

It Has Been Said: Do Not Divorce

Matthew 5:31-32 and Luke 16:18

DIG: What did Jesus say were biblical grounds for **divorce**? Some rabbis allowed **divorce** for nearly any reason a husband wanted it? What was their casual attitude towards **divorce** promoting? How were they misusing **Moses'** allowance for **divorce** (Deuteronomy 24:1)? What inner quality is Yeshua seeking instead? Does the Lord command **divorce** as a result of **adultery**? What other reason is there for legitimate **divorce**? Is **divorce** the unforgivable sin? Does **divorce** cause a person to lose their salvation? What are the consequences of **divorce** in this life and the next?

REFLECT: If you are **divorced** for biblical reasons, should you feel guilty? If you are **divorced** for unbiblical reasons, what can you do now? Are there any guarantees that you won't be **divorced** even if you are both believers? Why? What steps can you take to give yourself the best chance possible of never being **divorced**?

The disintegration of the family is an epidemic that is causing social chaos around the world. There are several contributing factors which include mothers of young children working outside the home, frequent family moves, the invasion of electronic devices, lack of moral leadership in society and lack of communication in the home. But by far the free fall of the family is due to **divorce**. There is no doubt about it - the family is under attack. The harmful effects of **divorce** on children, parents, grandparents, and on the family and society as a whole would be more than enough reason to be concerned about the problem. But the ultimate tragedy of **divorce** is that it violates **God's Word**.

In Messiah's third example of true righteousness, He teaches about divorce and how the Torah differed from pharisaic Judaism. There were two reasons for **divorce** in the TaNaKh: social incompatibility (Deuteronomy 24:1), and religious incompatibility (Ezra and Nehemiah). **Adultery** was not grounds for **divorce** because it was grounds for execution by stoning. So the pharisaic Judaism believed that Moses permitted a husband to **divorce his wife** if he protected **her** from being stoned to death by writing out a **divorce document** in the presence of witnesses, signing it, and giving it to **her** (Tractate Gittin 1:1-3, 7:2).

Since marriage has always been a cherished covenant in Judaism, **the rabbis had much to say about maintaining a blessed relationship. So important was this document that an entire tractate of the Talmud deals with various interpretations and details of issuing what is called a get. Among some of the particulars, the document must be written and**

signed before witnesses. Likewise, the *get* will be approved by the *Beit-Din*, or a Jewish religious or civil court of law, literally translated as *house of judgment*, only after a delay of some time. This is due to the hope that there still may be some possibility of restoring the marriage (Tractate Gittin 9:3). In Deuteronomy 24:1, the document is called a *sefer khitut* (certificate of **divorce**), which literally means a *scroll of cutting off*. **Divorce** is likened to cutting off a limb. It is so tragic that it was stated that even the altar of the Temple sheds tears at the news of a **divorce** (Tractate Sanhedrin 22a).

ADONAI's primary purpose here was not to give an excuse for **divorce** but to show the potential evil of it. Moses wrote: **Suppose a man marries a woman and consummates the marriage but later finds her displeasing, because he has found her offensive, *ervant devar* (unclean thing or nakedness) in some respect. He writes her a divorce document, gives it to her and sends her away from his house. She leaves his house, goes and becomes another man's wife; but the second husband dislikes her and writes her a *get*, gives it to her and sends her away from his house, or the second husband whom she married dies (Deuteronomy 24:1-3 CJB).**

His intention was not to provide a way out of the marriage, but to *prevent divorce*. These first three verses are a series of conditional clauses that culminate in the prohibition of a man ever remarrying a woman who he had divorced if she married someone else and is separated from the second husband either by **divorce** or death. In such a case her first husband, who sent her away, may not take her [back] again as his wife, because she is now defiled (more literally, *disqualified*). It would be detestable to ADONAI, and you are not to bring about sin in the Land ADONAI your God is giving you as your inheritance (Deuteronomy 24:4 CJB). Because her first **divorce** had no sufficient grounds, her second marriage would be adulterous. Even if her second husband died, she could not go back to her first, because she was defiled because of the **adultery** brought about by her second marriage - which is the main point of the passage. Therefore, **Moses** said that the **divorce** for indecency or promiscuity created an adulterous situation.

Far from encouraging **divorce**, most references in the TaNaKh put restrictions on it. For example, the Torah says that a husband who falsely accuses his bride of not being a virgin that the leaders of that town are to take the man, punish him, and fine him two-and-a-half pounds of silver shekels, which they will give to the girl's father, because he has publicly defamed a virgin of Isra'el. She will remain his wife, and he is forbidden from divorcing her as long as he lives (Deuteronomy 22:14 and 19 CJB). In the same chapter we read: If a man comes upon a girl who is a virgin, but who is not engaged, and he grabs her and has sexual relations with her, and they are caught in the act, then the

man who had intercourse with her must give to the girl's father one-and-a-quarter pounds of silver shekels, and she will become his wife, because he humiliated her; the man may not divorce her as long as he lives (Deuteronomy 22:28-29).

In God's eyes, even the granting of a divorce document did not in itself make a **divorce** legitimate. Far from approving **divorce**, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is a strong warning against it. The passage suggests, perhaps assumes, that a **divorce** on proper grounds, accompanied by a **divorce document**, was permitted. It does not offer a divine provision for divorce, but rather shows that **divorce** often leads to **adultery**. Even on the grounds of **adultery**, **divorce** was tolerated in the Torah only as a gracious alternative to the capital punishment of stoning that **adultery** justly deserved (Leviticus 20:10-14). But pharisaic Judaism had turned what YHVH had provided as reluctant permission into a legal right.⁵²⁹

During the time of Christ, all the Pharisees agreed that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 permitted **divorce**, that only the husband could initiate it, and that remarriage was assumed. The essential part of a Jewish bill of **divorce** was when the husband said to his wife, "You are free to marry any man. And this shall be to you from me, a book of divorcement, and a letter of release and a write of dismissal; to go to be married to whichever man you want. You are a free woman" (Mishna, Gittin 9:3). But they disagreed on the grounds of **divorce**.

There were two schools of thought. Some liberal rabbis like Hillel held to a wide range of interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, *ervant devar*, or for any other reason (Tractate Gittin 9:10). Hillel believed that if a wife deliberately burned her husband's food, a *get* would be permitted. Other rabbis like Akiva believed that if a husband found a woman that he thought was better looking, **divorce** was acceptable. However, conservative rabbis like Shammai took the narrow interpretation that the phrase *ervant devar* was strictly limited to sexual immorality on the part of the wife, the literal implication of the term.

It has been said by Moses to the Israelites in the desert: **Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a divorce document (Matthew 5:31)**. The ease with which **divorce** could be obtained, and its frequency, can be seen from the question the Pharisees asked the Messiah during the training of His apostles (see Ij - **Is It Lawful for a Man to Divorce His Wife?**). For we know that it included every kind of bad behavior, such as going about with loose hair, spinning in the street, commonly talking with men, treating her husband's parents badly in his presence, speaking to her husband so loudly that the neighbors could hear her in the house next door (Chethub. 7.6), a general bad reputation, or the discovery of fraud before marriage. On the other hand, a wife could insist on being **divorced** if her husband were a leper, or affected with polypus, or

engaged in a disagreeable or dirty trade, such as a tanner or coppersmith. One of the cases in which **divorce** was obligatory was, if either party had become heretical, or disavowed their faith in Judaism. But even so, there were at least checks to the danger of general lawlessness, such as the obligation of paying to **a wife her portion**, and the need for a **divorce document**, without which no **divorce** was legal, and had to be worded a certain way, handed to **the woman herself**, in the presence of two witnesses.⁵³⁰

But **Jesus** gave no more approval of **divorce** than **Moses** did when He said: **I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality** (Greek: *porneia*, where we get the word *pornography*), **and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery** (Mattityahu 5:32; Luke 16:18). **Yeshua** affirms exactly what **Moses** taught in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, that unjustified **divorce** inevitably leads to **adultery**. It was as if **the Meshiach** was saying to the self-righteous Pharisees and Torah-teachers, "You consider yourselves to be great teachers and keepers of the Torah, but by allowing no-fault **divorce** you have caused the great stain of **adultery** to pollute **Isra'el**. By lowering the holy standards of **ADONAI** to meet your own lusts, you have led many people into sin and judgment."

Adultery was another reality that **God** never intended, and, up to the time of **Christ**, it was the only thing that could break the bond of marriage because the guilty party would be stoned to death (Leviticus 20:10). But here, **Messiah** specifically mentions **divorce** being permissible on the grounds of **adultery** (Matthew 5:32, 19:9). Why did **God** allow **divorce** to replace stoning? The answer could possibly be that **Isra'el** was so immoral that **she** didn't have the willpower to carry out the **death** penalty. When all was said and done, **ADONAI**, **Himself** chose not to enforce it (see **Gq - The Woman Caught in the Act of Adultery**). Apart from the **death** penalty, **divorce** became the divine alternative tolerated only because of the hardness of the human **heart** as **Yeshua** states in Mattityahu 19:8: **Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard.**

But it is also important to understand that **the LORD** does not *command* **divorce**, even in the case of **adultery**. Otherwise **Ha'Shem** would have given **His divorce document** to **Isra'el** (see my commentary on **Jeremiah At - Unfaithful Isra'el**), and Judah long before **He** did. A legitimate **divorce document** was allowable for **adultery**, but it was never *commanded* or *required*. It was a last resort - only to be used when the unrepentant immorality had exhausted the patience of the innocent spouse, and the guilty one refused to be restored. Although **God hates divorce** (Malachi 2:16), **He** acknowledges that there are times when it does not result in **adultery**. The innocent party who has made every effort to maintain the marriage is free to remarry if **his** or **her** spouse insists on continued **adultery**. It's very

noble to wait and try to work things out, or to go to counseling. But when you know that your spouse is in another's bed, waiting is like bleeding to death. It's slow and painful.

Later in **First Corinthians**, Rabbi Sha'ul added one more legitimate reason for **divorce** and subsequent remarriage. He said: **To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him (First Corinthians 7:12-13).** After giving the reason for that instruction, he adds: **But if the unbeliever wants to leave, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace (First Corinthians 7:15).** The Greek word translated **leave** (*chorizo*) was often used for **divorce**. Consequently, if an unbelieving spouse deserts or **divorces** a believer, the believer is no longer bound and is free to remarry.⁵³¹

I would like to conclude with a word to those who are already **divorced**. **God** has revealed **Himself** and **His** will through **His Son** and through **His Word**. When we follow **His** biblical principles about **divorce** (whether we are aware of them or not) our lives will go smoother than if we didn't follow them; and when we violate **His** biblical principles (whether we are aware of them or not) our lives will be bumpier than if we had followed them. That's the way that our universe is set up, and it doesn't matter if you believe it or not. It's inescapable. Take for example, a man who doesn't believe in gravity. If you take him up to 10,000 feet and toss him out of the plane without a parachute, it doesn't matter if he believes in gravity or not - he is still going to hit the ground. Such it is with biblical principles and **divorce**.

However, let me say that **divorce** is not the unforgivable **sin**. Rejection of the **Holy Spirit** is the unforgivable **sin** because once you reject the wooing of the **Ruach HaKodesh**, you have rejected **Christ's** sacrifice on the cross and your **sins** cannot be **forgiven**, thus being the unforgivable **sin**. **Sin is sin is sin**, and you need to ask for forgiveness: **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (First John 1:8-9).** This is not cheap grace. Just because you have been **forgiven**, doesn't mean that you're pardoned from the consequences of your **sin**. Does that mean **believers** who knew the biblical standard and went ahead and **divorced** anyway will lose their salvation? **By no means** (see **Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). Nevertheless, it does mean that they will suffer loss of peace in this world and reward in the next (see my commentary on **Revelation Cc - For We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ**).

Let me give you an example. After **David** committed adultery with **Bathsheba**, killed **her** husband **Uriah**, and then married **her** (**Second Samuel 11:1-27**), **his** life fell apart. **Amnon**, **David's** son, raped his half-sister **Tamar**. Several years later **Absalom**, **David's** son and **Tamar's** full brother, murdered **Amnon**. Not satisfied with that, **Absalom** led a revolt against his **father** to replace **him** as **king**. Betrayed by **his** son, **David** actually had to flee **Jerusalem**. Finally troops loyal to **the king** killed **Absalom** and **David** mourned bitterly. After returning to **Jerusalem**, **Sheba** rebelled against **David**. Then there was a famine for three years. After that there was war against the **Philistines**. Even though **David** was still **king** and a man after **God's** own heart, the prophet **Nathan** came to **him** and prophesied that **the sword** would **never depart from [his] house** for the rest of **his** life (**Second Samuel 12:10**). What a mess. Needless to say, **David** paid an extremely heavy price for **his adultery**.