

“The two shall become one flesh”

The Beginning and End of Marriage

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Some Pharisees came to Yeshua, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matt 19:3–6)¹

When Messiah Yeshua is tested with a question about divorce, he doesn’t immediately engage with the ethical and legal arguments already current in the Jewish world of his day,² but instead brings his hearers back to the original male-female union that came to be known as marriage. To understand the meaning, significance and purpose of marriage, then, we will return with the Master to the beginning, exploring the accounts in B’reisheet, and especially the key verse 2:24, to develop a definition of marriage. Indeed, this whole paper can be seen as an exposition of Genesis 2:24 in the context of Genesis 1–3, and the treatment of this verse within the Tanakh, rabbinic literature, and the Apostolic Writings.

Two accounts of origin

Messiah Yeshua’s reference to the beginning highlights two texts: Genesis 2:24, especially its final phrase, “the two shall become one flesh,” and Genesis 1:26–28, with his statement that the Creator “made them male and female.”

And God created the human in his image,
in the image of God He created him;
male and female He created them. Gen 1:27³

Yeshua thereby connects us with the entire creation account of Genesis 1 and 2. The Genesis 1 account of the creation of humankind stands in tension with the account in Genesis 2. In Genesis 1, male and female appear to be created simultaneously, as equal bearers of the divine image; in Genesis 2, the woman is made from the man, who is created first. To understand the relationship

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Apostolic Writings are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This choice is based on both my frequent use of the NRSV-based *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (New York: Oxford, 2011; referred to as JANT), and the NRSV policy allowing for occasional word substitutions, such as “Yeshua” for “Jesus.”

² Craig S. Keener. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 463. Along with numerous modern references, Keener cites the Hillel-Shammai debate on Deut. 24:1, b.Gittin 90a.

³ All quotations of the Torah are from *The Five Books of Moses*. A translation and commentary by Robert Alter (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004). Quotations from the rest of the Tanakh are from Jewish Publication Society TANAKH translation copyright © 1985, 1999, by the Jewish Publication Society.

between these two accounts, we note first that throughout Genesis 1, God advances the process of creation by dividing or separating diverse elements: light from darkness (1:4); waters above from waters below (1:6); dry land and the seas (1:9–10); day and night (1:14, cf. 1:18). This distinguishing process continues as God creates plants (1:11–12), sea creatures and birds (1:21), and earth-bound creatures (1:24–25) “of each kind,” that is, each with its own distinctive qualities.

Reflecting Genesis 1:27, Midrash Rabbah pictures an original male-female Adam, who later will be split or divided, like other elements of creation.

R. Samuel b. Nahman said: When the Lord created Adam He created him double-faced, then He split him and made him of two backs, one back on this side and one back on the other side. (Genesis R. 8:1)⁴

In this reading, the female is not so much “created” in Genesis 2 as separated from the male. The “splitting” of Adam to give him two backs reiterates the dividing and separating process of Genesis 1. In Genesis 2:21, “He took one of his ribs,” would refer to a further separating of these two backs or sides⁵ into two separate humans, one male and one female, out of the prototypical androgynous Adam.

Against this background, it is striking that only at the first marriage is the creative process of dividing reversed, as man and woman, after being made distinct, “become one flesh” (2:24). Here God’s purpose advances not through separation into distinct kinds, but through merging, joining two kinds into one. The distinct bodies of male and female now reunite to become one flesh, not as a reversal of the process of creation, but as its culmination. Adam, created at the climax of the six days of Genesis 1, is now no longer alone, but united with the one who is “bone of my bones/ and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). They are together, naked and unashamed, in a moment of equilibrium that we can fittingly describe as Shalom, before the entry of the serpent and all that he brings to play in chapter 3. The consummation achieved by male and female, therefore, becomes the paradigm of the consummation toward which all Creation is moving.⁶

This glimpse of marriage “in the beginning” provides an outline for our entire study, which we organize under four categories:

1. The foundation of marriage

The creation account of the two becoming one flesh reveals a three-fold purpose of marriage: creation of a family; intimate companionship; covenant with the Creator.

⁴ All references to Midrash Rabbah are from *Midrash Rabbah, Vol. I – X*. Rabbi Dr. H Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds. (London, New York: Soncino Press, 1983.)

⁵ The Hebrew term for “rib” here, *tsela*, can also be translated as side. Translator Everett Fox notes that this alternative is “paralleling other ancient peoples’ concept of an original being that was androgynous (*The Five Books of Moses: The Schocken Bible, Volume I* [New York: Schocken Books, 1995] 20). See *R. Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Creation*. Translated and annotated by Michael Linetsky (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998) 70; Genesis R. 17:6.

⁶ E.g. Isaiah 61:10, 62:1-5; Hos. 2:18-22, Rev. 21:2.

2. The order of marriage

In marriage, the inherent male-female equality as divine image-bearers operates in tension with differing roles. These roles are accentuated and to some degree set against each other after Adam and Eve's sin in Gan Eden, and persist into the Messianic, New Covenant context in modified form. This section will also include a brief look at the significance of singleness.

3. The boundaries of marriage

On one level, marriage is an institution that protects the covenantal, one-flesh union of man and woman. What are the boundaries of that institution? We will consider the violations and penalties outlined in Scripture, the biblical treatment of eligible and ineligible marriage partners, and the internal boundary of marriage reflected in the family purity laws.

4. The consummation

The wedding appears repeatedly in Scripture as a metaphor for the consummation of God's purposes for creation. The use of this metaphor reflects back upon marriage itself to reveal and heighten its significance. This section will explore some new material, and then bring together various strains already discussed concerning the purpose or teleology of marriage.

1. The foundation of marriage

Messiah Yeshua cites "one flesh" as a description not simply of sexual union, but of marriage itself,⁷ thus reflecting the wider context of Genesis 2:18–25. The first male and female join together as one flesh only after a third party, Hashem himself, brings the woman to the man. "[A]nd the LORD God built the rib He had taken from the human into a woman and He brought her to the human" (2:22). Nahum Sarna comments, "As noted in a midrash, the image may well be that of God playing the role of the attendant who leads the bride to the groom. Without doubt, the verse conveys the idea that the institution of marriage is established by God Himself."⁸ And so we have here not only the etiology of human sexuality, but of marriage itself, which serves to protect and sanctify that sexuality.

Furthermore, as Sarna notes, Hashem's involvement in the primal wedding suggests the role of community in subsequent weddings.

R. Abbahu said: The Holy One, blessed be He, took a cup of blessing and blessed them.
. . . R. Simlai said: We find that the Holy One, blessed be He, blesses bridegrooms,
adorns brides, visits the sick, buries the dead, and recites the blessing for mourners. He

⁷ Messiah discusses "one flesh" as the antithesis of divorce, which is the topic at hand in Matt. 19:3-6. He thereby defines this one-flesh union as the paradigm of marriage.

⁸ *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, commentary by Nahum M. Sarna (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 23, citing Yal. Gen. 24 and Gen. R. 18:4.

blesses the bridegrooms, as it is written, And God blessed them; He adorns brides, as it is written, *And the Lord God built the rib . . . into a woman* (Gen. 2:22).⁹

In this midrash, God's actions at the first marriage provide a model for the community's actions in subsequent marriages, a model which is developed further in halakha.

Marriage, then, is not simply sexual union, but sexual union affirmed and protected by the community. This combination comes into focus gradually in the Genesis narrative. Thus, the earliest accounts of marriage are laconic. Cain's wife simply appears without introduction: "And Cain knew his wife and she conceived . . ." (Gen. 4:17); later, "And Lamech took him two wives" (Gen. 4:19). The "book of the lineage of Adam" in chapter 5 doesn't mention wives at all; the males simply beget sons and daughters, generation after generation, until the time of Noah and his three sons.

In the patriarchal stories, however, the picture changes. When Abram leaves Haran in response to Hashem's call, he takes along Sarai his (named) wife (Gen. 12:5). It's clear in the stories of Sarai-Sarah and Hagar (Gen. 16, 21) that Sarah as wife enjoys a higher status than Hagar, with whom Abraham will also have one-flesh intimacy. Marriage is sexual intimacy plus communal sanction. Thus, when Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac, the beautiful account of Genesis 24 includes familial negotiations for a marriage contract, along with the blessing of the bride's family upon the new marriage (Gen. 24:60). Jacob's marriages are far less orderly, but they still entail family involvement. Isaac sends Jacob off with a blessing to his great-uncle Bethuel's household to find a wife (Gen. 28:1–5). Jacob contracts with Bethuel's son Laban to marry Rachel. Laban deceives Jacob into marrying his older daughter, Leah, first. In the midst of this troubling tale we first hear of a wedding feast, attended by "all the men of the place," and of the formality of the father (Laban) bringing his daughter to the groom (Jacob), for the marriage to be consummated (Gen. 29:22–23). We might read Laban's act as an ironic echo of the original wedding ceremony, in which Hashem "brought her to the human" (Gen. 2:22). What's clear is that the triangular shape of marriage hinted at in Genesis 2—male, female, and an attending third party or parties—is well established in the patriarchal accounts.

The shape of marriage, then, is triangular. A close reading of Genesis 1 and 2 also reveals a triangular or three-fold purpose of marriage, including intimate companionship, procreation, and divine covenant.

Maurice Lamm lists three "Purposes of Marriage" in his summation of Jewish tradition.¹⁰ First, companionship. Lamm supports a translation of Genesis 2:18 as, "It is not good for the man to be *lonely*," rather than the usual "alone." He comments: "Loneliness is not felt by animals; only man can experience existential loneliness, the fragmentary and incomplete nature of this world.

⁹ Genesis R. 8:13 on Genesis 1:28.

¹⁰ Maurice Lamm. *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David, 1991) 122-141. I draw heavily upon Lamm because I've used his book *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York: Jonathan David, 1969) in my practice for years and find it to be consistently helpful. His marriage book reflects the same balance and depth.

It is the genuine companionship of Adam and Eve that humanity requires, and which is the stated purpose for marriage in the scheme of creation.”¹¹

The second purpose is “creation of a family,” which parallels “procreation,” but provides more nuance. “Procreation” could be simply biological or material; “creation of a family” comprises procreation plus the institution that nurtures the issue of procreation. Marriage is a response to the creational mitzvah, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” and also creates a new nuclear family within the extended family of Israel. Marriage, then, is not primarily instrumental, merely a means to accomplish procreation. The attraction between male and female, and the blessing of no longer being alone, are equally foundational.

Lamm’s third purpose is “sexual relations within marriage,” or *onah*.¹² This term is derived from Exodus 21:10: “If another woman he should take for himself, he must not stint from this one her meals, her wardrobe, and her conjugal rights [*onatah*].” The Talmud records a discussion of “the *onah* spoken of in the Torah,” which lists the length of time men in various occupations can be absent from their wives, and thus from fulfilling their sexual commitment, without their wives’ permission.¹³ Sexual union, here framed as the man’s obligation to his wife, has value and meaning apart from procreation. Alongside the negative commandment of Exodus 21:10, Deuteronomy 24:5 stands out as a positive mitzvah: “When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out in the army and shall not cross over on its account for any matter. He shall be exempt in his house for a year and gladden his wife whom he has taken.” Note that the goal of this mitzvah is not reproduction, but happiness to the bride. *Onah* is the woman’s right and the husband’s obligation—but it’s not against the rules for him to enjoy it too!

Departing from Lamm, however, I see *onah* not as a distinct purpose, but as part of the intimate companionship for which marriage is intended. There are, of course, aspects of this companionship that are not sexual, but the sexual dimension implied within *onah* is essential to it. Instead of *onah* as a third purpose of marriage, then, we can discern a third purpose in Messiah Yeshua’s comment on Genesis 2:24—“what *God* has joined together.” Marriage is inherently covenantal, an institution of divine-human interaction, and one purpose of marriage is to enshrine and reflect that covenantal quality.

These realities affirm the sanctity of marriage for couples who cannot or do not have children. According to halakha, a husband who fails to fulfill the mitzvah to have children within ten years after marriage was obliged to divorce his wife and seek another marriage partner (Yevamot, 64a). But *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* 22:2 pictures the value of marriage beyond this legal obligation.

In Sidon it happened that a man took a wife with whom he lived for ten years and she bore him no children. When they came to R. Simeon bar Yohai to be divorced, the man

¹¹ Ibid. 123.

¹² Ayin-vav-nun-hey. Jewish sources explain the word as meaning “time” in some sense, but it may be derived from the root ayin-vav-nun, meaning “dwell,” as noted in, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* [TWOT], edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 654.

¹³ Mas Kethuboth 61b. *The Soncino Talmud*. Electronic version 2.2, Dafka, 2001.

said to his wife: “Take any precious object I have in my house—take it and go back to your father’s house.” Thereupon, R. Simeon bar Yoḥai said: “Even as you were wed with food and drink, so you are not to separate save with food and drink.” What did the wife do? She prepared a great feast, gave her husband too much to drink [so that he fell asleep], then beckoned to her menservants and maidservants saying, “Take him to my father’s house.” At midnight he woke up from his sleep and asked, “Where am I?” She replied, “Did you not say, ‘Whatever precious object I have in my house—take it and go back to your father’s house?’ I have no object more precious than you.”¹⁴

In addition to affirming the marriage of childless couples, this story provides an essential lesson for couples with children: even when the child as a “precious object” is gone from the house, the even more precious spouse remains. Couples sometimes become divided or triangulated by their children, and need to make the marriage itself a higher priority. For the sake of the children as well as the marriage itself, they need to rebuild their husband-wife intimacy, even if that requires less attention to the children. The one-flesh union is male and female, not parent and child.

The Jewish Wedding

The Jewish wedding ceremony enacts the elements that we are discussing here. Today’s wedding ceremony combines two ancient ceremonies, originally taking place about a year apart, *erusin* or *kiddushin* (betrothal) and *nissu’in* (the wedding proper).¹⁵

Before the ceremony takes place, two prerequisites must be met; consent of both parties and the signing of a *ketubah* or marriage contract in the presence of witnesses.¹⁶ The requirement of consent reflects the story of Rebekah’s betrothal to Isaac, in which her family asks for her consent before agreeing to the proposal conveyed by Abraham’s servant and allowing her to depart with him (Gen. 24:56–58). The *ketubah* marks marriage as a covenant, stating that the proposal of marriage is “according to the law of Moses and of Israel,” stipulating an exchange of items of value, detailing obligations and responsibilities, and requiring the presence of witnesses, all features of ancient covenant enactments.¹⁷ Lamm makes a distinction between the *ketubah* as a contractual document, and the covenant of marriage itself.

¹⁴ Cited in <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/infertile-wife-in-rabbinic-judaism>, accessed 3/14/15. Cf. Song of Songs R. 1:4.

¹⁵ This terminology is fluid. Rabbi Isaac Klein uses *erusin* and *kiddushin* in *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992) 391. Klein also discusses a third, preliminary, element in talmudic times, termed *Shiddukhin* or engagement. R. Sacks, in *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem: Koren Pub., 2009) 1038ff., refers to *erusin* or *kiddushin* and *nissu’in*. Lamm uses *kiddushin* and *nissuin*, 210.

¹⁶ Klein 392. Lamm lists consent, legal capacity, and witnesses as the “minimum legal requirements” of the wedding ceremony, which follows the signing of the *ketubah*, 163–168.

¹⁷ Maurice Lamm. “The Ketubah Text.”

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Events/Weddings/Liturgy_Ritual_and_Custom/Ketubah/Details_I.shtml?p=1 accessed 10/11/14. Covenant features are listed in TWOT 281-282.

The Jewish concept of marriage can be summarized as follows: *The form, the contract [ketubah] and the process are contractual. The content, the bond, and the resulting relationship are covenantal.*

The covenant is the purpose and essence of all Jewish marriage. Malachi (2:14) speaks of “the wife of my covenant,” and Ezekiel (16:8) says, “Yea, I swore unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee.”

The contract is an agreement to abide by certain rules, but a covenant has a metaphysical dimension. By contract we share duties; by covenant we share destinies. . . .

The paradigm of man’s marriage covenant with woman is the be’rit, the covenant of God and His people, Israel.¹⁸

Sharing of food and drink is also part of ancient covenant ritual,¹⁹ and the betrothal ceremony opens with a blessing over a cup of wine, which the bride and groom share. “Because marriage is covenantal, both components, *kiddushin* and *nissuin*, are initiated with the blessing over wine.”²⁰ The rabbi recites the betrothal blessing, ending with, “Blessed are You, Lord, who sanctifies His people Israel by the rite of the canopy (*huppah*) and sacred covenant of marriage.”²¹ The groom then gives a ring, or other item of equivalent value, to the bride, and recites, “Behold you are consecrated to me by means of this ring, according to the ritual of Moses and Israel.” Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes, “The use of the word ‘consecration’ in the context of marriage signals the sacred nature of the bond between the partners.”²²

This ritual creates a legal bond between groom and bride, but they are not yet permitted to cohabit. The *ketubah* is then read, and the second ceremony, *nissu’in*, begins as bride and groom are brought together under the *huppah*. The Seven Benedictions are recited over a second cup of wine and afterwards the couple are provided with a few moments of privacy or *yichud*.²³ This tradition symbolizes the physical consummation of the marriage, which is also represented by the bride’s joining the groom under the *huppah*. As the betrothal blessing above states, the *huppah*, representing consummation—the two becoming one flesh—is essential to sanctifying the marriage. This consummation in turn anticipates the consummation of creation, which is represented in the Seven Benedictions by the redemption of Israel.

Bring great happiness and joy to the one who was barren [Zion],
as her children return to her in joy. . . .

Soon, LORD our God, may there be heard in the cities of Judah,
and in the streets of Jerusalem, the sounds of joy and gladness,
the sounds of the bridegroom and bride,

¹⁸ Lamm, *The Jewish Way* 162-163.

¹⁹ TWOT, 281–282. See Ex. 24, in which the covenant stipulations are read to the Israelites, they are sprinkled with “the blood of the covenant” (vs. 8), and then the representative elders eat and drink in God’s presence (vs. 11). Cf. Fox, 388. Israel’s encounter with Hashem at Sinai is compared to a wedding ceremony in rabbinic literature.

²⁰ Lamm, *The Jewish Way* 163.

²¹ Koren Siddur, 1038.

²² Ibid.

²³ Klein 391-392, or Lamm, *The Jewish Way* 222–231.

the joyous sounds of bridegrooms from their wedding canopy and
of young people at their feasts of song.
Blessed are you, LORD,
who makes the bridegroom rejoice with the bride.²⁴

Summary

The creation account of the two becoming one flesh reveals a three-fold purpose of marriage as the union of male and female: procreation in the broad sense of creating a family; intimate companionship that overcomes existential aloneness on a human level; and participation in covenant with the Creator, a divine-human partnership that anticipates the consummation toward which the creation is moving.

2. The order of marriage

In Genesis 2, the creation of woman—or the division of primordial Adam into male and female—is triggered by God’s observation, “It is not good for the human to be alone (or lonely); I shall make him a sustainer beside him [*ezer kenegdo*]” (Gen. 2:18). *Ezer kenegdo* is an essential term in our definition of marriage, but one that is translated in various ways. The classic KJV rendering, “help meet,” has survived in some circles, along with various derivations. Robert Alter’s translation, however, more effectively captures the sense of the Hebrew. Alter explains, “‘Help’ is too weak because it suggests a merely auxiliary function, whereas ‘*ezer*’ elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts, as often in Psalms.”²⁵ Indeed, in Psalms, the role of *ezer* is often ascribed to God himself (e.g. 33:20; 70:6/5; 115:9-11; 146:5), thus supporting the translation of “sustainer” over “helper.”

As the Genesis narrative progresses, it reveals that the *ezer kenegdo* that Adam seeks is woman. On the way to that revelation, however, God forms the animals and brings them to Adam to be named, only to show that among them no *ezer kenegdo* is found (2:20). Adam has dominion over the animals; he is to rule over them, and his act of naming is a function of that dominion. The woman, in contrast, is formed from him, is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, not subject to his dominion, but a sustainer beside him. His naming her *Ishah*, woman, “for from man [*ish*] was this one taken” (2:23) seems more an act of discovery than of domination. Furthermore, these words comprise the first recorded statement of Adam, even though he has probably spoken earlier, in naming the animals. Alter notes, “The first human is given reported speech for the first time only when there is another human to whom to respond.”²⁶ And of course that other human is his counterpart, the first woman. Accordingly, the rabbinic literature sees man as coming into his full purpose and blessing in partnership with woman: “A man who has no wife lives without

²⁴ Koren Siddur 1040.

²⁵ Alter 22, fn.

²⁶ Ibid.

joy, without blessing, and without goodness” (b.Yevamot 62b). “He who marries a good woman is as if he fulfilled the whole Torah from beginning to end” (*Yalqut Shimoni, Ruth 606*²⁷).

Recently, as my family sat together at the Shabbat table and I read *Eshet Chayil* (Proverbs 31:10-31), I was brought up short by the second verse: “Her husband’s heart trusts in her, and he has no lack of gain” (Koren Siddur). I’d gotten some particularly good advice from my wife, Jane, that day, and I wondered out loud if this sentence was causative: “Her husband’s heart trusts in her; *therefore* he has no lack of gain.” Without hesitation, the women around the table answered in the affirmative. Marriage is sustained and deepened as the husband recognizes the gifting of his wife.

All of this expands on the notion of “genuine companionship” or intimacy as one of the purposes of marriage. Ramban comments on “they shall be one flesh” that the same could be said of the sexual functioning of animals. What is unique to humankind is “cleaving.”

It is for this reason that Scripture states that because the female of man was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, he therefore cleaves to her and she nestles in his bosom as his own flesh, and he desires to be with her always. And just as it is with Adam, so was his nature transmitted to his offspring, the males among them should cleave to their women, leaving their fathers and their mothers, and considering their wives as if they are one flesh with them.²⁸

Marital intimacy in Ramban’s view, then, is a uniquely human trait, part of what distinguishes humans from the animals. Or rather, since singleness, as we shall see, is also a valid status, especially in today’s conditions, we should say that the *capacity* for this sort of intimacy is part of what defines our humanity, whether we’re married or not.

Ramban, commenting on Genesis 2:18, balances this emphasis on cleaving with the insight that true intimacy requires distinct individuals.

And the Holy One, blessed be He, saw that it was good that “the help” stand facing him, and that he should see or be separated from it or joined to it at his will. This is the meaning of what He said in the verse, *I will make him a helper opposite him.*²⁹

One-flesh union doesn’t mean merger or fusion of personalities, but two persons joining in intimacy, yet remaining distinct. Rabbi and family therapist Edwin H. Friedman speaks of this dynamic as “Differentiation . . . the capacity to be an ‘I’ while remaining connected.”³⁰ It’s striking that Genesis 2:24 says that the *man* leaves father and mother to cleave to his wife, when

²⁷ Cited in Klein 381. At the same time, as we will see in “A note on singleness” below, the Apostolic Writings explicitly affirm the single state.

²⁸ *Ramban, Commentary on the Torah: Genesis*. Translated and annotated by Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel. (New York: Shilo, 1971) 80.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 76.

³⁰ Edwin H. Friedman. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011) 27.

in the ancient near East it is normally the *woman* who leaves to cleave to her husband, as reflected in the stories of betrothal in Genesis. In 2:24, however, it is the man who leaves, which may be the precise point. In the ancient world, everyone knows that the woman leaves father and mother when she marries a man. What's less obvious, but equally, or perhaps even more, important is that the man must leave as well—even if he stays put physically. This leaving is an act of differentiation, which provides for true intimacy between husband and wife, rather than mutual dependency or enmeshment.

Leaving the paternal household also allows the man to become “master” of a new household, as in Genesis 24. After Abraham's servant finds Rebekah, the bride for Isaac, he asks her family to let him return with her to “my master” (24:56), meaning Abraham, as is evident in his many uses of the word “master” throughout the chapter. Later, when the servant returns to the land of Canaan with Rebekah, she sees Isaac in the field coming toward them, and asks who he is. The servant replies, “He is my master” (24:65). It's as if Isaac is transformed from “my master's son” to “my master” by the presence of his bride. The prominence given in the patriarchal narratives to this story, and to the tale of Jacob's acquisition of brides afterwards, highlights the importance of marriage itself, not only in creating a new family, but also in bringing the male into his differentiated individuality. Rebekah's proactive responsiveness in Genesis 24 suggests that she too becomes a defined individual as she approaches marriage with Isaac.

Individual differentiation provides for mutuality between husband and wife. In the biblical world, the male generally had the dominant role, and yet he is incomplete apart from the woman. Man and woman both share in the divine image, and are equally essential to the meaning of humanness, so that the humanity of each is completed when they unite. Accordingly, Midrash Rabbah highlights the interdependency of man and woman.

In the past Adam was created from dust and Eve was created from Adam; but henceforth it shall be *In our image, after our likeness*; neither man without woman nor woman without man, and neither of them without the Divine Spirit.³¹

Within marriage, the inherent equality of male and female as divine image-bearers is expressed in tension with differing roles of male and female. These differing roles are accentuated, and to some degree set against each other, as a consequence of exile from the Garden. They persist into the Messianic community and are upheld in the Apostolic Writings, as we will see. Furthermore, even before exile from the Garden, we can detect a hierarchy in the male-female relationship. Alter renders *ha-adam* in Genesis 2 as “the human” rather than “the man,” but we're still confronted by male-female hierarchy in the human's observation,

This one shall be called Woman (*ishah*),
for from man (*ish*) was this one taken. Gen. 2:23³²

³¹ Gen. Rabbah 18:9. Note the similarity here to 1 Cor 11:11-12, which will be discussed below.

³² Ironically, in these two lines that clearly differentiate male and female, Alter chooses to render the feminine pronoun *z'ot* as “this one,” rather than simply as “she.”

The Midrash simply observes, “Adam was created from dust and Eve was created from Adam.” Two passages in the Apostolic Writings agree: “Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man” (1 Cor. 11:8); and “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:13). After the man and woman sin, this subtle hierarchy becomes pronounced, as the LORD God tells the woman:

“I will terribly sharpen your birth pangs,
in pain shall you bear children.
And for your man shall be your longing,
and he shall rule over you.” (Gen. 3:16)

The two Apostolic passages referred to here draw upon our Genesis texts to expand on the relationship of man and woman in marriage.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is discussing head coverings, or veils, which he portrays as appropriate for women and inappropriate for men.

For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. (11:7–12)

Interpreters argue whether Paul’s comment here should be understood as a universal principle, or as a recommendation to conform to both Jewish and Roman custom of the time. Regardless of the application of these verses, however, Paul is clearly citing the order of creation, man first and then woman, rather than mere social custom, to support differing practices between men and women. At the same time, he cites the mutual dependency of man and woman, and the overarching “all things are from God,” to deconstruct a strictly male-dominant viewpoint. Moreover, both men and women in this context are praying and prophesying, that is, exercising significant verbal ministry, within the public meeting of the *kehilah* (1 Cor. 11:4–5).

Gordon Fee provides a helpful summation of this passage:

Paul’s point, of course, is that in the creation narrative this [creation of woman from man] did not happen the other way around—man from woman and for her sake. Hence he is her “head” (her source of origin) and she is his “glory.” She must not be uncovered when praying and prophesying and thereby disregard one of the (apparently) visible

expressions of differentiation, because in so doing she brings shame on him by trying to dissolve the rightful male/female relationship that still obtains in the present age.³³

Fee may be signaling his own egalitarian perspective with this final phrase, “in the present age”. Does the male/female relationship *still obtain* in the present age until it is overcome in the age to come, when all distinctions are dissolved in the presence of God? Or is this relationship an expression of inherent, creational distinctions that will remain even in the restoration of all things? Either way, marriage is the union of two distinct persons with distinct roles, which may vary in different cultural settings. The fact of distinction between male and female, and the resultant possibility of a hierarchical ordering, remain within this age. But here Paul emphasizes male-female mutuality and interdependency. Paul’s emphasis on male-female mutuality is evident earlier, in 1 Corinthians 7. A close reading of that chapter reveals a unique treatment of “complete mutuality between the two sexes.”³⁴ Verses 7:2–5, 10–16, and 32b–34 in particular entail a constant oscillation between man and woman, and an equal appeal both to husband and to wife, on each point that Paul raises, with no sense of hierarchy or distinctive roles at all.

1 Timothy 2, in contrast, invokes a sharp distinction between men and women in the context of teaching.

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (1 Tim 2:11–15)

Unlike 1 Corinthians 11, this passage is hard to read simply as an argument for maintaining social norms. JANT comments, “1 Timothy grounds female subordination in creation.”³⁵ The passage, moreover, not only cites the order of creation, as does 1 Corinthians 11, but also the account of Adam and Eve’s sin in Genesis 3. This passage also differs from 1 Corinthians 11 (as well as 1 Corinthians 7) in lacking the sense of interdependency noted there. On the other hand, we should not read the reference to childbearing in 1 Timothy as heightening female subordination, as if her only or highest purpose in marriage is bearing children; rather, the reference is triggered by the mention of Eve’s deception. In Genesis 3, soon after Eve is deceived and she and Adam eat of the tree, the focus shifts to childbirth. First, the LORD God tells the serpent that the seed of the woman, “will boot your head / and you will bite his heel” (Gen. 3:15b). Hashem then says to the woman herself, “I will terribly sharpen your birth pangs, / in pain shall you bear children. / And for your man shall be your longing, / and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16). 1 Timothy reflects this whole context, drawing out the implications not only of an ordered creation, but also of the cataclysmic sin of the Garden, which continues to affect

³³ Gordon D. Fee. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 517-518.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 270.

³⁵ JANT ad loc. The notes add, “The view that women are subordinate to men and that the subordination derives from Genesis appears in later Jewish circles and is native to some rabbinic understanding of womanhood (e.g. *b.Ber.* 61a).”

husband-wife relationships, even in Messiah. The faithful woman, however, will be brought safely through the harsh conditions of childbirth imposed after the transgression in Eden.

Our purpose here is to define marriage, not to resolve all the secondary questions of the male-female relationship within marriage. Our reading of the Apostolic texts, however, does uncover an inherent tension within marriage between male-female equality as divine image-bearers on the one hand and disparate male-female roles on the other.³⁶ But “tension” may be too negative; rather, we see a dynamic balance in which the male-female distinction inherent to marriage, and expressed in varying ways in different cultures, glorifies the Creator, who distinguishes between day and night, heaven and earth, sea and dry land, and also male and female. Indeed, one purpose of marriage may be to display a quality of ordered relationship free of the dynamics of power and status that seem inherent to every human society. The dominant party is to sacrifice self on behalf of the subordinate party. The subordinate submits, not out of coercion or inferiority, but as a free act of service that reflects the service of Messiah himself. Ephesians 5:21 captures this mutuality within hierarchy: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Messiah.” We will explore the whole passage, Ephesians 5:22–33, further in section 4.

Summary

The community is responsible to address this male-female distinction in ways that honor the profound mutuality and interdependency of man and woman, and the divine image within both. The community is to provide an alternative to both the harshness of male domination that has prevailed throughout history, and the current overreaction that would deny any inherent distinction between male and female. In the Messianic community the divine image shared by men and women is revealed in fuller measure through the Ruach poured out on “your sons and your daughters, and . . . even upon my slaves, both men and women” (Acts 2:17–18).

A note on singleness

Our discussion thus far portrays marriage as the ideal, and even as the fulfillment of our humanness as designed by the Creator. Accordingly, Jewish tradition generally extols marriage (although with plenty of reality checks), and devalues singleness. The Apostolic Writings in contrast, although in line with some Jewish sectarian and apocalyptic texts of their era,³⁷ define a special place and value for singleness, as in Yeshua’s saying about “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:10-12), or Paul’s pragmatic advocacy of singleness in 1 Corinthians 7:25ff. Paul favors singleness not because he denigrates marriage, as passages like 1 Corinthians 11:7–12 or Ephesians 5:22–33 make clear, but because of “the present distress” (1 Cor. 7:26) and his sense that the return of Messiah was at hand. Likewise, it may be that those

³⁶ JANT cites Gal 3:28 and Romans 16:1-3, as defending a more egalitarian position, with 1 Cor 14:33b-36 arguing for subordination. Other Apostolic passages could be cited for both positions.

³⁷ Keener 472. JANT on Matt 19:12 “some Jews in the Second Temple period valued celibacy (Philo, *Cont. Life* 8.68).”

who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom are responding to the immediate demands of the kingdom that is at hand and to be taken by force (Matt 11:12).

Today, profound changes in our culture tend to promote singleness, and delay or even eliminate marriage as a possibility for many.³⁸ The so-called sexual revolution launched a generation ago has succeeded in breaking the link between active sexual expression and marriage. One of the main motivations for marriage, at least for men, is gone. (Of course, there was plenty of sexual activity outside of wedlock in previous generations, but only recently has it been completely normalized and de-stigmatized.) Another force contributing to widespread singleness is easy access to divorce, which returns many once-married individuals to a status of singleness, whether these individuals have chosen it or not. Also, young people are encouraged to focus on education and career before considering marriage, and postponement can decrease the likelihood of getting married at all. The Apostolic Writings affirm singleness as a choice, but we should also support those who find themselves single without choosing it. Our community needs to be careful to view and speak of singleness without stigma, and to affirm the benefits of singleness clearly articulated in 1 Corinthians 7:24–40, without minimizing its difficulties and challenges.

In addition, we can affirm singleness because male-female union, as the first human relationship to be created, provides a foundation for all other relationships as well. In response to God's creation of woman, the man first speaks (or first has his speech recorded), first recognizes the other, and first differentiates himself so that he can unite with other selves. These aspects of human existence come to apply to celibate singleness as well as to the married state. So, for example, David cites a love beyond that of marriage partners in his lament for Jonathan:

I grieve for you,
My brother Jonathan,
You were most dear to me.
Your love was wonderful to me
More than the love of women. (2 Sam 1:26)

Messiah Yeshua pictures the greatest expression of love, not within marital union, but within friendship: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13). The capacity created in “the two shall become one” isn't limited to sexual intimacy, then, but can be expressed in non-sexual friendship, which also defines and fulfills our humanness. And of course, beyond this is the intimacy with God in Messiah, toward which it all points. Even within a positive discussion of marriage, we see Messiah as the true bridegroom. Marriage, then, as we'll explore in detail in our final section, is a picture and foretaste of the even greater fulfillment of union with Messiah, which is the goal of all his followers, single as well as married.

³⁸ It's beyond the scope of this paper to review the documentation for this claim, but see for example the summary at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/14/5-facts-about-love-and-marriage/> (accessed 3/23/15), which notes, “The share of Americans who are married today is at its lowest point since at least 1920,” and “Americans are waiting longer and longer to get married.”

3. The boundaries of marriage

“It is better to marry than to burn” (1 Cor. 7:9b KJV) is one of the most famous, or perhaps infamous, statements on marriage in the Apostolic Writings. The urge to interpret and explain this phrase—as evidenced by the embellishment in most translations, such as, “to burn with passion” (ESV), or “to be aflame with passion” (NRSV)—can lead us to miss its most important point. Paul is saying that the only alternative to sexual immorality is marriage, the only alternative to “burning” for those not called to practice celibacy.

1 Corinthians 7 opens with a “Corinthian slogan,”³⁹ such as Paul addresses repeatedly throughout the letter: “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: ‘It is well for a man not to touch a woman’” (7:1). Celibacy is suggested as an ideal, perhaps in response to an apocalyptic perspective, such as discussed above in reference to “eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 9:10–12), or in response to ascetic pagan influences.⁴⁰ Regardless of the statement’s source, however, Paul’s rejoinder is clear: “But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (7:2). Celibacy might be ideal in some circumstances, but it’s generally not realistic. Sexual desire is too strong and apart from marriage it will lead to *porneia*, sexual immorality. Hence, it is “better to marry than to burn.” For the one who thinks “it is better not to marry” because of Messiah Yeshua’s restrictions on divorce, the alternative is not uncommitted sexual encounters, but becoming a “eunuch” (Matt. 19:10–12).

Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.” The alternative to the marriage bed, which obviously alludes to sexual intercourse within marriage, is fornication (*porneia*), extra-marital sexual activity in general, or adultery (*moicheia*), extra-marital sexual activity that involves at least one partner married to someone else.⁴¹ Torah defines differing legal consequences of the two different acts, as we shall see, but both are violations of the proper sphere for sexual expression, which is marriage.

This clear demarcation of marriage is rooted in our foundational verse, Genesis 2:24. The two becoming one flesh refers primarily to the sexual act, which is framed communally or covenantally as the man leaves his family of origin to cleave to his wife, and God brings the two together (Matt. 19:5–6). Sexual acts outside of this framework also entail the two becoming one flesh: “Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, ‘The two shall be one flesh’” (1 Cor. 6:16). But such acts do not in themselves constitute marriage, and aren’t legitimate without the communal and covenantal framework of marriage. Paul therefore concludes, “Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the

³⁹ JANT on this verse, citing also 6:1 and 10:23.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), Vol. 1 498–500; Vol. 2 582–583.

body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself” (1 Cor. 6:18). Prostitution alone isn’t the issue here, but any sexual union outside of marriage, that is, fornication. Resorting to a prostitute is one form of *porneia*, and today’s widespread and widely accepted premarital sex would be another.

Before we see how this understanding is rooted in Torah, we’ll consider Paul’s statement that “the fornicator sins against the body itself.” Fee concludes that *porneia* constitutes sin “against one’s own body *as viewed in terms of its place in redemptive history*,”⁴² because our bodies are members of Messiah (1 Cor. 6:15a), and the body “is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,” and “you are not your own” (1 Cor. 6:19). But the holiness of the body and the wholeness of the person as body and soul or spirit is rooted not only in Messianic redemption, but also in creation itself.

In contrast with this holism, notes Robert P. George, today’s common morality is based on a body-soul dualism, in which, “the person is understood as the conscious and desiring aspect of the self.”

The person, thus understood, inhabits a body, but the body is regarded (if often only implicitly) as a subpersonal part of the human being—rather than part of the personal reality of the human being whose body it is.⁴³

The alternative to this morality is the view “embodied in . . . our historic law of marriage.”

According to this view, human beings are not nonbodily persons (consciousnesses, minds, spirits, what have you) inhabiting and using nonpersonal bodies. Rather, a human person is a dynamic unity of body, mind, and spirit. The body, far from being a mere instrument of the person, is intrinsically part of the personal reality of the human being.

I quote George at some length because he arrives at a definition of marriage that reinforces our direction in this paper:

What is unique about marriage is that it truly is a comprehensive sharing of life, a sharing founded on the bodily union made uniquely possible by the sexual complementarity of man and woman—a complementarity that makes it possible for two human beings to become, in the language of the Bible, “one flesh,” and for this one-flesh union to be the foundation of a relationship in which it is intelligible for two persons to bind themselves to each other in pledges of permanence, monogamy, and fidelity.

George is responding to the idea of marriage between members of the same sex, but his argument can also be mobilized against extramarital sex, whose advocates likewise seem to understand the human person as the “conscious and desiring aspect of the self,” and the body “as an instrument by which the individual [person] produces or otherwise participates in satisfactions and other desirable experiences and realizes various objectives and goals.” In other words,

⁴² Fee 263. Emphasis in the original.

⁴³ Robert P. George, “Law and Moral Purpose,” *First Things*, January, 2008.

today's widespread acceptance, and even affirmation, of extra-marital and same-sex intimacy reflects a dualistic understanding of the person as a radically autonomous self that inhabits and uses a body for its own purposes. In contrast, the Torah maintains a holistic view of the person as soul-and-body, which undergirds belief in the sanctity of sexual expression within marriage and also its illegitimacy outside of marriage. Sanctity inherently entails boundaries and standards, that is, limits on the autonomous self.

Within these standards, Torah portrays adultery as distinct from fornication, and more serious. Thus, adultery is prohibited in the Ten Words (*na'af*, Ex. 20:13), and receives the death penalty in Leviticus 20:10. Deuteronomy 22:22ff. assigns the death penalty for both parties to adultery, whether the woman is "married to a husband" or "betrothed to a man." Following the proscription of adultery in the Ten Words, Exodus 22:15-16 covers the case of one who seduces a virgin who is not betrothed. Sarna notes that "seduction" here is "[b]y persuasion or deception but not by coercion. There is a presumption of consent on the part of the girl."⁴⁴ In this case the man must pay the bride-price of a virgin and marry the woman, unless her father refuses to give her to him in marriage, in which case the bride-price must still be paid. The financial aspect of marriage is also evident in the last of the Ten Words, "You shall not covet your fellow man's wife, or his male slave, or his slavegirl, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that your fellow man has" (Ex. 20:14). Note that the wife is included in the things "that your fellow man has." Against this background, Paul's treatment of the mutuality of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 and 11 is all the more striking. Our point here, however, is simply to trace the parameters of fornication and adultery in the Torah. Sexual activity entails either fornication (including adultery) or marriage; there is no third category such as "premarital sex among consenting adults." The consequence of non-adulterous fornication is that the male partner must pay the bride-price and help restore the standing and value of the female, as in Exodus 22:15–16. In contrast, there is no corrective for adultery. Accordingly, Lamm summarizes,

*Sexual relations are a mitzvah, a religious duty, within a properly covenanted marriage in accordance with Jewish law. Outside of that covenant, premarital sexual relations are not condoned and extramarital relations are considered crimes.*⁴⁵

Intermarriage

Lamm's reference to Jewish law raises the issue of eligibility for marriage. Scripture sets apart marriage as the sole legitimate venue for sexual union, and also sets parameters for who is eligible as a marriage partner. Who are those, in the words of the wedding service, permitted to us "through the rite of the canopy and sacred covenant of marriage"?⁴⁶ Leviticus 18 lists those who are not permitted because of close relationship. First are the "six *she'er* relatives: mother,

⁴⁴ *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*, commentary by Nahum M. Sarna. Electronic version (Skokie, IL: Varda Books, 2004), ad loc.

⁴⁵ Lamm, *The Jewish Way* 26. Italics are in the original.

⁴⁶ Koren Siddur 1038.

father, son, daughter, brother, sister,” of the nuclear family.⁴⁷ Verses 6 through 18, in language directed toward the male, expand this list of ineligibility to include: the father’s wife, even if she is not one’s mother; the daughter of a son or daughter; a half-sister; an aunt, whether paternal or maternal, or by marriage to an uncle; a daughter-in-law; a brother’s wife, although this is exempted in the law of levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-10); a woman and her daughter, or granddaughter; and two sisters.⁴⁸ A discussion of the halakha regarding these forbidden categories is beyond the scope of this paper, but the simple parameters set in Leviticus would seem to still be relevant to Messianic Jews and others seeking guidance from the Torah.

The biblical treatment of marriage between Jews and Gentiles, on the other hand, is dynamic even within the Tanakh, and the Apostolic Writings suggest a radical redirection of the standards set in Torah. Thus, Deuteronomy 7:3–4 explicitly forbids intermarriage with the seven nations that inhabit the land of Canaan.

You shall not intermarry with them. You shall not give your daughter to his son, nor shall you take his daughter for your son. For he will make your son swerve from following Me, and they will worship other gods, and the LORD’s wrath will flare against you and He will swiftly destroy you.

The rationale for this prohibition is not ethnic but religious. Canaanites are not permissible marriage partners because they will lead Israelites into idolatry. But earlier, in Genesis, before any prohibition against intermarriage is announced, it is already portrayed negatively. When Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac, he not only forbids him to take a wife from “daughters of the Canaanite in whose midst I dwell,” but he limits him to finding a wife only among his own people (24:3–4). Likewise, Isaac gives Jacob a similar charge when he sends him back to Paddan-Aram to find a wife (28:1–2). In contrast, Esau manifests his unworthiness by taking wives from among the Hittites (26:34–35; 27:46).

To be sure, there are numerous exceptions to this pattern, both in Genesis and beyond, but it remains as a precedent for prohibiting intermarriage altogether. Thus, 1 Kings 11:1–2 condemns Solomon’s love for “foreign women in addition to Pharaoh’s daughter—Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Phoenician, and Hittite women, from the nations of which the LORD had said to the Israelites, ‘None of them shall join you, lest they turn your heart away to follow their gods.’” The Torah bans Moabites and Ammonites from entry into the congregation of the Lord (Ex. 34:4), which would imply a ban on intermarriage, although Edomite, Phoenician, and Hittite women are not explicitly banned. Already in 1 Kings, a wider prohibition of intermarriage is in view, and is reflected in Ezra 9:1–2, and the discussion that follows through Ezra 10.

“The people of Israel and the priests and Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the land whose abhorrent practices are like those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. They have taken their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons,

⁴⁷ *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*, commentary by Baruch A. Levine. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 117.

⁴⁸ Klein 382ff.; Lamm, *The Jewish Way* 26; Sanh 58a.

so that the holy seed has become intermingled with the peoples of the land; and it is the officers and prefects who have taken the lead in this trespass.”

The Jewish Study Bible notes that Ezra makes two additions to the Deuteronomy 7 ban. First, Ezra appears to extend the ban to all non-Jews, not only Canaanites, since all intermarriages heighten the risk of idolatry. Second, he requires that the foreign wife, and any children resulting from the marriage, must be expelled (Ezra 10:2–4). A third addition in Ezra, not mentioned in the Jewish Study Bible, is concern that the “holy seed has become intermingled with the peoples of the land” (9:2). This terminology hints at an ethnic or even racial concern beyond the concern over idolatry. The Talmud (Kid. 68b; Yev. 23a) also expands the Deuteronomy 7:3 prohibition into a ban on intermarriage with non-Jews in general, basing its argument on the risk of being led astray by any non-Jew. As in Ezra, the children of Gentile mothers are not considered Israelites, and therefore not included in the concern about being turned away from worship of Hashem.

In contrast, 1 Corinthians 7 appears to reverse two of the conclusions of Ezra. It argues that a believer (parallel to an Israelite in Ezra) is not to divorce a non-believing spouse (parallel to a Gentile spouse in Ezra), and the children of such unions are holy, regardless of which parent is the believer, and hence not to be sent away.

To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer⁴⁹ has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. (1 Cor 7:12–14)⁵⁰

Several factors would explain this change from the time of Ezra. First, the ethnic factor, which seems to be highlighted by Ezra’s mention of “the holy seed,” is not at play here at all. The issue is belief-unbelief, not ethnicity. Second, it appears that in Messiah the dynamics of holiness within a marriage change. Here, the holy sanctifies the unholy, whereas in Ezra the unholy corrupts the holy. In this, Ezra reflects the concern of Deuteronomy 7:3. Paul seems to turn this concern on its head: “Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife” (1 Cor. 7:16). We have already considered the holiness of marriage; here we learn that this holiness is “catching.” This notion, however, is not new to Paul. “But it is a scriptural principle that the blessings arising from fellowship with God are not confined to the immediate recipients, but extend to others. Paul teaches that the sanctification of the believing partner extends to the unbeliever.”⁵¹ Furthermore, “The parents’ ‘holiness’ extends to the child.”⁵²

⁴⁹ “Believer” here is “brother” in the Greek. NRSV’s use of “believer” as a gender-neutral alternative is supported by the contrasting use of “unbeliever” in the following verses.

⁵⁰ Note the oscillation between husband and wife, and the equivalency of expectations for each, in this passage, as referenced in Section 2 above.

⁵¹ Leon Morris. *1 Corinthians*, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 110, citing Gen. 15:8, 17:7, 18:26ff.; 1 Kings 15:4; Isa. 37:4.

⁵² *Ibid.*

But what exactly does Paul mean by “unbeliever” here? 2 Corinthians 6:14–16 sheds light on that question, and also may serve to balance Paul’s position in 1 Corinthians 7.

Do not be mismatched⁵³ with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Messiah have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

“I will live in them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.”

The prohibition here seems to be concerned primarily with idolaters. It isn’t ethnic or sectarian, but based on the unbridgeable gulf between worship of the God of Israel and worship of idols. Paul doesn’t mention marriage specifically, but it would certainly fall within the broad categories of partnership, fellowship, and “yoking” that he does mention. In 1 Corinthians, the married believer is not to divorce the unbeliever; in 2 Corinthians the unmarried believer is not to marry an unbeliever. Is “unbeliever” to be strictly defined in terms of faith in Yeshua as Messiah, or more broadly as belief in the God of Israel? The context would suggest the latter; as in Torah narrowly interpreted, Paul is arguing against marriage with an idolater. The exact application to Jewish-Gentile intermarriage within the Messianic Jewish community remains to be worked out by the community, and Paul’s treatment of the issue may serve to modify traditional halakhic standards. What’s clear is that marriage is a sphere in which one’s relationship to God, one’s participation in the covenant, is to be expressed, perhaps even with transformative power.

An internal boundary

We have outlined the boundaries between marriage and non-marriage, and must note that there are also boundaries within marriage, for example in the laws of marital purity. This term refers primarily to the limits on sexual intimacy related to the wife’s monthly cycle, as in Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18. Based on Lev. 15:19, a woman in this state of “uncleanness,” or the state itself, is termed *niddah*, which is the title of a tractate of the Mishnah that deals specifically with the laws of family purity. A woman becomes *niddah* immediately upon the onset of her monthly period and remains *niddah* for seven full, 24-hour days after the end of the period, or after five days from the onset of the period, if the period ends more quickly. Sexual contact is forbidden during this time, so that there is thus a minimum span of 12 days every month in which the couple must be abstinent. In traditional Jewish law, husband and wife are to have no physical contact during this time, and are to sleep in separate beds. At the end of the seven “clean” days, the woman is to immerse herself in a *mikveh* before the couple resumes sexual contact.⁵⁴

⁵³ Literally “misyoked,” or “unequally yoked,” perhaps echoing Deut. 22:10.

⁵⁴ Klein 510-516. See also Lamm, *The Jewish Way* 191-194.

Two points stand out in the context of our broader discussion of the meaning and purpose of marriage. Klein writes,

Of all the laws of *tum'ah* and *tohorah* [impurity and purity], to which so much space is devoted in the Torah and Talmud, only the laws governing family purity are still relevant. This is not by accident. A prominent Jewish scholar writes: “The preservation of the menstrual laws alone, with the restrictive regulations entirely unimpaired, is . . . a conscious emphasis on, and an attempt at the inculcation in a particularly significant area of human interest, of that self-discipline which must be—in all aspects of life—an integral element in the Jewish ideal of cultivating ‘holiness’ (Kedushah)” (Loewe, *Position of Women in Judaism*, p. 48).⁵⁵

First, the laws of family purity define the marital act as holy—set apart from the ordinary, and possessing a quality of glory. They emphasize that marriage cannot be fully understood or practiced without reference to the Creator who instituted it, or apart from its covenantal nature, which includes laws and stipulations. Second, these laws bring sexual expression under discipline, which our dominant culture might view with suspicion or contempt, but which is integral to marriage as established in Torah. Discipline and restraint are essential to maintaining holiness, which in turn lends mystery and transcendence to the sexual act. Scripture employs the simple, but powerful verb “to know” to describe this mystery. In contrast, Lamm comments, “The increasing freedom from sexual restraint in this post-Freudian era is testimony to the demystification of sex and the irretrievable loss of precious ‘knowledge.’”⁵⁶

Summary

The boundaries of marriage provided in Scripture run counter to the narcissism and disorder of our age. Every successful marriage involves a story of overcoming today’s dominant narrative of self-fulfillment and entitlement. Indeed, marriage is often the means by which the partners learn the Messiah-like traits of sacrifice and denial of self. In the marriage relationship they learn to forsake self-interest and superficial fairness for the higher value of unconditional giving.

4. The consummation

Ephesians 5:21–33 applies Genesis 2:24, especially the phrase “one flesh,” to Messiah and the *kehila*. “This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Messiah and the *kehila*. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.” Most of Ephesians 5:21–33 draws upon the relationship between Messiah and the *kehila* to illustrate the proper relationship between husband and wife. But toward the end of the passage, it seems to do

⁵⁵ Klein 511-512. One has to admire Loewe’s understated description of sex as “a particularly significant area of human interest.”

⁵⁶ Lamm 32.

the opposite: The one-flesh union of man and woman in the beginning illustrates a more profound union to be revealed later—that of Messiah and his people. As F.F. Bruce comments:

In the light of [Messiah's] saving work, the hidden meaning of Gen. 2:24 now begins to appear: his people constitute his bride, united to him in "one body." The formation of Eve to be Adam's companion is seen to prefigure the creation of the church to be the bride of Christ. This seems to be the deep "mystery" contained in the text, which remains a mystery no longer to those who have received its interpretation.⁵⁷

One purpose of marriage, then, is to reflect and embody the intimate union of Messiah and his people, to display, as already noted, a relationship free of the pervasive social dynamics of power and status. And conversely, as we see what Messiah did to accomplish this union, and how he now nourishes and cherishes the *kehila* as his own body, we understand how marriage between man and woman was intended to be all along. Marriage between one man and one woman is a reflection of the greater intimacy between Messiah and his "body," the *kehila* (Eph. 5:28–30). Marriage is secondary, Messiah-*kehila* is primary, and every Yeshua-follower, married or single, is included in that bond.

As we've seen, the Tanakh pictures marriage as reflecting the union between Hashem and Israel.⁵⁸ The Apostolic Writings reveal that this union is accomplished in and through Messiah Yeshua, and that marriage is given "from the beginning" to point toward that union, which is to be fully realized only at the end of the age. Thus, Revelation 21 pictures the final consummation in terms of a wedding, and brings the reader back to the beginning to portray it. The elements divided in Genesis are revisited here: there is no more sea, as distinct from dry land (21:1); heaven is united with, or present upon, earth (21:2, 10); the separation of light and darkness is no more (21:23). All of this is framed in the metaphor of a wedding, which echoes the original wedding of Genesis:

Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready . . . (Rev. 19:7)

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Rev. 21:2)

Beale cites Isaiah 52 and 62, along with 61:10 LXX, as background for the marital imagery of these two passages.

So also here in 21:2 the intimate union of God and his people, and possibly his vindication of them, is a prophetic decree depicted as fulfilled in the future. Preparation of the "bride adorned *for her husband*" conveys the thought of God's preparation of his

⁵⁷ F.F. Bruce. *Epistle to Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 394-395.

⁵⁸ See fn. 18. Note also, for example, Jer. 2:2, Hos. 2:16-22.

people for himself. Throughout history God is forming his people to be his bride, so that they will reflect his glory in the ages to come (so Eph. 5:25–27) . . . ⁵⁹

Hence, the one-flesh union of man and woman, which both anticipates and reflects this union of God and his people, is sacred. The sexual act of one-flesh union must become enshrined within the communal institution of marriage, which is sanctified and inviolable.⁶⁰ This brings us back to the original setting of our discussion, Messiah Yeshua’s response to a question about divorce. Now we see that his reference to “in the beginning” reveals not just rules about marriage, but the profound meaning of marriage from the beginning, which is to be fully known at the end.

Conclusion

From our brief view of the beginning and end of marriage, then, what can be said about the purpose of marriage?

As noted above, Rabbi Lamm comments on Genesis 2:18, “only man can experience existential loneliness, the fragmentary and incomplete nature of this world. It is the genuine companionship of Adam and Eve that humanity requires . . .”⁶¹ But it puts too much weight on marriage to expect it to relieve this existential loneliness, which ultimately is to be resolved in union with Messiah Yeshua. Paradoxically, one key to successful marriage is not to expect too much of it, or (especially) of the marriage partner. Some human needs only the spirit of Messiah can meet, and only in his time. Nevertheless, and again paradoxically, another key is not to expect too little of marriage. God was present with Adam when he noted that it was not good for the man to be alone, and God didn’t resolve that aloneness himself, but formed woman and created marriage to do so.

Marriage from the beginning serves the calling on male and female to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). Yet it is significant that this aspect of marriage isn’t mentioned at all in Genesis 2:18–25, where marriage provides the solution to, “It is not good for the human to be alone.” Thus, marriage has two purposes; creation of family, and intimate companionship. But it is not limited to these two purposes, as it also comprises a union, a (re)uniting of what was separate and distinct, which foreshadows the consummation toward which the whole created order is heading.

The creation account of the two becoming one flesh reveals this three-fold purpose of marriage as the one-flesh union of male and female: procreation in the broad sense of creating a family; intimate companionship that overcomes existential aloneness on a human level; and participation in covenant with the Creator, a divine-human partnership that anticipates the consummation toward which the creation is moving. The Apostolic Writings reveal that this consummation is accomplished in and through Messiah Yeshua, so that marriage provides an earthly reflection of

⁵⁹ G.K. Beale. *The Book of Revelation in The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 1045.

⁶⁰ Except in occasional accommodation to human weakness, as for example in Matthew 19:9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 123.

the relationship between Messiah and his people. This lofty purpose informs each individual marriage, and hence demands self-sacrificial love and respect from both partners.

For no one ever hates his own body, but nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Messiah does for the *kehila*, because we are members of his body.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Messiah and the *kehila*. Each of you should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband. (Eph. 5:29–33)

Marriage, understood biblically, defies the consumerism and self-aggrandizement of this (or ultimately any) era. Marriage provides a foretaste of holiness in an unholy age, and thus anticipates the age to come.