

DIVORCE IN THE O.T.: LEGAL BUT EVIL

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In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, through Moses, God gave a law to Israel permitting divorce and remarriage for any cause. The law said, “*When a man has taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he has found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and gives it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Lord: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the Lord thy God gives thee for an inheritance.*” In Mark 10:1-9, Jesus explains the reason God permitted divorce under the Old Covenant.

Permitted by God, but not approved by God

The fact that God permitted divorce in the Law of Moses did not mean that He *approved* of or *avored* the practice of divorce. In fact, the law as it is stated in Deuteronomy 24 reveals God’s view of the practice of divorce and remarriage. God would not permit a man who had divorced his wife to remarry her because she was “defiled” (Deut 24:4). She could marry anyone else (Deut 24:2), but not her first husband. If divorce made the woman defiled in general, then no one could have married her. Obviously, then, it was not the woman herself who was actually “defiled” before God, but she was only defiled to her first husband. That reveals the fact that God did not approve of the husband divorcing his wife to begin with. God’s view of the practice of divorce *even though He permitted it under the Law of Moses* is expressed in Malachi 2:14-16. God refused to accept the sacrifices offered by those who had divorced their wives. God said the ones who had divorced their wives had “dealt treacherously” (Mal 2:14). Marriage is a covenant and since the wife is the husband’s “companion” and the wife of his covenant (Mal 2:14), divorce is covenant breaking, which is itself wrong (see Eccl 5:1-6; Rom 1:31). Thus, God said, “Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hates putting away: for one covers violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts:

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(continued)

therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously” (Mal 2:15-16). God says He *hates divorce!*

Hard hearts judged by God

Then why did He give a law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 permitting that which He hates? When the Pharisees asked Jesus if divorce was lawful (Mark 10:2), Jesus answered by asking them what Moses had commanded (Mark 10:3). The Pharisees pointed out that Moses “suffered (i.e. *allowed*) to write a bill of divorcement” to put away their wives (Mark 10:4). “And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept” (Mark 10:5). The Israelites’ hearts were so hardened that God allowed them to divorce and remarry even though He hated it. But He never approved of it, and He did not accept their sacrifices. Those same hard-hearted Israelites despised the manna that God fed them with every day, and demanded flesh to eat (Num 11:4). God sent them an abundance of quails to eat (Num 11:31-32), but “while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague” (Num 11:33). Psalm 78:29-31 says, “So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire; they were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel.” God also gave the people their desire for divorce, and then judged them for it. This reminds us that just because God lets us have something, does not necessarily mean it’s a good thing for us. Also, as with divorce under the Law of Moses, we also have many examples in our laws today of things that are technically legal but not morally right to do. Divorce and remarriage for any reason, so-called “gay marriage,” gambling, alcohol, tobacco and marijuana use, are some examples in our time. Finally, Jesus pointed out that divorce was not in God’s original plans when He instituted marriage in Genesis chapter two (Mark 10:6-8). God designed marriage to be permanent right from the beginning, and Jesus restored that arrangement in Mark 10:5-12. He said, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9). Those who do not comply with God’s law are guilty of adultery (Mark 10:11-12).