

A MIND TO DIVORCE

After Mary returned home from visiting Elizabeth, Joseph discovered that she was 3 months pregnant (Matt.1:18).

There was no doubt in Joseph's mind that Mary had been unfaithful to him and to God and to their engagement. At this point, his mind was like concrete, all mixed-up and permanently set.

He concluded that his only doctrinal option was divorce. After studying the Shammi theology of Deut.24:1-4, he discovered that he had two options. He could divorce Mary publicly or privately – “And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put away secretly (lathra).” The NIV translate this last part – **“he had a mind to divorce her quietly.”** (Matt.1:19)

This lesson will discuss five aspects of Joseph's “mind to divorce” and why it was the wrong decision and what we can learn from it.

1. During the time of Joseph, there were three popular interpretations of Deut.24:1-4 on divorce. These three interpretations are still prevalent today.

- **Strict orthodox** NO CAUSE“ (Mal.2:14-16) “I hate (sane / kal pf) divorce.”
- **Hillel** ANY CAUSE (Deut.24:1) “She no longer finds (lo matsa / kal impf) favor (chen) in his sight.”
- **Shammi** ERWAH DABAR (Deut.24:1) “He has found (matsa / kal pf) some (dabar) indecency (erwah) in her.”

Erwah dabar (some indecency) is used as a euphemism for illicit sexual acts. Leviticus 18:6-23 is used to describe the illicit sexual acts by the phrase, “uncover the nakedness (galah erwah).” Lev.18:24-30 explains that they are an abomination and will bring divine discipline to those who practice them. This was used with Ham's incident with Noah in Gen.9:21-23 (Lev.18:7 or 18:22).

2. We know that Jesus held to a similar view as this Shammi interpretation of “erwah dabar” based on Lev.18

“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for immorality** (porneia / erwah dabar), and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matt.19:9)

Jesus was challenged by a group of Pharisees on the divorce issue in Matt.19:3-12: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all.” (Matt.19:3)

Jesus told them that they were focusing on the wrong issue. The issues are not divorce but marriage, not law but love, not failure but faith, and not pain but promises (Matt.19:4-6). Jesus reminded them as well as us that God created marriage but man created divorce: “Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.” (Matt.19:8)

3. In the biblical doctrine of marriage, divorce was never part of the contract or concept of DI #2 (marriage) as taught in Gen.1:27 and Gen.2:18-25. See: Matt.19:4-6.

Jesus added this interpretation to the biblical doctrine of marriage as taken from Gen.1:27; 2:18-25 and Matt.19:4-5: “Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” (Matt.19:6)

Jesus reminded us of divine math regarding marriage: 3 in leaving and 2 in cleaving and 1 in becoming (Matt.19:5). The goal of divine math in marriage is for 1 (husband) + 1 (wife) = 1 (unity in marriage).

Divorce reverses divine math (reversionism / hardness of hearts). Moses permitted it with a reversionistic congregation whose carcasses fell in the wilderness (Heb.3-4; 3:17).

Jesus charged a reversionistic generation of His day with rejecting the biblical doctrine of marriage and with a misinterpretation of Deut.24:1-4 regarding divorce.

Prior to 1945 there were less than 2% divorces in USA. Divorce has increased to 270% among baby boomers in USA (Baby Boomers by Carol Keeney).

4. The key to marital longevity is a healthy mutual spiritual relationship with the Lord.

“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” (Matt.19:6) “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.” (3 John 2)

Marital reconciliation and restoration is God’s desire for Christians: “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband, and the husband should not send his wife away.” (1 Cor.7:10-11)

Why? (Read Eph.5:22-33) – “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one (3 leave to 2 cleave to becoming 1) (divine math of marriage is $1 + 1 = 1$). This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.” (Eph.5:31-32)

5. There are six important passages on divorce that should be read carefully before divorcing.

- Deut.24:1-4 erwah dabar
- Mal.2:14-16 breaking faith with wedding vows
- Matt.5:31-32 exception clause (porneia) and warning
- Matt.19:3-12 hardness of hearts
- Rom.7:1-3 remarriage
- 1 Cor.7:10-16, 39 desertion of unbeliever

The subject of divorce and remarriage is always a hot button within a moral and spiritual declining generation. This was true with the reversionistic Exodus generation as well as the generation of Jesus’ day under the 4th cycle of divine discipline.

Moses permitted it because of spousal abuse due to hardness of hearts. Therefore, great care should be taken before entering or before leaving the divine institution of marriage.

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