, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die." 16 So it was, while Joab besieged the city, that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew there [were] valiant men. 17 Then the men of the city came out and fought with Joab. And [some] of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite died also. 18 Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war, 19 and charged the messenger, saying, "When you have finished telling the matters of the war to the king, 20 "if it happens that the king's wrath rises, and he says to you: 'Why did you approach so near to the city when you fought? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? 21 'Who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you go near the wall?'--then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.' " 22 So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent by him. 23 And the messenger said to David, "Surely the men prevailed against us and came out to us in the field; then we drove them back as far as the entrance of the gate. 24 "The archers shot from the wall at your servants; and [some] of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also." 25 Then David said to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab: 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another. Strengthen your attack against the city, and overthrow it.' So encourage him." 26 When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. 27 And when her mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

In this passage, it is clear that David sinned by committing adultery, after which he tried to cover his tracks and lastly he used the enemy to kill Uriah so that he could marry Bathsheba. A quick divorce would have been an easy solution if women were allowed to divorce their husbands. However, women were not allowed to leave their husbands. In modern times, Bathsheba would have simply left and divorced Uriah, but under Biblical law, that was never an option. David clearly understood that Bathsheba was not allowed to divorce Uriah. David wanted to marry Bathsheba and he also wanted to cover his act of adultery. While there may have been other ways for David to try to cover his tracks, there was no other way for David to obtain Bathsheba as his wife than for Uriah to be dead. If Uriah had survived, he would have come home to find out that his wife had committed adultery and he may have chosen to have her put to death (along with the unborn child) or he may have chosen to keep her like the later prophet Hosea decided to keep his wife, or perhaps he would have divorced her, like Joseph intended to do to Mary. At any rate, he would have a hard time pinning the crime on David. In those days there was no blood test, no DNA test. Uriah may have heard rumors that David was the adulterer, but it is doubtful if he could prove it. David's own servants would be reluctant to testify against the king.

David understood not only that Adultery was sin, but that marriage was for life. David waited until Bathsheba's husband was dead and until she finished her time of mourning before he took her as his wife.

It is also important to note that although David already had multiple wives and numerous concubines, including the former wives of dead King Saul, he still wanted more. The grass is always greener...

Ezra 9:1ff - Divorcing pagan wives

When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 "For they have taken some of their daughters [as wives] for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of [those] lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass." 3 So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. 4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. 5 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God. 6 And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than [our] heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. 7 "Since the days of our fathers to this day we [have been] very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, [and] our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and

to humiliation, as [it is] this day. 8 "And now for a little while grace has been [shown] from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. 9 "For we [were] slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. 10 "And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, 11 "which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. 12 'Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave [it] as an inheritance to your children forever.' 13 "And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities [deserve], and have given us [such] deliverance as this, 14 "should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people [committing] these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed [us], so that [there would be] no remnant or survivor? 15 "O LORD God of Israel, You [are] righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as [it is] this day. Here we [are] before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!"

Ezra 10:1-44 - Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly. 2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, [one] of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. 3 "Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 "Arise, for [this] matter [is] your [responsibility]. We also [are] with you. Be of good courage, and do [it]." 5 Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath. 6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and [when] he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity. 7 And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem, 8 and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity. 9 So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It [was] the ninth

month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of [this] matter and because of heavy rain. 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. 11 "Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives." 12 Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do. 13 "But [there are] many people; [it is] the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor [is this] the work of one or two days, for [there are] many of us who have transgressed in this matter. 14 "Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter." 15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support. 16 Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, [with] certain heads of the fathers' [households], were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17 By the first day of the first month they finished [questioning] all the men who had taken pagan wives. 18 And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives [the following] were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19 And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and [being] guilty, [they presented] a ram of the flock as their trespass offering. 20 Also of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah; 21 of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah; 22 of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah. 23 Also of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (the same [is] Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. 24 Also of the singers: Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri. 25 And others of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Jeziah, Malchiah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah; 26 of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah; 27 of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza; 28 of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, [and] Athlai; 29 of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, [and] Ramoth; 30 of the sons of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh; 31 [of] the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, 32 Benjamin, Malluch, [and] Shemariah; 33 of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, [and] Shimei; 34 of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, 35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluh, 36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai, 38 Bani, Binnui, Shimei, 39 Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, 40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, 41 Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, 42 Shallum, Amariah, [and] Joseph; 43 of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, [and] Benaiah. 44 All these had taken pagan wives, and [some] of them had wives [by whom] they had children.

These verses in Ezra and also the ones in Nehemiah below, seem to indicate a circumstance in which divorce was allowed. However in these cases, divorce is the mercy, since death was the prescribed judgment on all the peoples that were from the land of Canaan. It was also specifically forbidden to intermarry with the people of the land of Canaan or to make a covenant with them:

Exodus 34:11-16 “Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out¹⁴ from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 12 Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. 13 But you shall destroy their altars, break their [sacred] pillars, and cut down their wooden images 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name [is] Jealous, [is] a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and [one of them] invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.”

The Israelites were commanded on several occasions to completely destroy every living person in the Promised land:

Deuteronomy 7:1-4 “When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, 2 and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them [and] utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. 3 Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. 4 For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.”¹⁵

¹⁴ הַנִּי גֵרֶשׁ The verb “goresh” also means to “cast out” or “drive out”. In Lev. 21:7, Num. 30:9 and Ezekiel 44:22 the root word is used as an adjective meaning “divorced”. A divorced woman was “cast out” of her house by her husband, as Sarah asked Abraham to do to Hagar (Gen. 21:10). There is an aspect of force involved with this verb. See for example the forceful expulsion from Eden (Gen.3:24). Thus Malachi 2:16 mentions “violence” in connection to divorce. It is considered to be an act of violence against a woman to divorce her. In the context of Ex. 34:11ff, we see that the nations living in the Promised Land, had the opportunity to avoid annihilation by leaving the land. It would be difficult for anyone to show that the Israelites were to pursue the Amorites, etc. to the four corners of the globe to destroy them.

¹⁵ see also: Deut. 20:16-17,

In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews were in no situation to restart the annihilation of the damned. In their day the people of Israel had just begun to return to dwell in the promised land under the rule of the Persians. The previous kingdoms of Assyrian and Babylon had completely conquered the land of Israel and deported the Israelites.

Here in Ezra's day (5th century BC), the best the Jews could do, was to separate themselves from the nations whom God had sentenced to destruction.

Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-29

Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-29 - On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, 2 because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3 So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel. ... 23 In those days I also saw Jews [who] had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, [and] Moab. 24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. 25 So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, [saying], "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. 26 "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. 27 "Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?" 28 And [one] of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, [was] a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me. 29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

Based on this passage and those in Ezra, the Corinthian church had asked Paul if they should divorce unbelieving spouses. Paul gave his personal opinion that these verses did not apply to the situation in Corinth, but that if an unbeliever is willing to stay with the believer, they should not divorce (1st Corinthians 7:12ff discussed below).

Isaiah 50:1 - Divorcing Zion?

Thus says the LORD: "Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce, Whom I have put away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, And for your transgressions your mother has been put away.

The term "certificate of divorce" is taken directly from Deut. 24:1. Here the point is that YHVH has not put Zion away forever. The LORD seems to be saying that He did not

issue a certificate of divorce as He did with the 10 Northern Tribes (Jer. 3:8 - see below), but that Zion is still His bride, even though He sent her away because of her sins¹⁶.

By asking “where” is the certificate of divorce and by paralleling that question with that of YHVH’s hypothetical creditors, it becomes evident that He has not abandoned Israel to divorce. For God owes no one money and has no creditors. He simply punished his people for a while because of her persistence in sin. A temporary separation.

Additionally it must be pointed out that this verse and the following two verses belongs to the end of the previous chapter. Isa. 49:14 is the start of this passage, which begins with Zion complaining that God has forsaken her. However God shows in 50:1-3 that this is not the case, but rather that God was merely punishing her. Isa. 50:4 picks up with the preceding theme of the Servant of the LORD (the Messiah - Jesus), which was begun in 49:1 and even earlier.

Jeremiah 3:1-15 - God’s faithfulness to His wives

"They say, 'If a man divorces his wife, And she goes from him And becomes another man's, May he return to her again?' Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; Yet return to Me," says the LORD. 2 "Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: Where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them Like an Arabian in the wilderness; And you have polluted the land With your harlotries and your wickedness. 3 Therefore the showers have been withheld, And there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; You refuse to be ashamed. 4 Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You are the guide of my youth? 5 Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end?' Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, As you were able." 6 The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. 7 "And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. 9 "So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. 10 "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the LORD. 11 Then the LORD said to me, "Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. 12 "Go and proclaim

¹⁶ At this point in History, Judah was beginning to lose territory and many of her cities and towns had been taken captive and were attacked by Assyria and even Egypt. Isaiah prophesied from the end of King Uzziah’s reign (758 BC) to end of king Hezekiah’s reign (696 BC) (Isaiah 1:1, 6:1) and was killed by being sawn in half by Hezekiah’s wicked son Manasseh (according to the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds and The Martyrdom of Isaiah, see Heb. 11:37).

these words toward the north, and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the LORD; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says the LORD; 'I will not remain angry forever. 13 Only acknowledge your iniquity, That you have transgressed against the LORD your God, And have scattered your charms To alien deities under every green tree, And you have not obeyed My voice,' says the LORD. 14 "Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. 15 "And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Here we see adultery by the wife as grounds for her husband to divorce her. But we also see YHVH calling Israel back even though He had given her a certificate of divorce.

Hosea - The Adulterous and Harlot wife

The book of Hosea is an important example of a husband forgiving an adulterous wife and taking her back. Most importantly we learn from Hosea that God does not choose to have a hard heart, but is both forgiving and merciful to His sinful bride.

Hosea 1:1-11 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. 2 When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the LORD." 3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4 Then the LORD said to him: "Call his name Jezreel, For in a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, And bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 It shall come to pass in that day That I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." 6 And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him: "Call her name Lo-Ruhamah (not loved), For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, But I will utterly take them away. 7 Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, Will save them by the LORD their God, And will not save them by bow, Nor by sword or battle, By horses or horsemen." 8 Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. 9 Then God said: "Call his name Lo-Ammi (not my people), For you are not My people, And I will not be your God. 10 "Yet the number of the children of Israel Shall be as the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.' 11 Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel Shall be gathered together, And appoint for themselves one head; And they shall come up out of the land, For great will be the day of Jezreel!

It is very important to consider all the injustices done to the LORD by His Bride, yet He never leaves her to take another spouse. As believers, we are to be Godly and not hard hearted towards cruel, adulterous and rebellious spouses.

While the modern wife may try to divorce her husband because he is mean or grumpy or unpleasant, God never leaves His bride even though she literally abandons Him for other lovers through idolatry, she doesn't trust Him, and she refuses to listen to Him.

Malachi 2:13-16 - God Hates Divorce

And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive [it] with goodwill from your hands. 14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant. 15 But did He not make [them] one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously¹⁷ with the wife of his youth. 16 "For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce¹⁸, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously."

God hates divorce. Divorce goes against God's will and His design. God would not receive offerings from the man who divorced his wife unjustly. This cannot be overstated - If a man divorces his wife (or if a woman leaves her husband), there is no reason for the him to continue giving to the church or to charity or to the poor, for God will not have any regard to his gifts. As Jesus said, leave your gift at the altar and go and be reconciled first and then afterward offer your gift (Matt. 5:23-24). In other words - fix the broken marriage first and don't bother with your charitable gift until after the relationship is restored.

Matthew 5:31-32 - Remarriage is Adultery

"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

¹⁷ "treacherously" - probably better translated as "do not betray". The Hebrew word can refer to a "traitor" - someone who is "dressed up" one way but then behaves another way. The root is the same as the word for "clothing". It is the same word used in Exodus 21:8 - where the owner of a concubine can not sell her since he was a traitor to her by taking her sexually and then not wanting to keep her. Don't be a "traitor" to your wife, by divorcing her. Don't be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

¹⁸ Modern versions of the Bible, including the ESV and newer versions of the NIV purposely mis-translate this verse. Here, the NKJV correctly handles the original Hebrew, as do the KJV, NASB, RSV, NET, YLT, ASV, WEB and even the JPS.

These verses should be read in the context of the entire passage of Matt. 5:21-48. Jesus starts out dealing with Anger, then Lust, then Divorce, then Oaths, then Going the Extra Mile, then Loving your Enemies. All six of these topics are related to the topic of divorce and marriage. The way to preserve marriage and avoid divorce is to not fill oneself with anger or lust, but instead to keep your word and do good to those who misuse you and those who hate you.

Jesus gives only one reason for a husband to divorce his wife – sexual immorality. He gives no reason here or elsewhere for a wife to divorce her husband. Many teachers, especially in the modern era, have expanded Jesus words to also allow wives to divorce their husbands for having sex with other women. However no where does the Bible teach that a woman may divorce her husband. Since the Bible allows husbands to have multiple wives (Deut. 21:15-17), and even concubines, it is illogical to claim that a woman can divorce her husband if he has sex with women besides her. However it must be remembered that if a man has sex with another man's wife or concubine, he was given the death penalty according to Leviticus 20:10. The wife of the adulterer would then be a widow and free to remarry.

Notice also that Jesus does not say that a husband can divorce his wife for 'adultery' but rather for 'sexual immorality'. Sexual immorality (GK = Porneias from Pornea) is a broader term that can include prostitution / extramarital sex. One view is that Jesus was saying that a husband can only divorce his wife if he discovers that she is not a virgin on their wedding night based on this verse:

"But if the thing is true, [and evidences of] virginity are not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house. So you shall put away the evil from among you." (Deut. 22:20-21)

However, Jesus was speaking Hebrew and not Greek. And if we compare what He said through Jeremiah the prophet (see above), we realize that He gave the ten tribes of Israel a 'certificate of divorce' for committing adultery - נאפה (Jer. 3:8). In that same passage in Jeremiah the more general term 'harlotry' from the root זנה is also used.

Thus the Greek term 'Pornea' used in the translation of Matthew's gospel¹⁹ likely covers both the situation of adultery and a non-virgin bride. Therefore the view that divorce is only allowed in the case of a non-virgin bride is not valid. Rather divorce was allowed, but not encouraged, in the case of adultery or undisclosed pre-marital sex.²⁰

It is important to note that Jesus' words here and His words through the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah are more merciful than the Law of Moses, for under the law, the un-virtuous bride and adulterous wife were both to be stoned to death²¹. Jesus allows the husband to simply divorce the adulterous wife rather than stone her to death. Jesus is therefore consistent in His mercy when in John 8:3ff he forgives the woman caught in adultery and saves her from death by stoning.

In the same manner, Jesus' step-father, Joseph, was declared righteous when he planned to divorce Mary privately when he thought she was not a virgin. Joseph spoke neither of stoning nor even of publicly disgracing her.

Matthew 19:3-15 - One Flesh, Remarriage is Adultery

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for [just] any reason?" 4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made [them] at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 "and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father

¹⁹ Matthew's gospel was originally written in Hebrew. Later it was either translated or re-written in Greek. Greek was the common language in Asia Minor and was well known throughout the entire region. Papias (150-170 CE) states: "Matthew composed the words in the Hebrew dialect, and each translated as he was able." (as quoted by Eusebius; Eccl. Hist. 3:39).

Unfortunately the surviving copies of Matthew's Hebrew gospel are very late and may not even be connected to the original but may be recreated versions. Shem Tov's version has been translated by George Howard. Shem Tov lived around 1200 AD, but the nine copies of his Hebrew version of Matthew date to the 1400s-1600s. Shem Tov's version reads quite differently than our Greek version in this passage. In Shem Tov's version, Jesus reaffirms the requirement to issue a certificate of divorce while also putting the sin of adultery on the man for sending away an innocent wife. However Shem Tov's version is likely not representing the original here, for it disagrees with the parallel passage in Mark 10:2-13.

In Matthew 19, Shem Tov's version has Jesus reaffirming what is said in the Greek text of the same. Additionally, note that at Matthew 19:9 the Hebrew word in Shem Tov's version corresponding to Pornea is 'adultery' נִאֻן and not simply 'sexual immorality' זָנוּת.

²⁰ "undisclosed pre-marital sex" I use this term because in the Bible there is the situation where a father refuses to give his daughter to a man even if she already had sex with him. I presume that the father would eventually give his daughter to a different man as a bride, with the explanation to her groom that she was not a virgin. Such an explanation would be necessary in order to avoid the penalty and shame for harlotry found in Deut. 22:13ff

²¹ Or burned to death, in the case of a priest's daughter who fornicated - Lev. 21:9. Compare Gen, 38:24 where Judah said to bring out Tamar and to let her be burned. The Rabbis have understood Tamar to be a priest's daughter based on the order to burn her. They claim she was a daughter of Shem whom they also credit with being Melchizedek - the priest of the most High God (Gen. 14:18).

and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." 7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" 8 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." 10 His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with [his] wife, it is better not to marry." 11 But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only [those] to whom it has been given: 12 "For there are eunuchs who were born thus from [their] mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept [it], let him accept [it]." 13 Then little children were brought to Him that He might put [His] hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." 15 And He laid [His] hands on them and departed from there.

Even though many preachers don't like to say it, Jesus is being very plain about marriage: The man to whom a virgin gives her virginity is her husband. The husband may not divorce her except for "sexual immorality". If the husband divorces her for any other reason and then takes another wife, he is in a state of adultery. Likewise, the man who marries the divorced woman is in a state of adultery. The act of re-marriage is not one-time adultery, but rather the re-marriage constitutes on-going adultery.²²

Also note that if the first husband divorced her for a frivolous reason (not sexual immorality), then he is blamed by Jesus for 'causing her to commit adultery' (Matt. 5:31-32 – above).

Note that these two passages in Matthew's gospel are the only ones that give allowance for divorce by Jesus. Both Mark's gospel and Luke's gospel do not give the allowance for divorce in the case of an adulterous wife (see below). Divorce is not the desired outcome in the case of adultery. This is especially evident when we consider God's patience with adulterous Israel. God desired for them to repent and remain His people, His bride, His wife. Repentance and reconciliation is the way of God, as demonstrated over and over again in His dealings with Israel.

²² Greek experts, which I am not, can compare the verb here to that used by Jesus to say 'ask and it shall be given to you' - The person was to be in a state of on-going 'asking'. The same concept is used for 'commits adultery'. In other words he 'commits and continues to commit adultery'.

Mark 10:2-16 - One Flesh, Remarriage is Adultery

The Pharisees came and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce [his] wife?" testing Him. 3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses permitted [a man] to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss [her]." 5 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. 6 "But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8 'and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." 10 In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same [matter]. 11 So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. 12 "And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." 13 Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought [them]. 14 But when Jesus saw [it], He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." 16 And He took them up in His arms, laid [His] hands on them, and blessed them.

Mark's account is parallel to what we find in Matthew, including both passages concluding with the blessing of the children. The verses about the Kingdom of God being connected to children deliberately follows the discussion about divorce (and in Matthew's gospel follows the further discussion about castration). Adults tend to be the ones who harden their hearts and make decisions based on sexual lusts. Children are generally free from sexual compulsion, as are eunuchs. Children also tend to forgive quicker and don't harden their hearts like adults.

There are two differences that stand out between Matthew's gospel and Mark's gospel:

1. Mark does not include Jesus' allowance for divorce in the case of adultery.
2. Mark adds the circumstance where a woman divorces her husband. The Law of Moses did not allow a woman to divorce her husband. However governments of other countries had different rules. The gospel according to Mark was written in

Rome specifically for the Roman believers.²³ Rome began allowing both sexes to divorce by at least the 2nd Century AD and perhaps earlier. Mark includes words of Jesus that would have bearing on gentile women whose pagan cultures allowed them to divorce. Jesus' words to such women is simple: If a woman divorces her husband and remarries, she is living in adultery. She may also be in rebellion simply for divorcing even if she doesn't remarry.

Both here in Mark and also in Matthew Jesus adds to the definition of the term 'adultery'. No longer does He limit it to a man who has sex with a married woman, but adds the definition of divorcing a first wife in order to marry a second woman. Really this is not an addition if we view things from the Savior's point of view. In both gospel accounts, Jesus defines marriage as being lifelong and indissoluble. So even if someone obtains a divorce by civil law, they are still united in marriage under God's law. Thus, regardless of a civil divorce status, forsaking a first wife to take a second wife constituted adultery. Although polygyny is allowed in the Bible, leaving a first wife to take a second is called adultery. Thus "Serial Polygamy"²⁴ was not allowed in the Bible and in Jesus' words, it constituted adultery.

Regarding polygamy, the law of Moses protected the rights of a wife in a polygamous marriage (Exodus 21:10) and the children of the unloved wife in a polygamous marriage (Deut. 21:15).

The passage surrounding Exodus 21:10 is especially interesting, because it is talking about a concubine (a slave wife). The Law of Moses required the concubine to be set free if the master no longer was willing to give her the appropriate marital provisions.

²³ Those that teach the primacy of Mark's gospel not only fail to acknowledge the testimony of the early church fathers, but also ignore these type of subtle but significant changes to Mark's gospel. Mark wrote his gospel sometime after 64 AD in Rome. Mark borrowed heavily from the versions of Matthew's gospel that were already in circulation and modified it based on his own first hand knowledge and especially based on the teachings of Peter.

Mark's gospel was likely originally written in Latin (the language of Rome). This is evident in several ways: The Peshitta colophons at the end of Mark's gospel, as well as 10th century Greek manuscripts point out that it was written in Latin (Burkitt). The 'Latinisms' within Mark's gospel may point to a Latin original and especially to Mark's Gospel being written in Rome (Decker). For a deeper analysis of the Latin issue see "Proof that the Gospel of Mark was Written in Latin" by David Bruce Gain. Mark wrote for the believers in Rome, particularly at the request of the higher class. Their language was primarily Latin, though Greek was their second language. It is also worth noting, regarding the use of Latin, that even the Romans in the land of Israel used latin as evidenced by Pilate's order to include a Latin translation of the accusation against Jesus on the Cross (Luke 23:38 and John 19:20).

²⁴ "Serial Polygamy" is used to refer to having spouses in succession by divorce and remarriage. This practice of divorce and remarriage is sinful in all but the case of the adulterous wife, whereas polygyny (having multiple wives at the same time) is at least tolerated in the Bible and occasionally even endorsed: [2Sa 12:8 NKJV] 'I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if [that had been] too little, I also would have given you much more!'

However here in the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus says that a husband who leaves his first wife to take a second is an adulterer. Jesus' teaching here combined with His teaching on "one flesh" effectively extends the principle of lifelong marriage even to concubines. The Law about setting the concubine free was not intended to allow husbands to divorce but rather was intended to protect concubines from abuse and neglect and to protect them from "sex trade". Slave wives were not to be sold and were not to be mistreated.²⁵

Luke 16:18 - Remarriage is Adultery

"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery."

Remarriage after divorce is called adultery here. Like Mark, Luke also omits the exception for adultery on the part of the wife as grounds for divorce.

Romans 7:1-3 - Remarriage is Adultery

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? 2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to [her] husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of [her] husband. 3 So then if, while [her] husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

Paul clearly shows that remarriage equals adultery in the case of a woman whose first husband is still alive. He repeats this view exactly in 1 Cor. 7:39.

1 Corinthians 6:16 - Sex Makes Two 'One Flesh'

Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh."

Becoming 'one flesh' with a harlot does not equal marriage or require marriage as it does with a virgin. Samson had sex with a harlot (Judges 16:1), but that did not make her his wife. The same is true of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38:15). While God's original intent was that marriage and sex would always be one and the same institution, the reality of sin entering the world complicated the issue.

1st Corinthians 7:1-40 - Do not Divorce Pagan Spouses

Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: [It is] good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. 3 Let the

²⁵ One of the many crimes of American Slavery was the trading of sex slaves. Slave masters would have intercourse with certain female slaves and then sell them to other masters, even boasting of the female slave's value for sexual satisfaction. Such a sin is forbidden in the Bible.

husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband [does]. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife [does]. 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. 7 For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. 8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; 9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn [with passion]. 10 Now to the married I command, [yet] not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from [her] husband. 11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to [her] husband. And a husband is not to divorce [his] wife. 12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such [cases]. But God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save [your] husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save [your] wife? 17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. 18 Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God [is what matters]. 20 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. 21 Were you called [while] a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use [it]. 22 For he who is called in the Lord [while] a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called [while] free is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that [state] in which he was called. 25 Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. 26 I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress--that [it is] good for a man to remain as he is: 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time [is] short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, 30 those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, 31 and those who use this world as not misusing [it]. For the form of this world is passing away. 32 But I want you to be without care. He who is

unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord. 33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world--how he may please [his] wife. 34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world--how she may please [her] husband. 35 And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction. 36 But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. 37 Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. 38 So then he who gives [her] in marriage does well, but he who does not give [her] in marriage does better. 39 A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 40 But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment--and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

In verses 12-16, Paul, in giving his personal opinion, seems to say that if the unbelieving spouse divorces because he or she doesn't want to live with a believer, then the believer is free to remarry. Although Paul never actually says the believer is free to remarry, he does say they are not "bound", which implies free to remarry. Notice the use of the word 'bound' in v39 and in Romans 7:1-3. It is also important to point out that if the unbeliever is willing to stay, the believer is not to divorce. The unbeliever will act like an unbeliever, and the believer must not complain or use the unbeliever's behavior as an excuse for divorce. Paul gives no right of divorce to the believer here!

Paul is also answering an important question arising from Ezra 9:1-10:44²⁶ and Nehemiah 13:23- 28 where the Jews were ordered to put away their foreign, pagan wives and the children born to them²⁷ and to separate themselves from the pagans. Paul is here saying that, in his opinion, the situation in those books is not to be applied in the church. In Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews had intermarried with pagan people that God had told them to completely wipe out. Since the Jews at that period in

²⁶ Ezra 9:12 quotes/refers to Deut 7:3 and Ex. 34:16 and Joshua 23:12. All of which prohibit intermarriage with the pagan nations that were living in the promised land.

²⁷ Ezra 10:3 shows that the pagan wives and their children were to be divorced. Ezra 10:44 reinforces the fact that these women had children with their husbands, but even so they were to be divorced, thus separating the children from their fathers and breaking up the family. Paul says that, in his view, the Corinthians are not to do this and adds the point that even children and spouses are made "holy" by the believing spouse. Thus Paul is saying the situation is not analogous.

The Book of Esther provides the example of a Jewish girl who was married to the pagan king of Persia. Although it is highly likely that she did not have a choice in the matter, but was probably forcefully taken from her home to the king's harem, her faith in the God of Israel caused this mixed marriage to result in great good.

history were not in a position to start wiping out the Canaanites again, the least they could do was to separate themselves from the Canaanites. The Corinthians are logically asking Paul if they are in the same situation and Paul says 'NO'.

According to the Law of Moses, the Israelites were allowed to take non-Israelite virgin concubines, but only from nations farther away from them and not from the Canaanites (Deut 20:14-18, and Deut. 21:10-14).

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 - Unequally Yoked?

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."¹ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Being in a status of an 'unequally yoked' marriage²⁸ is no excuse for divorce, as Paul points out in his first letter the Corinthians (see notes above).

Divorced couples in the Bible

Several couples were divorced in the Bible:

²⁸ Many Pastors will immediately turn to this passage to preach against marriage to unbelievers. However marriage is not the context of these verses. The general principle may apply, but it must be remembered that Paul's phrase "unequally yoked" is from Deuteronomy 22:10 - "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together". On a practical level, trying to plow with these two animals together is problematic because of differences in strength, stride, height, attitude and size. They simply do not work well together. The verse following this is similar: "You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together" (Deut. 22:11). Different natural fabrics shrink differently. I personally bought a pair of socks made from wool and cotton. They fell apart on the first washing. If we apply this principle to marriage, it becomes apparent that a follower of Jesus and a follower of demons must not be united.

That passage in Deuteronomy cannot be used as a universal law against all marriages of believers to unbelievers, for Deuteronomy 21:11 allowed the taking of concubines from foreign nations. While this passage in Deuteronomy does not mention foreign wives, it must be noted that Ezra was opposed to marriages with Egyptians (which were not forbidden in the Law) and also Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh was problematic. Thus it is likely that while taking foreign concubines was allowed, taking foreign wives was at a very minimum strongly discouraged. The problem with marrying an unbeliever is that the believer will be pulled in the wrong direction - away from the one true God.

Pharaoh and Sarai (Abram's wife)

Genesis 12:14-20 - So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. 15 The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house. 16 He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. 17 But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 "Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken²⁹ her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way." 20 So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

Pharaoh had taken Sarai to be his wife, and may have had sex with her.³⁰ Upon learning that Sarai was Abram's wife, Pharaoh sent her away.

Pharaoh recognized that Sarai's marriage to her first husband, Abram, was binding.

Abimelech and Sarah

The story here is similar to the one above of Pharaoh and Sarai, except that Sarah clearly did not have sex with Abimelech. See Gen. 20:2ff.

²⁹ The NKJV follow the KJV and avoids the direct translation of the Hebrew which literally reads "and I took her to myself for a wife". The Hebrew text implies that Pharaoh had sex with Sarai. Especially when contrasted with the story of her being taken by Abimelech (Gen. 20:2ff) where the text specifically says that Abimelech did not have sex with Sarah (Gen. 20:4).

³⁰ When we compare the later story of Abimelech and Sarah, the text specifically says that Abimelech did not have sex with Sarah (Gen 20:4) but any such statement is completely missing in the story of Pharaoh and Sarah. God had plagued Pharaoh because of his sin with Sarah, but basically only threatened Abimelech.

The difference between the two stories could also be explained this way: Pharaoh's intercourse with Sarah was not close to the time of Isaac's birth and therefore there was no confusion about who was the father of Isaac and thus no need to emphasize that Pharaoh did NOT have sex with Sarah. However in the case of Abimelech and Sarah, the situation was within a year of Isaac's birth, so the text emphasizes that Abimelech did not have sex with Sarah, for if he did, there would be confusion as to the patronage of Isaac.

So while it seems that Pharaoh may have had sex with Sarah, there is the possibility that he just took her into his harem, but didn't have sex with her. Such is the view of the translators of the KJV, NKJV and WEB. This is probably based on the tense of וָיִקַח (vav-conversive with future tense) rather than using a simple past tense as at the beginning of the verse. I would translate the phrase as "I was in the process of taking her as my wife". Other major English translations take the view that Sarah did have sex with Pharaoh.

The Abraham, Sarah, Pharaoh incident is a foreshadowing of the Israelite slavery and deliverance by plagues from Egypt. Abraham represents God and Sarah represents the people of Israel in this foreshadowing. In both stories, Pharaoh holds the holy bride and only releases her after plagues and when she is released, she goes out with great wealth.

Abraham and Hagar - Gen. 21:9-21

God told Abraham to listen to Sarah and send away Hagar and her son. This seems like it is contrary to God's own teaching about not divorcing wives and is a difficult passage. However it is important to remember that God is not bound by the rules He gives to humanity. God also told Abraham to sacrifice his own son Isaac - something that is clearly condemned in the Bible. Of course God stopped Abraham from actually carrying through with the sacrifice, but the point is that God is sovereign and is above the Bible.

Ishmael was a grown man at this time (probably 18 years old). There is no record of Hagar re-marrying. Additionally, Hagar was freed from slavery by Abraham sending her away.

Abimelech and Rebekah

Gen. 26:6ff - Similar to the story of Abimelech and Sarah except Rebekah was not actually taken into his harem. This is not a divorce story, but notice in v. 11 Abimelech declares the death penalty for adultery.

Samson and the Philistine woman

Judges 14. Samson only had the one traditional week of romance with his wife before abandoning her. In Judges 14:20 she is then given to his best man as a wife. However in the very next verse it is obvious Samson (and the author) consider her to still be Samson's wife (Judges 15:1).

Palti and Michal (David's wife)

David reclaimed his wife who had been re-married to a man named Palti. David had not given Michal a certificate of divorce. Nor did David recognize the right of the previous government (King Saul - Michal's father) to allow her to remarry. (1st Samuel 25:44, 2nd Sam. 3:13ff)

Philip and Herodias

Matthew 14:1-12 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus 2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." 3 For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put [him] in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 4 Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. 7 Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. 8 So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter." 9 And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded [it] to be given to [her]. 10 So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. 11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought [it] to

her mother. 12 Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

Mark 6:16-29 - But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!" 17 For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. 18 Because John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he [was] a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. 21 Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief [men] of Galilee. 22 And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give [it] to you." 23 He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom." 24 So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!" 25 Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 And the king was exceedingly sorry; [yet], because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard [of it], they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

John the Baptist was imprisoned and executed for speaking the truth. Herod was committing two sins here:

1. Uncovering his brother's nakedness (Leviticus 18:16 - You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it [is] your brother's nakedness.)
2. Marrying a divorced woman.

In these passages, it is also important to note that Herodias' daughter was not Herod's daughter. This step-child was the agent in bringing about John the Baptist's martyrdom.

Jerry Fite states: "John was cast into prison because he "had been saying" (NAS) that Herod had no right to Herodias (Matt. 14:4). The imperfect tense probably indicates that John spoke repeatedly against his unlawful union. John's persistence in driving home the point that the marriage of Herodias and Herod was unlawful, drove John into prison." (Fite p23-24)

The Samaritan woman at the well

John 4:16-19 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You

have well said, 'I have no husband,' 18 "for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly." 19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

We often assume this woman was divorced five times (John 4:18). However the text does not say so. She may have been a widow five times over. Or perhaps a mixture of divorces and deaths. We don't know. Until now, I've always judged her to have been divorced five times, perhaps because of Jesus' statement that her current man was not her husband and because she testified that Jesus told her all the things she had done (John 4:29). However it is sinful for us as readers of the text to assume the worst about this woman's past and thereby pass judgment on her.

God and Israel (ten northern tribes)

Jeremiah 3:8 - "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.

But even though God had given Israel a certificate of divorce, He says:

Jeremiah 3:14 - "Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

Separated couples in the Bible:

Hosea and his wife (Hosea chapters 1 and 3).

There is no record of Hosea divorcing his wife. She had apparently left him and he had to reclaim her, even to the point of buying her back (Hosea 3:1-3). Likewise, God punished Israel for her adulteries, but then both allured her back to Himself (Hosea 2:14) and of course paid for her redemption.

The Levite and his concubine (Judges 19):

The concubine of the Levite ran away to her father's house. The Levite traveled across the country to bring her back by speaking kindly to her:

Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her [and] bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him. (Judges 19:3)

The phrase "speak kindly" is literally to "speak to her heart". It means to comfort concerning worries. Joseph spoke to his brother's hearts and comforted them that he would not be cruel or seek revenge but rather would treat them well (Gen. 50:21).

Likewise in Hosea 2:14 God speaks to His people's heart to comfort them after they had sinned and were chastened for their sin.

Observations

According to the scriptures, we can make the following observations:

1. Sex and marriage are meant to be synonymous.
2. Wedding vows and ceremonies are extras, but the essence of marriage is sexual union between a man and his wife (or wives in the case of polygamist marriages).
3. A woman is bound in scripture to the man to whom she gives her virginity, unless her father forbids it.
4. Divorce is not allowed except that a husband may divorce his wife if he discovers sexual immorality. This means that he can only divorce her if he discovers she is not a virgin on their wedding night or if she later commits adultery.
5. Women were not allowed to divorce in the Bible. Some cultures allow women to divorce. If a woman makes use of such a civil law, she must either remain unmarried or be restored to her husband.
6. The man who divorces his wife for any other reason other than adultery and marries another commits adultery.
7. The woman who remarries after divorce commits adultery - not once, but in a continuing sense until she leaves the second husband.
8. Moses allowed for divorce, but it was because of hard heartedness. Believers are not to be hard-hearted.
9. Emotional abuse is never an excuse for divorce. Consider the abuse suffered by Jesus at the hands of His people. Believers are to be Christ-like, bearing up under suffering with joy.
10. Remarriage was allowed after the spouse dies.

Implications for believers:

1. Stay married to your first spouse.
2. If a husband left his first wife for any reason besides sexual immorality, he should seek reconciliation. Even in cases of divorce due to immorality, the husband may still be encouraged to seek reconciliation. God drew His unfaithful people to Himself multiple times.
3. If a woman has left her first husband, she should return to him, even if she has remarried. The second marriage is adultery and the first marriage is the only legitimate one. (see David and Michal above). However if the husband divorced his wife and she marries another man, she should not return to her original husband.
4. A woman who has never married but gave her virginity away should seek to marry the man to whom she gave it, unless her father forbids it. (For an example of the importance of virginity, see the story of Tamar and Amnon – 2nd Samuel 13. Also consider the story of Dinah and Shechem in Gen. 34)

Frequently Asked Questions:

What if? (Excuses for Divorce):

A woman's husband has sex with another woman who is unmarried ("Cheats on his wife")?

If the unmarried woman was a virgin or widow, then the man should take her also as a wife. If she was a divorced woman, the man should confess his adultery and stay away from her. (see next question below).

Women were not allowed to divorce in Biblical culture and men in the Bible were allowed to have multiple wives at once. The believing wife should not leave her husband who takes a second wife.

A husband has sex with another man's wife?

According to the Law (the books of Moses), such a man would be put to death and thus his wife would then be free to remarry. However David did this with Bathsheba, and was allowed by God to live upon his repentance. None of David's other wives were given the option to divorce him. Also, an act of adultery by one spouse never justifies an act of adultery by the other spouse. Since it is adultery for a divorced woman to remarry, it is illogical for a woman to divorce her husband because he committed adultery, for then she too would be an adulterous.

In 1st Corinthians 7:8-9 Paul advises the younger widows and unmarried to marry because of lack of self-control. This lack of self-control would logically exist also in a divorced woman. This sexual desire is what should compel a woman to return to her husband. This is where God's ways, when firmly enforced, can result in desires driving someone to do good and be reconciled rather than to become an adulteress.

A woman's husband becomes a homosexual?

Under the Law, such a man would be put to death and thus the woman would have been free to remarry, just like any other widow. A wife in such a situation should remember that reconciliation is the goal, while taking steps to protect herself and any future offspring from HIV, etc...

It is recommended that a woman legally separate from such a man immediately. The risk of spreading HIV to herself and her children is too high a risk. If the husband repents, a period of time, currently a year, would need to pass from his last homosexual behavior to properly test for HIV.

A spouse commits a felony?

If the crime was worthy of death under the Law, then the spouse would be free to remarry once the offender was dead, just like any other widow.

Other felonies, such as theft, assault, etc... are today punished by prison in America. Prison sentences, not only punish the offender, but also the innocent family members, including the wife. This is an extremely difficult situation. But this is similar to a spouse who is persecuted for being godly and is imprisoned for their faith. The believing spouse on the outside should not automatically divorce the believer in prison.

A husband is verbally or emotionally abusive?

Divorce was never permitted for this reason. Such an abusive spouse needs to stop sinning and to be dealt with by the elders of the community.

A spouse is physically abusive – hitting their mate?

Divorce was not allowed for this reason either, but such a spouse was to be dealt with by the elders of the community and punished accordingly. In such a case, a temporary separation may be necessary if the abused is in serious danger. However the goal should be repentance and reconciliation.

By analogy: Under the law, a slave was to be set free if they were seriously injured by their master. Using this principle, it would be logical for a wife to be freed from a husband who has caused or may imminently cause serious physical injury. Obviously wives are not slaves, but the principle of being “bound” in marriage can be guided by the study of other types of bondage in the Bible.

A spouse becomes seriously mentally ill?

No allowance is given in the scripture for divorce in this case. However a legal separation may be necessary to keep the mentally ill from having control of finances or children.

A spouse becomes an alcoholic or drug user?

At some point a temporary separation may become necessary if this type of behavior becomes dangerous to the spouse or children, but this is still not an excuse for divorce, and especially not for remarriage.

The Polygamist who becomes a believer. Should he divorce all but one wife?

No. While polygamy (polygyny) may not be ideal, it is explicitly allowed in the Bible. It is better to keep the husband and his wives and children together than to cause children to be fatherless and women to be divorced. By divorcing any of his wives, he would “cause them to commit adultery” (Matthew 5:32) and whoever would marry the divorced woman would commit adultery (Matthew 19:9).

Is this Biblical view of divorce overly harsh?

Consider the disciples' comment and Jesus' response concerning His strong stance against divorce:

Matthew 19:10-12 His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with [his] wife, it is better not to marry." 11 But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only [those] to whom it has been given: 12 "For there are eunuchs who were born thus from [their] mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept [it], let him accept [it]."

And likewise the Apostle Paul says:

1 Corinthians 7:28 But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

Other Tough Questions for discussion

Why should a woman who has slept around or even lived with a man sexually, be allowed to get married, yet a woman who marries as a virgin and then divorces, not be allowed to re-marry?

A strict interpretation of the "one flesh" principle indicates that the woman who has slept around is no more allowed to marry than the divorced woman. The man who took her virginity is the husband in both cases.

It must be remembered that the woman who was found not to be a virgin on her wedding night was to be taken out and stoned. But Jesus has taught us that we are all sinners and need to be merciful to one another.

What should a woman do who wrongfully left her husband and then her first husband remarries?

This woman may still have the desire for sexual relations and companionship, yet under today's laws she cannot return to her husband and according to the Bible she cannot marry someone new.

Such a spouse should make her desire for reconciliation known to her first husband and must realize that the Bible does allow her to live in a polygamous situation, even if modern society does not.

Similar to the above question – What should a woman do who either left her husband and then slept with another man or was divorced by her husband for committing adultery, if her husband will not take her back and the Bible does not allow her to remarry?

She should continue to hope and strive for reconciliation to her first husband. A person who continues to strive for reconciliation will usually find it, though not always.

A woman divorces her husband against his will, marries another man and has children in this second marriage. Should she still have this second marriage annulled and try to return to her first husband? Under the law she would never have been allowed to divorce in the first place. Romans chapter 7 calls the second marriage adulterous and therefore the children are children of adultery. What should the repentant believer do?

Obviously the law would call for the death penalty. Thank God we are not under the law! But neither are we lawless – grace is not an excuse to keep sinning, but motivation and ability to turn from it.

Here the story of Hosea sounds very similar. He was told to take back his wife who had been living as a prostitute.

Why did God command Abraham to divorce Hagar?

Is this divine sanctioned divorce? Obviously God makes the laws and is not bound by the laws He creates. Sarah was Hagar's master and Sarah was mistreating Hagar. Severely mistreated slaves were to be set free according to the scriptures, but it is unlikely that Sarah's mistreatment was that severe. Sarah should have repented of mistreating Hagar. Hagar's son, Ishmael, should have repented of mocking Isaac.

Conclusion

Wives were never allowed to divorce in the Bible. Husbands were only allowed to divorce if a wife commits adultery or is found to not be a virgin on their honeymoon night, and then only if she allowed her husband to think she was a virgin.

To marry a divorced woman is, according to Jesus' words in the gospels, "adultery". To divorce a woman for a reason other than sexual immorality is to cause her to become an adulteress. If a woman divorces her husband and marries another man, she is living in adultery.

Those who have been divorced should seek reconciliation with their spouses. Those who have had 'cheating' spouses should give serious consideration to forgiving their spouses.

To protect finances and children's inheritance, it may be sensible to file an official separation or even divorce the spouse, while at the same time being committed to them. For example a spouse on drugs may drain the bank accounts to pay for the addiction. Therefore it may be wise to cut the drug addict off from access to credit

cards, bank accounts, assets and mutual liability for debts. It must be remembered that civil marriage is basically a government arrangement for financial issues and child custody issues. I personally know a woman who had to divorce her husband in order to provide financial protection for her and her children (so his behavior wouldn't ruin them financially). She refused to remarry, since that was her husband, but used a legal divorce to break the government bond that could endanger her livelihood and her ability to support her children.

“...LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?...
He who swears to his own hurt and does not change”

Psalm 15:1,4

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Abbreviations

ASV - American Standard Version

BLB - Blue Letter Bible: <<https://www.blueletterbible.org>>

ESV - English Standard Version

NASB - New American Standard Bible

NET - The NET Bible

NIV - NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

NKJV The Holy Bible New King James Version, Thomas Nelson, Inc copyright 1982

RSV - Revised Standard Version

WEB - Webster Bible

YLT - Young's Literal Translation

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NASB - New American Standard Bible - Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation
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NIV - THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®
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NKJV The Holy Bible New King James Version, Thomas Nelson, Inc copyright 1982

RSV - The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version containing the Old and New Testaments, translated from the original tongues: being the version set forth A.D. 1611, revised A.D. 1881-1885 and A.D. 1901: compared with the most ancient authorities and revised A.D. 1946-52. — 2nd ed. of New Testament A.D. 1971.

WEB - The Webster Bible was translated by Noah Webster in 1833 in order to bring the language of the bible up to date. This version of the Bible is in the public domain.

YLT - The Young's Literal Translation was translated by Robert Young, who believed in a strictly literal translation of God's word. This version of the Bible is in the public domain.

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