

Shayla: Does the fact that Jesus was talking to a Jewish community nullify this text?

- **Matthew 19:8-9 HCSB** He told them, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of the hardness of your hearts. But it was not like that from the beginning. (9) And I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

Extended question:

If you go to your church and publicly expose your spouse's infidelity, the church will most likely tell you to divorce your spouse because of this scripture. However, "except it be for fornication" is not talking about married couples but betrothed couples. Betrothed couples were also considered husband and wife. Betrothal is the commitment leading up to the actual marriage. It was Jewish custom for young couples to be betrothed before being married because of age, maturity, and/or financial reasons. The father arranged the marriage and if the father saw a good match for his daughter they were betrothed.

In the scripture above Jesus was talking with the Jewish community about betrothed couples, which were known as husband and wife. If one of the betrothed couples committed fornication it was allowed to get a divorce and not pursue the actual marriage. In other words, this scripture is NOT a loophole for divorce. Many good Christian people have been misled to believe that this scripture gives justification for divorce.

Marriage according to God, the One who created and established marriage, gives no escape from marriage, and that is because marriage is a lifetime commitment. Once we are married we are married until our spouse dies, then we are free to remarry, but we must marry in the Lord. "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 7:39)

Midrash

Problem #1: It does not say "betrothed", it says "wives". The word "betrothed" or "engaged" is *μνηστεύω* (mnesteo) as found in Matthew 1:18. The term used in Matthew 19 is *γυνή* (gynee) or wives. To argue "Jesus said "wives" but meant "fiancées" is neither an intelligent nor a safe response.

To say Jesus didn't say what He meant belies His promise to the disciples that He would always speak the truth clearly to them.

- **Matthew 13:10-11 HCSB** Then the disciples came up and asked Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" (11) He answered them, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them."
- **Matthew 13:16 HCSB** "But your eyes are blessed because they do see, and your ears because they do hear!"
- **Matthew 13:18 HCSB** "You, then, listen to the parable of the sower:

Jesus may have used parables with the crowds, but He always gave a straightforward answer to the disciples.

Problem #2: If you argue that "betrothed" and "married" is synonymous, then your argument is moot for the allowance for divorce in the case of *porneia* remains.

Problem #3: If you argue that divorce is NEVER allowed for any reason then what does one do with the fact that Hashem divorced Israel's northern tribes for their unfaithfulness? In the Old Testament, the relationship that existed between Jehovah and the people of Israel was described as a marriage and though the term is obviously different, being written in Hebrew or Aramaic, the concept of *porneia* is used metaphorically of the worship of idols.¹

¹ Hosea 1:2

Fornication comes from an evil heart² and is a sin against the body.³ Sins against the body are sins against the temple of the Holy Spirit and therefore lead to particular judgment from God.⁴ It also disrupts Christian fellowship⁵ and if habitually and unrepentantly practiced, it is evidence that one is excluded from God's kingdom.⁶

Since the husband and wife become one flesh, if one sins against the flesh it, in essence, forces the other to sin as well. This is not fair and just and thus God makes allowance for divorce in such a case.⁷

In fact, this very principle forced God Himself to divorce. Elohim gave the Northern Kingdom of Israel her certificate of divorce.⁸ God left Judah, but did not initiate the divorce. Judah broke her relationship with Him so God chose to enact a temporary period of separation by exiling Judah rather than divorcing her. His goal was to reconcile with her.⁹

For these and other logical, lexical, and theological reasons, I respectfully disagree with this point of view.

² Matthew 5:19

³ 1 Corinthians 6:18

⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:9-11

⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

⁷ Genesis 2:23-24; Matthew 19:5-6; 1 Corinthians 6:15-17

⁸ Jeremiah 3:8

⁹ Isaiah 54:6-8; 62:4