

## The Book of Matthew Study Guide

### Matthew 19-20

#### 19:1-12

The Pharisees test Yeshua again regarding His interpretation of a Torah principle, this time having to do with divorce. There is only one passage in the Torah dealing with divorce—Deut 24:1-4. Specifically that passage addresses the scenario of a man divorcing his wife, and then she remarries and her second husband dies or divorces her. In that case, the law of Moses forbid the first husband from remarrying her. All that was necessary was for the husband to give her a certificate of divorce, known as a *get*, that simply stated, “You are hereby permitted to all men.” That would enable her to remarry and remain part of the community. So it is clear that Moses permitted divorce. That is the only instruction on the subject that you can find in the Torah, and the intent is pretty evident in that passage.

But a controversy arose over the way that Deut 24:1 should be interpreted in terms of the justification for any divorce. In the generation before Yeshua, two authorities of interpretation emerged—Hillel and Shammai (they were both alive when Yeshua was growing up). Their disciples, known as the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai, continued with the same sense of interpretation as their originators. They took opposing points of view on a number of subjects, including this verse on divorce. Generally speaking, the House of Shammai took a stricter position and the House of Hillel tended to be more lenient. In this case, the issue was over the word *ervah* in 24:1, translated as indecency (KJV, uncleanness). The word literally means “naked,” as it comes from a root meaning, “uncovered.” Shammai interpreted it very literally and said that *halakah* (the law portion of the Torah) permitted divorce only for sex outside of marriage. Hillel, on the other hand, applied it in a broader sense, saying that divorce was permitted for anything a husband considered to be of indecent, including burning his food (*Mishnah, Gittin 9:10*).

So when the Pharisees ask in Mat 19:3 whether a man can divorce his wife for any reason, they are actually inquiring about which house of interpretation that Yeshua upheld. And Yeshua affirmed the stricter position of Shammai, in v. 5 basing it on the fundamental nature of marriage being ordained by God as a man and a woman becoming *basar echad*—one flesh.

- v. 6 – Yeshua logically concludes that whatever God has ordained, it should remain that way: “let no man separate” it. His declaration makes it clear that it should not be made easy for people to get divorced, and thus He rejects Hillel’s interpretation that any other excuse, even the slightest one, is grounds for divorce. Instead He upholds the interpretation of Shammai that it should be limited to adultery alone.
- v. 7 – The Pharisees then seek clarification regarding that reasoning. They ask if divorce contradicts God’s ideal state going all the way back to the beginning, then why would Moses permit it?
- v. 8 – Yeshua answers by saying it is because of the “hardness of heart.” This reason applies to similar situations, such as polygamy and slavery. When we consider the full context of Scripture, God never endorses the concepts of divorce, polygamy and slavery. But He does give instructions how to deal such things. We have to remember that the Torah was

given in order to know what sin is (Rom 7:7). And many of the commandments deal with managing behavior of sinful people. Some of them set forth consequences for excesses, while others bring a measure of control to our fallen nature. That is what Yeshua is getting at here. The Law acknowledged that sin would damage marriages, but the Law would also restrain how far people could stray from God's ideal. Thus it permitted divorce, but only for a very limited reason.

- v. 10 – In light of the complicated mess that comes with divorce, the disciples say it is better not to marry.
- v. 11 – Yeshua says that is true for some people.
- v. 12 – He then notes a similarity with eunuchs. Some of them are born with a physical defect that prevents reproduction. Some are castrated by others (typically in the case of royalty protecting a harem) and cannot reproduce. And some live like eunuchs by practicing celibacy and never reproduce offspring. So in that way, Yeshua agrees that marriage is not for everyone.

### 19:13-15

The next section is very similar to 18:1-6. Yeshua blesses some children, saying that the way they come to Him represents the way all people need to become part of the kingdom of heaven. This occurrence establishes a contrast for what is to follow.

### 19:16-26

Right after this, we see an encounter with a rich young man that is the antithesis to the way that children come to Yeshua without preconditions or hang-ups. v. 16 – The man asks what he needs to do to inherit eternal life.

- v. 17-19 – Yeshua responds initially by starting a discussion on the commandments of Torah. The six commandments he cites should be considered as being representative of the Law.
- v. 20 – The man says he does all of those things, which means he is being Torah observant and obedient.
- v. 21 – But Yeshua declares that if he wants to be complete (KJV, perfect; Gr. *telios*) he needs to sell everything he owns and to give it away. That instruction is not part of the Torah and it addresses a different issue. His statement affirms that keeping the Law does not secure eternal life. Moreover, the action described by Yeshua in this verse represents an act of faith because the man would no longer be able to trust in himself but would now have to trust in God alone.
- v. 22 – The man refuses to do as Yeshua said. This illustrates how it is easy to be religious yet not be a true person of faith.

### 19:27-29

Having witnessed the conversation between Yeshua and the rich young man, Peter realizes that he and the other disciples had already done the very thing that Yeshua told the man to do. So he wonders what is in store for them because of their obedience. Yeshua's answer is informative in several ways.

- v. 28 – He says the result or the reward will take place in what He calls the “regeneration.” The next verse gives the sense that He is describing *olam haba*—the world to come. But He

does not use that specific kind of terminology. Instead He uses the Gr. word (*palingenesia*), which is translated as “regeneration.” It literally means “genesis again.” Based on the greater context of Scripture, that term emphasizes a complete restoration of God’s creation. Additionally it is consistent with the way that Yeshua told Nicodemus in John 3:3 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” By using the term regeneration, He put the emphasis on the necessity of spiritual rebirth as the means of securing a place in the world to come.

So if the reward for the disciples is serving as judges over the 12 tribes of Israel, and “everyone will receive many times as much,” it is clear that believers will be given responsibilities in the final manifestation of the kingdom of heaven.

### 19:30-20:16

Yeshua states a principle that “the first will be last and the last, first” before and after a parable on laborers in the vineyard. In this parable, a landowner pays workers a denarius (the standard daily wage of laborers) regardless of the number of hours that they worked. Clearly the landowner is God and the laborers are the redeemed believers. But what about the payment? Two potential explanations can be considered. It could represent eternal life or it could be rewards in heaven. It can’t be rewards because they will not be the same for everyone (Mat 6:6; 16:27; 1 Cor 3:8; Rev 12:22). It must be eternal life because that is the same for all who believe, and it is not a function of how long or how hard we serve God. It is given equally to all who are called regardless of the circumstances. The phrase, “the last shall be first, and the first last” has nothing to do with reversing the order in the kingdom. It is simply an idiom for the concept of equality in terms of salvation and eternal life.

### 20:17-19

Yeshua and the Disciples begin their journey to Jerusalem and along the way He foretells for the third time about His coming death plus His resurrection. He repeats Himself in this manner in order to make sure they understand the serious nature of what is to come. Notice also that for the first time He includes the *goyim*—Gentiles in this conspiracy.

### 20:20-28

After Yeshua declared in 19:28 that the Disciples would have an esteemed role in the kingdom of heaven, word must have spread within their extended circles, because the mother of James and John (the sons of Zebedee) approaches Yeshua with a request that they receive the most privileged positions right next to the throne of Yeshua.

v. 22 – In response, Yeshua says that is an ignorant request and then asks them if they are willing to drink the same cup that He was about to drink. Cups are symbolic of judgment in that culture. So when James and John say yes, it indicates that they were willing to face the same judgment of Yeshua, including being persecuted, mocked, scourged and crucified (vv. 18-19), just as He had foretold right before the mother approached Him.

But based on what they had heard from Him up to this point, what they did not know was that Yeshua would take on the sins of the world and the punishment of death for all who believe in Him. That is what they did not know what they were asking for. Yet they should have known that truth based on the prophecy of Isaiah 53.

v. 23 – Yeshua does say that someone will get to sit at His sides, He just isn’t naming them.

v. 28 – But He says it will be someone who identifies closely with His service and suffering.

That is true greatness in His eyes, an attribute that still applies to followers of Yeshua today.

20:29-34

Yeshua and the Disciples continue on the road from Jericho up to Jerusalem (a distance of 17 miles). Along the way He demonstrates His servanthood by giving sight to two blind men beside the road. It is not just an act of compassion by Yeshua, but I an act of faith by the men. The important lesson of servanthood that we can emulate is that pausing or breaking away from our perceived objectives in life in order to minister to those in need.