

## Marriage in Heaven

Matt 22:28, Mark 12:23, and Luke 20:34 record the sadducees attempting to *reductio ad absurdum* Jesus' belief in the resurrection by use of a thought experiment. This story often spurs on common questions pertaining to marriage in the afterlife. Two such questions are: will our earthly marriage continue into the afterlife? Will we recognize that we are married to our spouse in the afterlife? This article will attempt to show that Jesus' answer to the sadducees in the above verses, do not address these questions. We should therefore not base our beliefs on the above two questions on these verses.

It is not uncommon to wonder if the relationship between you and your spouse will continue in some form into the new earthly and heavenly state. It may be argued that ones relationship may be functioning improperly if one or both sides would not want a continuous relationship. However, our wants and desires, however strong, should not be the deciding factor in this matter. Intuition may be a powerful tool, but if it does not cohere to the biblical account then we must reexamine. Lately, I have been asked two specific questions pertaining to this topic. The two questions were: Will our earthly marriage continue into the afterlife? Will we recognize that we are married to our spouse in the afterlife? It appears to me that the primary question of interest is that of continuing our earthly marriage into the new earthly state. It seems wild to think that we would form some kind of heavenly amnesia. Not only would each couple have to form this amnesia, but each person who knew of the marriage would also have to form it. I do not know of any verses mentioning any loss of propositional and non-propositional knowledge of our past lives. We are told that we will gain correct perspectives, but this assumes retention of our knowledge of past events. Given this, this article will attempt to address the question of the continuous nature of our earthly marriages into the new earthly state. The common turn is to a specific story of Jesus's run-in with the sadducees found within scripture. This story is found within three books of the Bible; Matt 22:28, Mark 12:23, and Luke 20:34. Let

us take an exegetical and historical look, to see if an appeal to this specific story provides us with any answers to this question.

The reader should be aware that this thought experiment by the sadducees was not designed to ask anything about the concept of marriage, but to show that belief in the resurrection was absurd. The sadducees already presupposed their understanding of marriage to be true in their efforts to attack the resurrection belief of Jesus. Afterlife concepts of marriage are side effects, not the focus of the passage. Any insight into this idea of marriage was used in order to put on display the wrong system of beliefs the sadducees held. This led to their incorrect belief in the resurrection. The sadducees held a range of different theological beliefs than some of their counterparts. The Pharisees accepted the Torah, Writings, and the Prophets. The Sadducees accepted only the Torah. They believed that the resurrection of the dead was nowhere to be found within the Torah itself, and since they only accepted the writings of Moses, there could be no resurrection. What is clever is the response of Jesus in regard to this belief. According to Mark, Jesus claims that they know neither the scriptures or the power of God. The reference to not knowing scriptures could be said to include two ideas. First, they do not know scriptures to the extent that they have left parts of it out by only believing in the Torah. Second, they have not fully comprehended the Torah. I take it Jesus may have had both in mind, but given the use of the Torah in his argument, the second option displays itself as the obvious choice. Jesus uses the Torah (Exo 3:6) to show that God himself proclaims to be the God of the living not the dead. Luke states, "Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him" (vs. 38). Why is this significant? It not only matters because of their belief system in how the world operates, but also it shows that they missed the idea of life after death in the Torah.

This is on full display when we understand why the sadducees used this thought experiment about marriage to disprove the resurrection.

The saduccess decide to loosely cite what was known as the law of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5; Gen 38:8). This practice obligated a man to marry the childless widow of his brother in order to preserve his brothers family line, name and inheritance.<sup>1</sup> The Mishnah Tractate Yebamath develops it fully.<sup>2</sup> We know this to be their concern:

“Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. And the second and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. Afterward the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.” (28-33).

Their continued mentioning and usage of offspring shows us that each brothers concern was for this women and their first brother to have an offspring. Since male mortality averaged roughly 40 years, it was common for wives to often find themselves widowed.<sup>3</sup> The concern and usage of marriage was not for the sake of understanding marriage, but for the prosperity of their lineage. The saducees believed in “immortality through prosperity.”<sup>4</sup> This belief suggested that the new heavenly state would be very similar to the earthly state we are living in now. People would continue to pass away, so in order for God to continue the Irseali lineage forever, the men and their wives were to be given children. Jesus in his answer directly addresses this belief.

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<sup>1</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, William B. Eerdmans, 2015, Pg. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 155. Interesting enough, the book of Tobit (225-175 BC) tells a story of a woman who married seven men and remained childless. Many scholars think the sadducees would have known the content of this book, and borrowed some of the contents to form their argument against the resurrection.

<sup>3</sup> F. Scott Spencer. *Luke*. Wm B. Eerdmas, 2019, pg. 523.

<sup>4</sup> Joel B. Green. *The Gospel of Luke: New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Eerdmans, 1997, pg. 574.

Two major considerations in Jesus's response shows this to be the case. Jesus states that those who are considered worthy will neither marry or be given in marriage and that they will be like the angels in heaven. This has brought many to believe Jesus is stating that not only will any earthly marriage not be continued, but also any recognition of marriage from a previous earthly state will also be abandoned.<sup>5</sup> This does not seem to be Jesus' message. Let us begin by examining his answer. First, yet very interestingly, Jesus mentions that we will be made like the angels in heaven. What exactly does this mean? Matthew and Mark are silent on this issue and this has led to some unfortunate arguments from this silence.<sup>6</sup> Luckily, Luke has filled in this space. Luke writes that Jesus states that this equalness to the angels is not that they have no marriage relationship (though I doubt the angels ever did or do), but that they cannot die anymore (vs. 36). The reference to the angels is strictly in reference to death in the new earthly state. What Jesus has done is chop away the sadducees' belief in immortality through prosperity. Absent the threat of death, the need for the levirate law on marriage is completely erased.<sup>7</sup> No longer will men or women find their need to continue their family lineage. There will be no death, so there will be no need to reproduce in order to continue the family line.<sup>8</sup> This also

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<sup>5</sup> This is a common notion that I have heard from many pulpits and have read. To give one example, Dr. Spencer in his commentary on Luke states, "all marriage ties will be obsolete, along with everything that goes with marriage" (pg. 524). He mentions that this is a normal way of life when following Jesus and mentions that Jesus even states that we must be willing to abandon ("hate") family members for the kingdoms sake. It seems this takes this verse too far. Luke 14 is about what one is willing to do for the sake of following Christ in this earthly realm. It mentions nothing about the state of marriage now, let alone marriage in the afterlife.

<sup>6</sup> An interesting belief is given by Cyprian. He values the chaste men and women on earth more so than those who are married because they are more like the angels. Cyprian writes, "while you remain chastes and virgins, you are equal to the angels of God" (*The dress of virgins* 22). Unfortunately, this leads to the conclusion that anyone who marries is moving farther away from the picture of the glorious state that will one day become of us. This seems odd given what we know about the story of God with Adam and Eve. It would appear that God has brought them together and in doing so deliberately made them lesser than they were previously. This interpretation begs many questions this article will not address.

<sup>7</sup> Joel B. Green. *The Gospel of Luke: New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Eerdmans, 1997, pg. 575.

<sup>8</sup> Jesus is quiet on the angels and human sexuality in the new earthly state. It would not be shocking to one day find that the angels live an asexual life. But assuming for those who believe that marriage on earth in some

dismantles the sadducees example that attacks their belief in the resurrection. Their whole example rests in this prior belief of needing to continue the line, when this need is false, their example has no bearing against belief in the resurrection?

Second, is the phrase “neither marry nor are given in marriage.” It seems rather clear that there will be no new marriages for those “who are considered worthy to attain to that age...” Although, as shown above, this connects with the context of being like angels in that they will not taste death, it seems obvious that this still speaks to the fact that there will be no new marriage covenants in this future state. The question that is still at hand is what about those who are married prior to this state?<sup>9</sup> Does “given in marriage” represent this? The verb *enkamiskō* represents the idea of a woman being given away in marriage to a man. Dr. Green shows this phrase to represent the idea of allowing oneself to get married,<sup>10</sup> not ones choice of continuing in

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sense is known, continued and recognized in the afterlife, what Jesus did not mention in these verses was the kind of sexual life those who are married here will have in there. Being made like the angels is strictly in relation to not tasting death. If one wanted to believe that those who are still within their marriage covenant will continue a physical relationship in the afterlife, in fact may be able to. Some have argued against this stating that sex is only for procreation in this life. Fortunately, this seems false, for more kinds of bonds in marriage are forged through sex than just merely offspring. One may be able to argue that no offspring will be produced due to decision factors of choosing Christ, but an argument for not having sex in the afterlife only follows from this if sex is only for reproducing. This can be biblically argued against. It seems safe to theorize that our new earthly bodies will lack the function of reproduction, but sex and reproduction are not identical. The overall point I am making is that these verses remain quiet on this topic and we are left speculating.

<sup>9</sup> Some have tried to argue that death breaks the marriage bond (Rom 7:2). The implication to this is that when one’s significant other dies, then you are no longer married to that person. Death ends our covenants to each other and breaks our oneness. This takes what Paul says too far. Paul nowhere explicitly states that death ends ones marriage covenant and oneness. Paul is using an analogy of marriage to show that those baptised in Christ should not live to the law, for they have died to it. When a believer died to the written law through the body of Christ, they are free from the moral constraint of the law to then be connected, belong and live to Christ. Just like when a spouse dies, they are released from the constraint of the moral legality to not marry another, so that marrying another would not make them an adulterer. Being free from the constraint of the moral legality on a marriage covenant, is not the same as to end a marriage covenant. This does nothing to inform us about those in the new earthly state who choose not to use this freedom now to remarry and become one with someone else.

What about those who are married at the time of the second coming? Are they just lucky? Since death has not come upon them, does that mean they are the only ones who get to stay married? There is nothing to even allude or take out of context stating the second coming ends ones marriage bond and or oneness. These verses often get applied wrong, and are taken farther than the context allows for.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

a marriage, but that of someone entering a new covenant of marriage. What is of interest is that Jesus seems then to reiterate the same idea twice within the same sentence. This is not because he lost track of thought, but in doing so Jesus recognizes both male and female parties and the way culturally in which they are represented as coming together in marriage. Typically, the men “marry” and the women “are given in marriage.” This shows mutual participation in the idea of marriage.<sup>11</sup> Jesus was not trying to acknowledge the notion of staying married. In fact, he was approaching the idea of getting married from both parties' angles and stating that both parties had false belief systems about using marriage as an institution for continuing their lineage in the resurrection state.

The saducces believed that if the resurrection was true according to the loosely cited levirate marriage law, then this woman in their story would have to choose from all her previous spouses in order to continue the family line. All these men in some sense had a claim to her. Since the saducees believed that the world would continue in the same manner as it does now when the Messiah comes, the need to continue the familial line would still exist. Which then would require this woman to be with one of these men. This leaves the woman and the seven husbands in an unfortunate dilemma; which man? Jesus does not attempt to offer an answer to who lays claim on the woman, rather he totally bypasses the question by stating that their view of how life functions in the new earthly state is false. It is not identical in the same manner as life here on earth. The resurrection gives each person a new way of life in which no one will die. This being the case, the need for the woman in this example to marry one of the seven husbands in order to continue their family line is false. There is no dilemma! Everyone will be made like the angels in which no one will die. This means there will be no end to their family line. These

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

scripture refernces do not address the above question about continuing our earthly marriage in the final earthly state; it was not intended to. Therefore, we are left speculating and it should be considered as such.