

APOSTOLIC SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

for Bereisheet

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Matthew 19:3-9

Mark 10:2-16

1 Corinthians 6:15-20

Ephesians 5:28-33

"One Flesh"

Realistically speaking, *Bereisheet* (Genesis 1:1-6:8) covers a large swath of time from "in the beginning" to Noah finding favor with the Lord. Estimates of how long a period this actually ranges is debated: from a few thousand years to millions or billions of years. Consequently, when a Torah student turns to this section of Holy Writ, there are a multitude of subjects to consider. The act of creation, in and of itself, is most fascinating. Scientists and theologians, not to even mention laypeople, have been debating the origin of the universe for millennia without any absolute determinations. Yet in the midst of such cosmic discussions, there is one topic inserted in the text that does have significant amplification in the Apostolic Scriptures, as its consequences just happen to be the cause for the propagation of humanity. The concept of becoming "one flesh" in marriage is a major theme seen throughout the Bible, and throughout history.

Before one is introduced to the institution of monogamy, a description of how God creates a woman from the rib or side (Heb. *tzela*, צֵלָע) of a man, who himself was formed from the dust, is incredible to contemplate. Of course, the Creator can do anything He desires with what He has created. While imagining an anatomical operation with the attendant reconstruction of another body seems beyond comprehension, perhaps the author is really trying to convey a more profound concept designed to maintain the species down through the ages. The fact that the first man poetically waxes eloquent, as he notes the intimacy of bones from his bones and flesh from his flesh, is an indication that God intends one man for one woman. When you read this, note the author's observation of a beautiful image of a naked man and woman possessing no shame:

"So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. **And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed**" (Genesis 2:21-25).

Regrettably, it is right after this awesome scene that we see the talking serpent intrude, and the temptation for humanity to "be like God" overcomes the requirement to be in total dependence upon Him. Without elaborating on the details, the consequences of disobedience are some specific curses upon both genders:

"To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire [urge, NJPS] will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat from it"; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, **till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**' Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all *the* living" (Genesis 3:16-20).

Here one finds some of the results of the original disobedience to God. It includes pain in childbirth and physical death, as the human body will return to the basic elements from which it was made. The original intention of God was for man and woman to be united as one flesh, but

instead a woman's *teshuqah* (תְּשׁוּקָה) will be for her husband, who will then be forced to dominate her (cf. Genesis 4:7)—as the two sexes will be locked in combat. Still, as this selection concludes, Adam continues to be impressed by his wife, as he names her *Chavah* (חַוָּה) in recognition of her ability to bring forth their progeny.

After examining these condensed episodes about the origin of life and human relations, we turn to the Apostolic Scriptures. The concept of husband and wife being one flesh is elaborated upon by not only Yeshua, but also the Apostle Paul. We see how Yeshua is questioned by some Pharisees about the merits of divorce:

“Some Pharisees came to Yeshua, testing Him and asking, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?’ And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created them from 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” [Genesis 1:27; 2:24]? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’ They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY [Deuteronomy 24:1-4]?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery” (Matthew 19:3-9; cf. Mark 10:2-12)

These Pharisees were “testing” Yeshua. They wanted to know if He was going to contradict instruction delivered by Moses. Instead, Yeshua adds significant weight to the institution of marriage, declaring that God has ordained it when He puts a man and woman together. But it is noted that according to Moses, the opportunity to issue a certificate of divorce is permitted, as originally given in Deuteronomy 24:

“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance” (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Yeshua recognizes the possibility of divorce primarily because of the hardness of heart that plagues many individuals. There is also the common problem of sexual infidelity. He further clarifies that when a divorce takes place that has not been justified by sexual immorality, and divorce occurs solely with the intention of marrying another, the divorcing spouse becomes an adulterer. In fact, according to Moses' original words, a divorced spouse who has remarried, but whose second spouse died, is not permitted to remarry the spouse who was previously divorced.

Yeshua upheld the validity of Moses' commandments, but did amplify the need for a husband and wife to remain married by imploring how, “what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matthew 19:6, NRSV). We could view this how when two people come together in holy matrimony, they are no longer two individuals, but rather one whole or completed person considered “one flesh.” This is the intention of adult human life, which goes full circle back to the Garden of Eden when Eve was made from the very side of Adam, and the two were to be lifelong companions. God joins a man and a woman together and makes them one flesh in marriage—and it is not right for any other man or woman to ever separate them.

In the modern era, the problem with divorce has become greatly rampant, even more so than previous generations. Many (including myself) have become victims of this insidious action, as statistics indicate that somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty percent of marriages end in divorce. Lamentably, many of those who claim a belief in the Bible do not have a measurable difference in these statistics, from those who are less inclined to follow Scriptural admonitions. For Believers in Yeshua who have been on either side of a divorce, His sacrificial work certainly

covers any transgression, and is able to bring forgiveness to those who have been victimized or have succumbed to divorce. Confession and repentance of this sin is available, but as many know, the consequences of failed marriages still resonate. *All reap what has been sown.*

The Apostle Paul used the Genesis analogy of “one flesh,” as he had to address the problems of sexual immorality among those to whom he ministered. To the assembly at Corinth, Paul quotes from Genesis in order to make the point that sexual promiscuity is a sin against one’s own body:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Messiah? Shall I then take away the members of Messiah and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, ‘THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’ [Genesis 2:24]. But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

Paul is trying to point out that once someone has become a redeemed child of God, and has been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, then one runs the risk of bringing degradation upon Him for this act of immorality. Sins of sexual perversion inevitably make their way into the Body of Messiah as a whole, which is to not be filled with iniquity, but instead the presence of the Spirit. For Believers in the Messiah, getting involved in perverse sexual intercourse is a vile transgression that should be avoided at all costs. **The strong admonition is to flee immorality.** There is no doubt that if someone is consistently in sexual sin, that the power of the indwelling Spirit is not actively at work overcoming the lust of the flesh. The incredible price paid for your sin is not that appreciated.

As Paul puts it later to his disciple Timothy, “now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:22). Another suggestion, if sexual immorality and temptation continually plagues you, is perhaps testing to examine whether you are truly in and of the faith: “Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Yeshua the Messiah is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Putting these words in an ancient Mediterranean context, rife with temple prostitution, homosexuality, and many other forms of lewd behavior, **only intensifies the need to turn to the Lord for deliverance.**

Paul also elaborates upon the mystery of man and woman becoming “one flesh” in his general letter to Believers in Asia Minor, making reference to Genesis. The union of a husband and wife is analogous to a union that is supposed to exist between the Messiah and the assembly of redeemed:

“So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Messiah also *does* the assembly, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH [Genesis 2:24]. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Messiah and the [assembly]. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:28-33).

Paul admonishes that a husband should love his wife so much that he puts her needs above his own. The nurturing and cherishing of the wife by the husband should be to the point of *his willingness to die for her*. On the other hand, when a woman discerns that her husband loves her to this extent, then the respect she has for her husband will naturally result. When the love of the husband is shown and known, then the respect of the wife follows, and the intimacy of two becoming one flesh resonates. Both the husband and wife can live as marriage partners in mutual submission to one another (Ephesians 5:21ff), hopefully ending the curse that incurred from the Garden of Eden with the two sexes being in constant conflict (Genesis 3:16).

On a personal level, let me just say that having lived in a failed marriage, and now living in a wonderful marriage—the difference between the two is like night and day. Living in a situation where the two parties to a marriage are not equally yoked is difficult. Lamentably, some find themselves in this situation and the ramifications are challenging. So having learned from experience, it is critical that prior to marriage, a potential husband and wife both discern that they are able to become one flesh and complete one another, so that their marriage can actually be used to further glorify the Holy One of Israel. This requires spiritual leaders to be there to counsel engaged couples, and speak openly and candidly about various relational, sexual, and social issues that they will encounter in their life of marriage together.

Finally, for those blessed with the oneness, wholeness, and sense of completion that comes from becoming one flesh with the love of your life—please relish in the joy of knowing that you are truly blessed by the Almighty. **Never take your spouse for granted.** Recognize that you are indeed living examples of the intimacy that the Messiah Yeshua desires with the *ekklēsia*. Seek Him, and pray together for what He has brought you two together to accomplish for His Kingdom. The two of you have a great responsibility to be available for His service! Truly desire to enjoy the companionship of one another, and the life that He has given you on this Earth.

Until the restoration of all things...

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