

Divorce in the law and prophets

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[0 : 00] So this is the subject we're looking at, marriage and divorce, and because it's such a sensitive subject and such an important subject, we're trying to do it carefully and a step at a time.

And this evening we won't resolve all the issues and cover all the ground, because there's actually quite a lot of ground in this, but I'll bring you what I've got as we look at divorce in the law and the prophets.

So let's pray. Lord, help us as we look into your word. May our meditation be sweet. May we find that there is something of the honey and the honeycomb in your word, and something which will point us to Jesus Christ, as well as to help us pick our way through all the confusions of and complications of life in this world. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Well, to recap very briefly, we looked last time at marriage, and I personally thought there were a number of surprises there in looking at that quite carefully.

The most commonly referenced idea about marriage was that of taking, and the usual verb was to take a wife.

[1 : 21] And it falls into the idea of the family home, where the daughter in those days would have been. She wouldn't have been economically, financially independent.

She would have lived with her father and with her family. And the father would give his daughter, and the man, the husband, would take the wife.

So almost literally, he takes her and brings her from her father's tent to his tent. And that is the change from being the father's daughter to being the man's wife.

And it's reflected rather charmingly in the Hebrew word. So the ish is the word for man, and isha, very close, is the word for woman.

She was taken out of man. And there isn't a word for husband. There isn't a word for husband. There isn't a word for wife. What there is, ish ish.

[2 : 23] She's this woman's, this man is this woman's man. And that means her husband. Or conversely, this woman is this man's isha.

His wife. So it isn't that there's a separate word for husband and wife. It's that you have the possessive. Not just a man, but her man.

And not just a woman, but his woman. And that's the way it's set out in the Old Testament.

Interestingly, in the wedding service yesterday, the bit that I did actually write in, it wasn't in the service, it was, who gives this woman?

And it was sort of an assumed Skype answer that Darlene's father gives this woman. And then interestingly, the vows, I take you to be my lawful wedded wife.

And then actually in the English ceremony, it goes the other way around. I take you to be my lawful wedded husband. So we have sort of remnants of the Hebrew idea.

[3 : 41] And I also said, and I think this is important, that as we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we don't keep everything the same. So in the Old Testament, for example, multiple wives happened in quite a number of the stories.

And we shouldn't say, oh, well, it's in the Bible, therefore we'll do that, because we're not in that bit of the Bible now. We're in the New Testament. And things have been, the Lord Jesus fulfills the things of the Old Testament.

He fills them where they were headed to. He takes them there. What they were getting at, perhaps imperfectly, he arrives at. So a number of things from last time.

And no doubt you'd be able to listen to that on the internet if you wanted to catch up with it. So today we're going to look at divorce. And again, there isn't a particular vocabulary like we have divorce.

It just means the breaking of a marriage. We have in Hebrew a number of words. So the first one to draw attention to is word number 01644.

[4 : 53] So you could look it up in a Strong's Concordance. Garage. And it, you don't need to worry about that bit. It's used 47 times altogether.

It means, 20 times in the authorised version, it's translated to drive out, to divorce or be divorced twice, or of a divorced woman once. So the normal meaning of it is to drive out, to expel, to cast out, drive away.

And let's look at some examples. So let's look at an example which is perhaps not entirely clear. Genesis 21.10. It's the first use of this and therefore worth looking at.

Genesis 21 verse 10. And I think, Steve, we should actually have got a roving mic.

Do you think you could fish one out? And we'll get somebody to be a reader. But while you're doing that, I'll read Genesis 21. This is to do with Hagar.

[6 : 05] Hagar. And Hagar's son Ishmael is a rival to Sarah's son Isaac.

So the child, let's just see, which child is this? The child grew up and was weaned. And on the day Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast.

But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar, the Egyptian, had borne to Abraham was mocking. And she said to Abraham, get rid of or drive out Garash, the slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.

Now the question is, do we take that to mean, thank you, do we take that to mean the technical divorce or is it simply drive away or is it to drive away with the effect of it being a divorce?

And I'm not sure that I can give you a clear answer to that, but it is a driving out of the home, isn't it? In 16.3, we'll give this to Ben.

[7 : 35] Ben, thank you. Could you read us Genesis 16, verse 3, 3 and 4. Okay.

So after Abraham had been living in Canaan 10 years, Sarai, his wife, took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar and she conceived.

Thank you. So it does look as though Hagar does have the status of a wife. This is not adultery. That would be severely looked on.

She's a second wife. And so I think we could suggest that what's happening in 21.10 is the first example of a divorce.

And it's interesting that it's, well, it looks as though it's approved of by God. Am I right? She says to Abraham, Abraham, and in verse 12, God says to, she says to Abraham, get rid of the slave woman.

[8 : 49] Abraham's distressed. God says to him, do not be distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you because it is through eyes that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also because he is your offspring.

So I think I've put that down with a question mark. Would that count as a divorce? So question mark for that. Let's look at Leviticus 21.7 and verse 14.

And these are regulations and restrictions, 21.7 and 13, 14, 15.

So 21.7 is about priests and 21.13 and 14 is about the high priest if I'm reading that correctly.

So please Ben, could you read us verse 7 and then verse 13 to 15. They must not marry women defiled by prostitution or divorce from their husbands because priests are holy to their God.

[10 : 20] The woman he marries must be a virgin. He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman or a woman defiled by prostitution but only a virgin from his own people so that he will not defile his offspring among his people.

I am the Lord who makes him holy. Thank you very much. So this is interesting. There are restrictions on whom the high priest can marry. Sorry, the priests can marry.

So that excludes somebody who's been a prostitute or divorced and then the high priest a widow divorced or prostitute.

So she must not be a widow nor garesh divorced nor zana a prostitute. It's interesting, isn't it? So what's going on here?

It's to do with holiness and the way this legislation seems to operate is to say that there must be not the slightest hint of abnormality or irregularity in the wife that the priest or the high priest has.

[11 : 27] So the implication is that each of those three states is in some sense abnormal. So being a widow is an abnormal thing because death is abnormal and being divorced is an abnormal thing

because the normal thing would be one man, one wife, full stop and then being a prostitute is an abnormal thing because that's having intimate relations with multiple men.

So the priest under the Old Testament sort of indicates that each of these three states is something abnormal.

I'm not saying that being abnormal is necessarily a sin but it's part of the humiliation of the human condition. So I think having a bad memory and forgetting things is not sin but it's you know we weren't meant to have bad memories it's part of what's happened to the fall and I think these three situations partake of something like that.

Let's look at Leviticus 22 13 which is another piece of legislation about divorce.

Leviticus 22 13 Leviticus 22 13 this is really to do with the priest's food because that has its own ceremonial constraints and could you read us Leviticus 22 13 please.

[13:14] But if a priest's daughter becomes a widow or is divorced yet has no children and she returns to live in her father's house as in her youth she may eat of her father's food no unauthorized person however may eat of it any of it sorry thank you so in those examples we have the return of the divorced woman to her father's house is a possibility so you get the same thing about leaving the father's house going to the husband and then of course if he dies or if she is sent away she can return back to her father's house well that's one word we have another word which is to send away doesn't seem to have a hugely different meaning shallach that's used 847 times of which 566 is send and I don't think the authorized version uses it doesn't say divorce for any of those but it does have the meaning of that let's have a look at

Deuteronomy 22 22 that doesn't seem to be right does it have I read I've got the wrong one 22 19 yeah I'm looking at the wrong verse myself right let me read this one so this is to do with accusing a wife of turning out to have had sexual relations before she was married to this new husband so if a man takes a wife and after lying with her dislikes her and slanders her and gives her a bad name saying I married this woman but when I approached her I did not find proof of her virginity then the girl's father and mother shall bring proof that she was a virgin to the town elders at the gate the girl's father will say to the elders

I gave my daughter in marriage to this man but he dislikes her now he has slandered her and said I did not find your daughter to be a virgin but here is the proof of my daughter's virginity then her parents shall display the cloth before the elders of the town and the elders shall take the man and punish him they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the girl's father because this man had given an Israelite virgin a bad name she shall continue to be his wife he must not divorce her as long as he lives if however the charge is true and no proof of the girl's virginity can be found she shall be brought to the door of her father's house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by being promiscuous while still in her father's house you must purge the evil from among you and verse 22 if a man is found sleeping with another man's wife both the man who slept with her and the woman must die you must purge the evil from Israel and there's quite a few more texts like that which we'll come to in a moment so that verse 19 as it affects divorce if he has made this accusation and it turns out not to be true the provision in the law is that she shall continue to be his wife and he must not divorce her as long as he lives now that seems to me to be making well it's an unsatisfactory situation in all sorts of ways isn't it and I think what the law is trying to do is to protect her as much as possible so one thing it does it protects her from chaps just randomly and in an unfounded way making an accusation like this because if the accusation is proved wrong he's really they're really stuck with each other and so no divorce is possible there and I think we can work back in that and say that there are situations where divorce is possible in the

Old Testament but this isn't one of them and we also notice the the very fierce guarding of the boundaries of marriage so if somebody has had sexual relationships outside marriage or before marriage that is a very fiercely guarded against there are fierce conditions against that situation which is pretty typical of the way the Old Testament looks at that and then if we look at 2229 so there's various things about rape an attack on a girl different in the town because if she'd screamed somebody would have come to help in the countryside nobody might have heard so she's presumed to have not consented and there was no one to rescue verse 27 the man happens to be to virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered he shall pay the girl's father 50 shekels of silver he must marry the girl for he has violated her he can never divorce her as long as he lives so again it's quite tough justice isn't it but he's forced to bear the

responsibility to look after her and he can't shirk it and he can't sort of a couple of months later say right it's all over he's made a decision which is going to last both of them the rest of their lives so that's no divorce is possible there is that making sense anybody want to raise any thoughts about those texts can you say something about the difference between the woman who is not married and she's stoned but the man who rapes the woman is not stoned right which one which one was the first one the one who the charge is that she's not a virgin because in 2220 the first one you mentioned yeah okay so she's stoned

I think there's an issue of evidential proof because in verse 22 they are found sleeping together so it's not a question of she saying well it was him yeah sorry which one sorry could you I'm not following the question right in verse 20 yep if she's not a virgin yep stone somebody else yep she's stoned yep but the man who rapes is not I I just wondered why you know I mean I know it's obviously different but yes yeah okay let's just look at so verse 23 this is this is sex between a an engaged girl and a man who she's not engaged to and we stone them both to death verse 24 yep and in verse 25 it's only the man who dies because the girl is presumed innocent because we assume that she cried out and no one came to help

[22 : 04] I've still got lost as to which of these you're asking the question about sorry sorry to be dense 28 yeah yeah but is not stoned but forced to marry yeah I wonder why the woman wasn't forced to marry if she slept with somebody else and come verse 20 yeah okay it's difficult to capture a discussion on the microphone and I don't think

I know enough about it I'm not familiar enough about it to make very much intelligent comment I think there is I think what the law is trying to do in a rather unsatisfactory situation or a very unsatisfactory situation is make some sort of gradation as to whether it was consensual and who was particularly guilty I think that's the sort of thing it's trying to do and beyond that I don't think I can say very much yeah yes if it's going to feel right I don't need someone else to hang around it is unsatisfactory in lots of ways isn't it but there is an evidential thing in verse 22 if a man is found sleeping with another man's wife so it isn't circumstantial they're actually discovered together which is a different

I think I remember reading it's a different situation in terms of legality than if it's sort of discovered afterwards which is why in John 8 it's rather strange that the woman was found sleeping with a man but it's only the woman who's brought in front and presumably a man must have been involved otherwise it doesn't make sense does it so let's look at 24 Deuteronomy 24 1 to 3 and this is one of the most contested and classic passages here so let's look Deuteronomy 24 verses 1 to 4 Ben please if a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her and he writes her certificate of divorce gives it to her and sends her from his house and if after she leaves his house and she becomes the wife of another man and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce gives it to her and sends her from his house or if he dies then her first husband who divorced her is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled that would be abominable sorry detestable in the eyes of the Lord do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance thank you very much so this is the classic text about about divorce it begins if a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her so the whole question of what that means carries right on through to the new testament and it's that they come to Jesus to ask him which side of the debate he lands on and we'll try and look at this in more detail in future but there was a debate which said it really had to be something serious another rabbi said no it could be anything really she burnt the toast and that's enough the important thing that rabbi would have said is that she gets the properly made out certificate so you can see where that whole thing is going so what it says is so there are some grounds which are debatable and he writes her a certificate of divorce so he's going to send her away that's the shallach word and the bill of divorce is a sefer which is a book or a paper or could be a scroll and the divorce has this kirithuth kirithuth that's the it's a paper of kirithuth a bill of divorce or a certificate of divorce and that's just used three times for that particular piece of paper and that's the text and what the text is saying is that if she's divorced she marries another man verse 3 her second husband divorces her she can't go back to the first husband that's what the text is driving at but there are a number of implications so here it seems to me a clear implication that divorce adultery wasn't catered for at all but divorce is possible it's permitted and it's regulated so it's it's possible because he says this is what happens she divorces and divorces and divorces sent away it's permitted and it's regulated so there are some

things that you can't do being divorced in particular you can't go back to your previous husband and it's regulated in that she has to have this certificate so the sort of

I don't know a public regularisation and I think a protection for the woman so it's got to be done properly and there's an implication here that remarriage is possible not commanded but it's certainly possible and it leaves the question what was the displeasing thing or the indecent thing which we will return to another time so we've looked at these two scenarios and I'm not actually going to take it an awful lot further but what I would like to do is leap forward to Malachi another classic text here so we've seen divorce happens we've seen divorce has regulations attached to it and it's possible for a divorced woman in the Old

[29 : 45] Testament to remarry in Malachi 2 10 to 16 we have this Malachi 2 10 to 16 please notice so if Ben could read this in one moment the repetition of the idea of breaking faith so there's a word to deal treacherously to break faith and it seems to be the burden of this passage that the nation is doing this with God and doing this with one another in particular it with between spouses or spouse as we sometimes say so Malachi 2 10 to 16 please could you read that Ben have we not all one father did not one God create us why did we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another

Judah has broken faith a detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves by marrying the daughter of a forward God as for the man who does this whoever he may be may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty another thing you do you flood the Lord's altar with tears you weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands you ask why it is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth because you have broken faith with her though she is your partner the wife of your marriage covenant has not the Lord made them one in flesh and spirit they are his and why one because he was seeking godly offspring so guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth I hate divorce says the Lord God of Israel and I hate a man covering himself with violence as well as with his garment says the

Lord Almighty so guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith thank you very much so that's the powerful Old Testament text which we've got to put against the other Old Testament texts the law permitted divorce it regulated it it said you could remarry after divorce but here in Malachi we could translate hate reject because that's usually what it means and divorce here is oh I've forgotten I think it's shallak to send away I hate sending away I reject that and it's put in this context that what God is really looking for is faithfulness faithfulness to God faithfulness in human relationships and when they break down it sometimes pulls both down with it so if the people in that people in Israel were getting rid of their Jewish wives in order to marry a wife who was an idol worshipper it would sort of bring the two things together wouldn't it and God's saying you know

I'm just I'm just not up for this at all I've got no time for this I reject the way you're carrying on I reject this sending away that you're doing and so I think we put that in the context of everything else that's said but that's the classic text in which God says I reject this this is not the way I want things to be and let's look another couple of texts Jeremiah 3 1 and I simply want I'm not going to get to the bottom of these texts but I would like us to see something of where they're going if a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man should he return to her again would not the land be completely defiled but you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers would you now return to me declares the Lord thank you so this is the

Lord speaking to his people and he reflects on the provisions of the law of Moses that it's not possible to divorce and marry somebody else and then divorce them and come back to your original husband you can't do that and he says well this is what you're trying to do isn't it you're the people of God and you turned away and you joined yourselves to some other foreign God and now you're deciding to come back to me again and he says if a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another should he return to her again I mean what sort of would that even be possible would not the land be completely defiled but you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers and you're now intending to come back to me declares the Lord and I think what the text is inviting us to think is how could you how difficult it is if not impossible to think of people who wandered away from [35 : 16] God and got themselves involved in all sorts of other spiritual liaison to then turn back and come back to God it's not an easy thing it's not automatic in fact it's put here as being pretty much impossible but my submission is that what Jeremiah is saying is that God is the God of

impossible grace that he will have back his people even if they've been totally obnoxious even if in human terms in the law it would be inconceivable that God says well actually I will have you back I will have you back which is I think that's where that text is going and it's rather a mind blowing thought isn't it and here's another text Isaiah 50 verse 1 this is what the

Lord says hold on hold on we haven't got there yet could you take us through to verse 2 as well thank you this is what the Lord says where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away or to which of my creditors did I send you because of your sins you were sold because of your transgressions your mother was sent away when I came why was there no one when I called why was there no one to answer was my arm too short to ransom!

Thank you very much it's another remarkable text isn't it about the Lord and his people so I'm not quite sure whether it's saying I didn't send you away because there's no certificate or it's saying I did send you away and find the certificate but it's raising the question you were sent away the people of God just were so abominable that they were sent away and yet God's arm is not short that it cannot save and his do I lack the strength to rescue you when I came there was no one there when I called there was no one to answer but I can draw you in my arm is not too short to rescue you and I think these texts are indicating to us the miracle of

God's grace that he's able to go way beyond the human confines of marriage and divorce and what's sensible and even possible and God goes beyond that with his grace and brings us back in this most remarkable and generous way and that's where we'll stop this evening and ending ending