

The Biblical History and Theological Teaching Concerning Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

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In the Old Testament

1. The Lord gave the three basic requirements for marriage prior to sin (Gen. 2:24):
 - a. leaving (social aspect)
 - b. cleaving (spiritual aspect)
 - c. weaving (sexual aspect)
2. Lamech was the first to violate God's example of one mate by his bigamy, which rebellion manifested in Lamech's murderous behavior and pride (Gen. 4:19-24).
3. Noah and Abraham were faithful in the institution of marriage (Gen. 7:7; 23:1 with 25:1) but Jacob (and hence "the children of Israel") set the pattern for the violation of the divine will of one mate for life and consequently perpetuated marital aberrations (Gen. 29:21 ff.).
4. Moses gave legislation to protect the woman in a society already practicing divorce (Dt. 24:1-4). *He did not institute divorce since its origin is with man and not God.* Moses taught that when the following conditions occur then the husband must give a bill of divorcement:
 - a. The wife is married to husband #1
 - b. He divorces her.
 - c. He must give her a bill of divorcement
 - d. She may marry husband #2
 - e. He divorces her
 - f. He must give her a bill of divorcement
 - g. Husband #1 cannot marry her again.
5. Divorce was not granted for the following:
 - a. In the case of adultery—but death (Dt. 22:22-24)
 - b. In the case of pre-marital sex—but marriage (Dt. 22:28-29)
 - c. In the case of false accusation concerning status of virginity—but chastening, money payment to virgin's father, continued marriage (Dt. 22:13-19)
6. Both David and Solomon rejected God's pattern (Gen. 2:24) and violated his prohibition about multiple marriages and suffered many physical and spiritual tragedies (Dt. 17:17; II Sam. 11-12; I Ki. 11 ff.).
7. Because Jews had married pagan Gentiles during the exile (*contra* Dt. 7:1-4), Ezra commanded "the Jews of the restoration" to put away their foreign wives so that they would not fall into idolatry (Ezra 9-10). Later, Nehemiah repeated the message to put away strange wives (Neh. 13).
 - a. Divorce was allowed in the special case to protect the national Jewish restoration.

b. Divorce was allowed to prevent idolatrous relationships within the Jewish families.

8. Culminating the Jew's history of rebelling against God's standard for marriage, the Jewish men broke their marital covenant with their wives by divorcing them. God hates divorce ("*the LORD...hateth putting away*" [Mal. 2:16]). Divorce characterized their wicked, hard hearts and brought God's condemnation. Malachi took the Jews back to Moses' teaching that Jehovah gave Adam only one wife (although He could have given several) so that they would produce a godly seed (Mal. 2:15).

In the New Testament

1. Joseph set the biblical pattern for divorce by thinking to divorce Mary (for assumed fornication) *before physical consummation* (Mt. 1:18-25). The Lord Jesus and Mary lived under the assumed charge (from unbelievers) that He was born of fornication (Jn. 8:41).
2. Christ condemned the practice that required Moses' legislation (Dt. 24:1-4) and prohibited divorce and remarriage with one exception (Mt. 5:31-32). The exception was what Joseph potentially wanted to do: *divorce his wife* (to be) *before physical consummation* (Mt. 1:18-24).
3. The Lord repeated His teaching concerning Dt. 24:1-4 in Mt. 19:1-12:
 - a. Divorce varied from and was contrary to the Lord's original purposes—vv. 4-5 (Gen. 2:24).
 - b. He warned about putting asunder what God has joined together—v. 6.
 - c. Moses legislated protection for the divorced wife because of the hardness of their hearts. The proclivity of Israel from the beginning was to violate God's plan of single spouse with no divorce, and so the Lord gave them what they wanted which led to social disaster within the nation of Israel (cf. Num. 11:17-20 and Rom. 1:24 ff. for this principle).
 - d. The disciples response indicated that they understood Christ's teaching that marriage was for life and so they must make the right first choice (v. 10).
4. John the Baptist denounced the gentile practice of divorce and remarriage after physical consummation that Herod and Herodias practiced, against God's law ("*it is not lawful*"—whose law? The Roman's or the Lord's? [v. 18]) in Mk. 6:14-29.
5. The Gospels of Mark and Luke were written to Gentiles who practiced divorce after physical consummation and therefore there is no stated "exception clause" (Mk. 10:1 ff. and Lk. 16:16).
6. Paul, writing to Jews in Rome, made an important theological point based on the biblical principle that only death breaks the marriage bond (no reference to fornication) and therefore the living spouse may remarry. Christians are dead to the law, not divorced from it, and are married to Christ (Rom. 7:1-4).
7. The Corinthians wrote Paul asking about six questions concerning marriage and the Christian (I Cor. 7). He responded with six answers.
 - a. What is the purpose of marriage (vv. 1-9)?
 - b. May Christians divorce (vv. 10-11)?

- c. What about mixed marriages (vv. 12-24)?
 - d. What about virgins and unmarried (vv. 25-35)?
 - e. What about Christian fathers and their daughters (vv. 36-38)?
 - f. What about widows (vv. 39-40)?
8. Paul revealed the divine standard for bishops and deacons concerning marriage. They are to be husbands of one wife (living) similar to qualified widows who are to be wives of one husband (now deceased) in I Tim. 3:2, 12; 5:9.

Summary

1. The Lord's original plan was "one wife for life." 4000 years after creation Christ affirmed the original instruction and pattern given in the Garden. John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul perpetuated Christ's teaching.
2. Mankind and Jews, having the natural proclivity for rebellion and for being covenant breakers, resisted God's pattern and explicit teaching.
3. The provision of "the bill of divorcement" for the divorced Jewish woman was permitted to legislate social protection.
4. Divorce from Gentiles was allowed when national Jewish identity and purity were at stake.
5. Jews may divorce during betrothal period and before physical consummation (**God's plan**).
6. Neither Jews nor Gentiles were permitted to divorce after physical consummation (**man's plan**).

Application

1. Any sin can be forgiven, even the sins of divorce or divorce and remarriage (I Jn. 1:9).
2. The Lord's candlestick may receive any repentant and saved sinner including divorcees and remarried divorcees, and except for the offices of bishop and deacon, they may serve fully and effectively in the assembly. There are no "second class citizens" in the assembly (I Cor. 6:9-11)!
3. Single Christians should plan to marry God's choice for life with no "backdoor" to the marriage (I Cor. 7:39).
4. Divorced Christians should not seek another spouse. Divorce does not break the marriage bond; only death breaks the marriage bond (I Cor. 7:11; II Tim. 2:22).
5. Divorced and remarried Christians should acknowledge their sin, repent of the initial sin that brought them into this union, continue in their marriage, and support the biblical teaching and pattern (I Jn. 1:9; Rom 5:1; I Cor. 7:11).
6. As in all relationships, forgiveness (Mt. 18:21-22) and reconciliation (II Cor. 5:17-21) must be practiced in all marriages.