

Bible Study 2023 -2024

Class #15

1/23/24

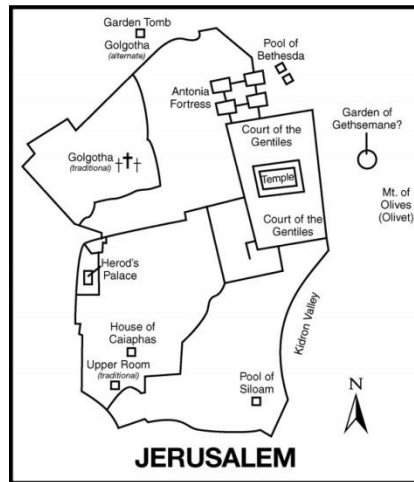
The Synoptic Gospels 2023-2024

- 1/9/24

Holy Land

New Testament

Jerusalem



Synoptics 23 – 24

- Matthew 19

Matthew 19

- **Matthew 19:1-2** *“Now when Jesus had finished these sayings,...and he healed them”*
 - Father reminded us of the five divisions in Matthew’s gospel, and recommended that we put a **IV** at the end of **Matthew 18:35**
 - This is the end of the fourth division within the basic pattern (of five) divisions of Jesus teaching something, followed by His doing something
 - Many scholars attribute this pattern to replicate the Mosaic pattern of the Torah (Moses said things, and then Moses did things)
 - We can perhaps see this in Jesus’ saying: *“You have heard it said, but I say to you,”* as a clear allusion to Moses)

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- Just before we look at His teaching on divorce, we see the gathering of a large crowd following Him to Judea (indicating that He was on the way to Jerusalem)
- As discussed earlier in **Matthew 17**, the *Transfiguration* marks the beginning of the second part of the story as Jesus leaves Galilee and heads toward Jerusalem in Judea
- The fact that there was a large crowd following Him (by the time they get to *Jericho*) previews what will happen on Palm Sunday

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- **Matthew 19:3-7** *“And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, and put her away?”*
 - As this first part is from **Genesis 2:24***, the Pharisees were obviously aware of it
 - Father pointed out that this question and answer process was a rabbinic style of argumentation in which the Pharisees would ask Jesus a question, and He would respond by asking them a question which was directed toward an answer
 - The obvious answer to this question is that “there should be no divorce”

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- But, that was not the question the Pharisees were asking Him
- They understood what He was saying about no divorce being allowed, but **that was not what they were interested in** when they asked why Moses allowed a decree of divorce to be granted
- They asked Jesus **why** Moses **commanded** that one could give a certificate of divorce and send their wife away?
- Jesus responded that **Moses did not** command them to give a certificate of divorce
- To better understand this discussion, we need to look at **Deuteronomy 24:1-4***

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** *“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some **indecenty** in her...the land the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance”*
 - The word “indecenty” means “unhappiness” (something that makes you unhappy) in *Hebrew*
 - This word was the root of the question the Pharisees were debating among themselves
 - The word could be read in many different ways
 - The RSV interprets it as “indecenty”

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- In modern English this usually means some “sexual licentious behavior”
- At that time, the Pharisees were divided on its interpretation which caused the internal debate
- One group believed that if a man saw something indecent in his wife (sexual licentiousness, she was a stripper, a streaker, a prostitute, an adulterous doing something sexually inappropriate), then he could divorce her (as we have seen, this seems to fit the story line in **Deuteronomy 24**)
- There were others who thought this could be about almost anything that made the husband “unhappy”

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- Thus, if she did anything that made her husband unhappy and/or he no longer liked her, he could divorce her
- But, there is another clause in the text they were debating, and it did not indicate that Moses said that if a man is unhappy with his wife, he **must** send her away (divorce her)
- In fact, Moses did not even command that a husband send his wife away
- Instead, he commanded that if they sent their wife away, and she gets remarried, and for whatever reason she is free to marry again, the first husband **may not remarry her!**
- That was the commandment from Moses!

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- This commandment was designed to protect the wife against abuse, and give pause to the husband not to divorce her in the first place
- Father said that before Moses gave the people this (and other) laws, they could simply kill one another over such disputes
- The people of that day certainly lacked the grace that came later through Jesus
- Thus, this rule allowed for divorce as a part of a system that protected the woman from such abuse

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- It simply said that a man could not **remarry** his divorced wife
- Father reminded us of a similar rule in **Numbers 5:11-31*** (**the water test**) used to protect the wife from accusations of adultery

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- **Matthew 19:8-9** *“And I say to you,...commits adultery”*
 - Returning to **Matthew 19**, we can see that the Pharisees completely misread the text in **Deuteronomy 24**, when they said that Moses had commanded a husband to give his wife a certificate of divorce and put her away
 - Here we see how Jesus corrected their interpretation by saying: *“For the hardness of their hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so”*

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- Jesus does not enter into the internal Pharisee debate about the meaning of “indecenty”
- In fact, He stepped aside of their entire ridiculous conversation concerning their subtle reading of the Law built upon fallen human nature
- He called them to return to the state before the fall of Adam and Eve when He said:
 - *“Whoever divorces his wife, except for **unchastity** and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9)*
- At this point, Father turned to look at an understanding of “**unchastity**” (a hotly debated topic among bible scholars)

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- This apparent “acceptance clause” only appears in Matthew’s gospel (**Matthew 19:19**)
- There are three texts in the Synoptics discussing divorce (**Matthew 5:31** and **Luke 16:18** which are identical) and **Matthew 19** and **Mark 10:2-12** (are similar)
- This means that we only have two stories of Jesus commenting about divorce
- A third reference appears in Paul’s **1st Corinthians 7:10-11***
- If we look at Mark and Luke, their statements are “absolute” (no acceptance clause)

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- Father pointed out that Paul in **1st Corinthians 7**, once again, does not provide an “acceptance clause”
- For some reason, out of all of these descriptions, only Matthew presents an “acceptance clause”
- Father said that there are different ways to read this passage, but according to the Biblical Scholar *Joseph Fitzmyer*, it has to do with the interpretation of the Greek word *porneia* used here in the text
- The RSV translates *porneia* as “unchastity”
- This leads to a “exegetical” problem

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- Father pointed out that most people understand unchastity within marriage to relate to adultery (but, the Greek word for adultery is *moicheia*)
- The word adultery also appears in this passage, so why did Matthew not use *moicheia* here instead of *porneia*?
- It would have been a good Greek style of writing to repeat something even if it causes confusion
- Thus, if Matthew wanted to tell us about adultery, He would have done so
- *Fitzmyer* suggested that Matthew must have meant something else here

Matthew 19 (C0nt)

- Father suggested that we look at **Matthew 15:19**, where there is another problem, “*from out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, **adultery, fornication, theft***”
- The word adultery here is *moicheia*; yet the word for fornication is *pornea*
- It would seem from this that Matthew saw the word *pornea* to have a different meaning than adultery (*moicheia*)
- This means that the RSV’s use of unchastity within marriage does not work
- So, Father asked: Why has the historic Catholic Church for years2000 not allowed divorce even for the case of adultery?

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- A person may separate, end the marriage in divorce, but not remarry, unless this problem is resolved (annulment)
- *Fitzmyer* suggested that since Matthew's gospel is very semitic, the answer may be found by looking at the semitic world at that time, and how they dealt with the question of divorce and remarriage
- One of the problems that the *Essenes* had with Jerusalem's religious hierarchy was that they allowance for divorce and remarriage
- It appears that the Essenes saw the problem of *pornea* within marriage as being caused by a certain degree of *sanguinity*

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- **Leviticus 18** (the Law of Moses) forbid the marriage of two people within a certain degree of consanguinity (blood line, incest)
- We basically have these same laws within the church (and society) today
- We still need to understand what Matthew is talking about in this passage
- According to *Fitzmyer*, the early church faced problems from the influx of Gentile Christians coming into the church who were living in marriages that violate **Leviticus 18** concerning *consanguinity*

Matthew 19 (Cont)

- Thus, when a gentile couple came into the church having a close blood relationship, the marriage could be declared a non-marriage in the Jewish sense (fornication), and the man could then divorce his wife and remarry
- Unfortunately, today many Protestants use Matthew's "acceptance clause" to allow for divorce by reading it to mean adultery
- This is a complex question which can be summarized from *Fitzmyer* to be a reference to Gentile incestual marriages coming into the early church needing to be dissolved
- This can further be understood because only Matthew's audience would be aware of the Law in **Leviticus 18**