

Lawful Marriage

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Chapter 1

The Question

This book asks a single, weighty question: **what actually makes a marriage** — and **what makes it valid before God?**

Is a marriage made by a wedding ceremony? By a priest or a pastor? By a state-issued licence? By sexual union? By love? Scripture answers more clearly than most assume — and its answer reorders all the others.

1.1 The short answer

A marriage is constituted before God when **a man and a woman, free to marry, enter a covenant** — leaving their former households, pledging exclusive lifelong loyalty, with God as witness — **and seal that covenant in the one-flesh union**. The binding itself is *God's* act, not man's:

Matthew 19:6, KJV · Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

The Greek for *joined together* is syzeugnymi συζεύγνυμι^{G4801} — “to yoke together.” Two people do not manufacture a marriage; they enter a union that **God** yokes. Man consents and enters; God binds.

1.2 How to read this book

What follows is built entirely from Scripture and the Hebrew and Greek behind it. It moves in these steps:

1. **The Question** — what is really being asked (this chapter).
2. **How a Marriage Is Made** — the six strands that constitute it, and the Hebrew and Greek words behind them.
3. **What Makes It Valid Before God** — why the covenant, not the ceremony, is the heart.

4. **The covenant itself** — the cut covenant, one flesh, betrothal and bride-price, the covering.
5. **What God Hath Joined** — permanence, and God's own marriage: the wife of His covenant, the Bridegroom and the bride, the marriage of the Lamb.
6. **The Faithful Party Is Free** — the two grounds on which the wronged and deserted stand.
7. **When the State Says No** — what holds when civil law and God's design diverge, and the biblical examples shown in full.
8. **Every Marriage in Scripture, and How to Read It** — the whole witness, and a plain test you can apply to any real case.

Read it with a Bible open. Every claim is anchored to a verse you can check.

Chapter 2

How a Marriage Is Made

Marriage was instituted in Eden — before Israel, before any king or court, before any law was written. That is exactly where Jesus goes when asked about it:

Mark 10:6, KJV · But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.

So the pattern is woven into creation itself. It has six strands.

2.1 God gives the bride

Genesis 2:22, KJV · And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

God *builds* the woman (banah בָּנָה^{H1129}) and *brings* her (bo בֹּאֵה^{H935}) to the man. God Himself is the first officiant (*Genesis 2:18*), the One who gives the bride away. Later the father “gives” the daughter in the same pattern (*Deuteronomy 22:16*).

2.2 The man receives and claims her

Genesis 2:23, KJV · And Adam 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.

He receives her by word — naming, recognition, glad acceptance. This is the groom’s “I take her.”

2.3 Leave, cleave, one flesh

Genesis 2:24, KJV · Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Three verbs, in deliberate order:

- **Leave** — ‘ azab אָזַב^{H5800}: to forsake. A public severance from the old household, founding a new one.
- **Cleave** — dabaq דָּבַק^{H1692}: ”to be glued, to cling.” The same verb used for clinging to the LORD in covenant loyalty (*Deuteronomy 10:20; Joshua 23:8*).
- **One flesh** — אֶחָד בָּשָׂר *basar echad* H1320 H259. *Echad* is ”united one” — the very word of ”the LORD our God is one LORD” (*Deuteronomy 6:4*).

The order matters: **leaving** (public) leads to **cleaving** (covenant bond) and then **one flesh** (consummation). Marriage is a braid, not a single instant.

2.4 A covenant, with God as witness

Malachi 2:14, KJV · Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

Marriage is a berith בְּרִית^{H1285} — a cut-covenant. And the LORD Himself is its **witness** (‘ ud עוֹד^{H5749}, ”to testify”). It is vertical before it is horizontal. Proverbs calls it ”the covenant of her God” (*Proverbs 2:17*).

God’s own marriage to Israel is the fullest template:

Ezekiel 16:8, KJV · Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.

The covering (the garment-corner, kanaph כַּנָּף^{H3671} — compare Boaz in *Ruth 3:9*), the oath (shaba שָׁבַע^{H7650}), and the covenant (berith בְּרִית^{H1285}) together make: ”thou becamest mine.”

2.5 Free consent

Genesis 24:58, KJV · And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.

The bride is asked, and freely assents. And the pledge already binds: a betrothed woman (aras אָרַשׁ^{H781}) is so bound that to violate her is adultery (*Deuteronomy 22:23-24*), and she is called ”wife” before the wedding.

2.6 Sealed in one flesh

First Corinthians 6:16, KJV · What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.

Paul applies Genesis 2:24 even to an illicit union: the physical act really forges a one-flesh bond (kollaō κολλάω^{G2853}, "to glue"). That is *why* the act is never casual — and why, within the covenant, it is the seal:

Hebrews 13:4, KJV · Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

The very same union is **honourable** inside the covenant and **judged** outside it. The covenant is what sanctifies the one flesh.

Chapter 3

The Words: A Greek and Hebrew Study

The words Scripture uses to make a marriage are not abstractions. Each is a picture. Read the pictures in order and the doctrine of marriage rises off the page. Here is the vocabulary God chose — Hebrew first, then Greek — with the scholarly lexicons behind it (Brown-Driver-Briggs, Thayer, Liddell-Scott-Jones, Abbott-Smith).

3.1 The Hebrew

3.1.1 Ish and Ishshah — man and woman

ish אִישׁ^{H376} and ishshah אִשְׁשָׁה^{H802}. At the first marriage the man names the woman out of his own name: *ishshah*, "woman," taken out of *ish*, "man" (*Genesis 2:23*). The pair is named out of one flesh; the wordplay itself preaches their unity.

3.1.2 Laqach — to take

laqach לָקַח^{H3947} — *to take, receive, fetch, lead* (BDB). "*To take a wife*" is the plainest Hebrew for *to marry*. The same verb is used when God *took* the rib (*Gen 2:21*) and the woman *was taken* out of man (*Genesis 2:23*). Marriage begins as a **taking and receiving**.

3.1.3 Chatan — to make a marriage-alliance

chatan חָתָן^{H2859} — *to give a daughter in marriage; to contract affinity by marriage* (Strong's). From its root come *chathan*, "bridegroom / son-in-law," and the whole web of in-law words. Marriage joins not only two persons but **two houses**.

3.1.4 Aras — to betroth

aras אָרַשׁ^{H781} — *to betroth, espouse* (BDB). The pledge already binds: a betrothed virgin is treated as a wife, and to violate her is adultery (*Deuteronomy 22:23-24*). The covenant begins at the promise, not only the wedding.

3.1.5 Dabaq — to cleave

dabaq דָּבַק^{H1692} — *to cling, adhere, be glued* (BDB). The husband *cleaves* to his wife (*Genesis* 2:24); Israel is told, with the same word, to *cleave* to the LORD (*Deuteronomy* 10:20). **Marriage is covenant-loyalty made flesh.**

3.1.6 Berith — covenant

berith בְּרִית^{H1285} — *covenant*. Its root means *to cut*: a covenant is sealed in cut flesh, which is why marriage is "*one flesh*." It is the same word as God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Israel — and Brown-Driver-Briggs lists "*alliance of marriage*" among its senses. Marriage is a *berith* with the LORD as witness (*Malachi* 2:14).

3.1.7 Yada — to know

yada יָדָע^{H3045} — *to know*. The Hebrew for the marriage union is the deepest word for knowledge: "*Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived*" (*Genesis* 4:1). The same verb is used for knowing God (*Jeremiah* 31:34). Union is a form of knowing.

To these add ba' al בָּעַל^{H1166}, "*to master, to marry*" — the "*thou becamest mine*" of belonging; and אֶחָד בָּשָׂר *basar echad*, "*one flesh*," where *echad* is the very word of "*the LORD our God is one LORD*."

3.2 The Greek

3.2.1 Gamos — marriage, the wedding feast

gamos γάμος^{G1062}. The chief New Testament word for marriage means first the **wedding feast** (Thayer). It names the wedding at Cana (*John* 2:1) and the marriage supper of the Lamb (*Revelation* 19:7).

3.2.2 Gameo — to marry

gameō γαμέω^{G1060} — *to wed* (of either sex). "*It is better to marry than to burn*" (*First Corinthians* 7:9).

3.2.3 Mnesteuo — to betroth

mnēsteuō μνηστεύω^{G3423} — *to espouse, betroth*; the Greek for Hebrew *aras*. Mary was *espoused* to Joseph, already his *wife* before they came together (*Matthew* 1:18).

3.2.4 Proskollao — to cleave

proskollaō προσκολλάω^{G4347} — *to glue to, adhere*. This renders Hebrew *dabaq* in Genesis 2:24, and Jesus and Paul use it: “*shall be joined unto his wife*” (Ephesians 5:31). The husband is **glued** to his wife.

3.2.5 Kollao — to glue, to join

kollaō κολλάω^{G2853} — the simple form. Paul uses it of the illicit union: “*he which is joined to an harlot is one body*” (First Corinthians 6:16). The glue bonds even where it ought not.

3.2.6 Syzeugnymi — to yoke together

syzeugnymi συζεύγνυμι^{G4801} — the verb of **God’s own act**: “*What God hath joined together*” (Matthew 19:6). God sets the two under one yoke. Its opposite, chōrizō χωρίζω^{G5563}, means “*to put room between*” — what man is forbidden to do.

3.2.7 Aner and Gyne — husband and wife

anēr ἀνὴρ^{G435} is both *man* and *husband*; gynē γυνή^{G1135} both *woman* and *wife*. The bond is carried in the very words for the sexes — which is why Jesus said of the live-in man, “*he... is not thy husband*” (John 4:18).

3.3 What the words say together

Lay the vocabulary end to end and the Bible’s doctrine of marriage is already complete:

- The man **takes** (laqach לקח^{H3947}) and **cleaves** (dabaq דבק^{H1692} / proskollaō προσκολλάω^{G4347}).
- The two enter a **cut covenant** (berith ברית^{H1285}), pledged at **betrothal** (aras ארס^{H781} / mnēsteuō μνηστεύω^{G3423}).
- It is **sealed in knowing** (yada ידע^{H3045}) — *one flesh*.
- And **God yokes** them (syzeugnymi συζεύγνυμι^{G4801}) — what no man may **un-yoke** (chōrizō χωρίζω^{G5563}).
- The whole points to a **wedding feast** (gamos γάμος^{G1062}) — the marriage of the Lamb.

In every word the human act and the divine act stand together: **man takes and cleaves; God cuts the covenant and yokes the pair**. The state is in none of them.

This same vocabulary is followed into its legal setting — the Hebrew marriage contract, the *ketubah* and the *get*, and the words a bride was actually released by — in [The Case for Marriage](#).

Chapter 4

What Makes It Valid Before God

Gather the strands and the answer to "what makes it valid before God" comes into focus.

4.1 The constituting acts

1. A **man and a woman** (*Genesis 1:27; Mark 10:6*).
2. They **leave** their prior households (*Genesis 2:24*).
3. They enter a **covenant** with **mutual consent** and **God as witness** (*Malachi 2:14; Genesis 24:58*).
4. They **cleave** — exclusive, lifelong belonging (*Genesis 2:24*).
5. They **consummate** it in the **one-flesh** union (*Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:16*).
6. And **God Himself joins them** (*Matthew 19:6*).

The betrothal-covenant **binds**; the consummation **seals**; **God constitutes**.

4.2 The ceremony is not the constituting act

Scripture records **no priestly rite** at any wedding. The standard Bible dictionaries confirm it: there was "no formal religious ceremony" — only a blessing and the covenant (Fausset; ISBE). The public wedding was the *procession* bringing the bride to the groom's house and the *feast* — that is, **witness and publicity**, not a sacrament.

So a wedding **declares and witnesses** a marriage. It does not, by itself, *create* one. The thing created is the covenant sealed in one flesh, which **God** joins.

4.3 Witnessed before God's people

Though no priest is required, Scripture never makes marriage a *secret*. It is sworn with **God as witness** — "*the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth*" (*Malachi 2:14*) — and confirmed before the community, as the elders at the gate declared over Boaz and Ruth:

Ruth 4:11, KJV · And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel.

The witness does not *make* the marriage — God does — but it **guards** it: it shelters the wife and the children, and it testifies openly to what God has joined. A marriage may be valid before God without a state's licence; it should never be hidden from God's people.

4.4 Therefore

Strip out the covenant and you have fornication that God judges (*John 4:18; Hebrews 13:4*). Strip out the union and you have a pledge not yet consummated. Remove God and you have a contract men imagine they can dissolve (*Romans 7:2*). Held together — **covenant sworn before God and sealed in one flesh** — it is God who has made the two one:

Mark 10:9, KJV · What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Chapter 5

The Cut Covenant

In Hebrew there is no neutral verb for "to make a covenant." The idiom is **כָּרַת בְּרִית** *karath berith* — literally **to CUT a covenant**. A covenant is not signed; it is *cut*.

5.1 A covenant is cut in flesh

karath כָּרַת^{H3772} means "to cut off, cut down, cut asunder" — and Strong's preserves why it came to mean *to covenant*: "*specifically, to covenant (i.e., make an alliance or bargain, originally by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces)*." The noun *berith* בְּרִית^{H1285} is glossed in the same vein: "*a compact (because made by passing between pieces of flesh)*." The word for the bond and the word for the blade are welded together — and Brown-Driver-Briggs lists, among the senses of *berith*, "*alliance of marriage*."

5.2 The rite: passing between the pieces

The covenant is enacted in Genesis 15. Abram divides the animals *Genesis 15:10*; then, in the dark:

Genesis 15:17, KJV · And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.

Genesis 15:18, KJV · In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:

The Hebrew of verse 18 is "*the LORD cut (karath כָּרַת^{H3772}) a covenant*." Jeremiah describes the identical rite — "*when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof*" (*Jeremiah 34:18*). To walk between the severed halves is to swear: *let it be done to me as to this animal if I break faith*. A covenant is a self-maledictory oath sealed in blood and severed flesh.

5.3 The blood of the marriage covenant

Marriage is repeatedly called a *berith* — “the wife of thy covenant” (*Malachi 2:14*), “the covenant of her God” (*Proverbs 2:17*) — with **the LORD as witness** to the cutting. Where is the blood of *that* covenant? The Torah locates it in the tokens of virginity:

Deuteronomy 22:17, KJV · And, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter’s virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city.

bethuliyim בְּתוּלִיִּים^{H1331} — Strong’s: “*virginity; by implication and concretely, the tokens of it.*” The bloodstained cloth of the wedding night does in the marriage what the sprinkled blood did at Sinai — “*Behold the blood of the covenant*” (*Exodus 24:8*) — and what the circumcision-blood did for Abraham, “*a token of the covenant*” (*Genesis 17:11*), drawn from the very organ of union. (*Scripture never writes the phrase “the blood of the marriage covenant”; that synthesis is ours — but it stands on three explicit facts: marriage is a berith, a berith is a flesh-cutting blood-compact, and virginal blood is its legal token.*)

5.4 Why it cannot be broken

basar בָּשָׂר^{H1320}, “flesh,” in “one flesh” (*Genesis 2:24*) is defined by Strong’s also as “*kindred, blood-relations.*” Covenant turns two strangers into one blood-kin. And in *Genesis 15* it is God alone — “*a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp*” — who walks the blood-path, while Abram sleeps. The permanence of the bond rests not on the strength of the two who cut it, but on the One who witnessed it and bore the self-curse Himself:

Matthew 19:6, KJV · Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Chapter 6

One Flesh, One

The doctrine of marriage rests on a metaphysics of unity carried by three words: basar בָּשָׂר^{H1320} (flesh), echad אֶחָד^{H259} (one), and yada יָדָע^{H3045} (to know).

6.1 Two become one

Genesis 2:24, KJV · Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

The grammar enacts the theology. *basar* (H1320) is **singular**; *echad* (H259) is **singular**; yet the subject is "they." A plural resolves into a single predicate — "A dualism becomes an individualism" (ISBE). Adam first recognises her as "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23); the one-flesh union restores what was one.

6.2 Echad — the word of the Shema

The "one" of "one flesh" is the very word that names the oneness of God:

Deuteronomy 6:4, KJV · Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

echad אֶחָד^{H259} — the same lemma, in the same grammatical form, in *Genesis 2:24* and *Deuteronomy 6:4*. Its root (H258) means *to unify*. It is a unity that can embrace plurality — "one" cluster, "one" people, "one" flesh of two persons — unlike yachid יָחִיד^{H3173}, the *solitary* "only one" (Isaac, Abraham's "only son," *Genesis 22:2*). The two-become-one of marriage images, at the creaturely level, the *echad* of God. (*That echad implies plurality within God is a theological inference careful scholars dispute; but the lexical contrast with yachid is real, and the marriage application is firm — Paul draws the Christ-and-church analogy from this very verse, [ref:Ephesians 5:31-32].*)

6.3 To know

Scripture's word for the marriage union is the deepest word for knowledge:

Genesis 4:1, KJV · And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

yada יָדָע^{H3045} — “to know by experience, to acknowledge, to be intimately acquainted with.” Brown-Driver-Briggs lists together “know a person, be acquainted with” and “know a person carnally.” The **same verb** is used for knowing God — “*they shall all know me*” (*Jeremiah 31:34*); “*if we follow on to know the LORD*” (*Hosea 6:3*). Union is a form of knowing; to know is a form of union.

6.4 Glued — and the spiritual parallel

The “cleave” of Genesis 2:24 is dabaq דָּבַק^{H1692}, “to glue, cling, adhere.” The Greek Old Testament renders it kollaō κολλάω^{G2853} — and Paul uses that exact verb of *both* the bodily and the spiritual union:

First Corinthians 6:16, KJV · What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.

First Corinthians 6:17, KJV · But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

One verb of cleaving binds Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31, and 1 Corinthians 6:16-17 together. The “*one flesh*” of marriage and the “*one spirit*” of the believer-with-Christ are framed as deliberate parallels.

6.5 Its purpose

Malachi 2:15, KJV · And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

God made the couple “one” “*that he might seek a godly seed*” — literally זָרַע אֱלֹהִים *zera elohim*, “seed of God.” (*Malachi 2:15 is among the hardest verses in Hebrew; translators genuinely differ on its syntax. Its plain thrust is secure: God made marriage one, for godly offspring — “therefore... deal not treacherously against the wife of thy youth.”*)

And that covenant-knowing reaches past marriage altogether. *Yada* is the same word for being known by God — the deepest ground a soul can stand on — traced in [Born Again](#) and in [Baptized on Your Faith](#).

Chapter 7

Betrothed and Bought

Hebrew marriage was a two-stage covenant, and the first stage already bound. To **betroth** was to take a wife in law before the wedding night ever came.

7.1 The pledge that binds

aras אָרַס^{H781} ("to betroth") makes the bond. A betrothed virgin is judged exactly as a wife — to violate her is to have *"humbled his neighbour's wife"* (*Deuteronomy 22:24*), a capital matter. The Greek keeps the force: Mary was mnēsteuō μνηστεύω^{G3423} — **espoused** — to Joseph, who is already called *"her husband"* and could release her only by divorce:

Matthew 1:18, KJV · Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

7.2 The bride-price

What sealed the betrothal was the mohar מוֹהָר^{H4119}, the bride-price the suitor laid down — *"Ask me never so much dowry and gift"* (*Genesis 34:12*); *"he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins"* (*Exodus 22:17*). A bride was *bought*, and the buying *bound*. ISBE: *"Its central feature was the dowry (mohar)... The dowry sealed the betrothal."*

7.3 God betroths His people

The Lord takes the very verb *aras* — three times, and for ever:

Hosea 2:19, KJV · And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.

Hosea 2:20, KJV · I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

The threefold *"I will betroth"* is bonded to His own character — righteousness, mercy, faithfulness — not to the bride's worth.

7.4 The bride-price paid in blood

Paul, as the friend who arranges the match, betroths the church to Christ:

Second Corinthians 11:2, KJV · For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

And the price is named — not the silver of the ordinary *mohar* but the blood of the Bridegroom. Believers are *"bought with a price"* (*First Corinthians 6:20*); the church is *"purchased with his own blood"* (*Acts 20:28*); redeemed *"with the precious blood of Christ"* (*First Peter 1:18-19*). Christ *"loved the church, and gave himself for it... that he might present it to himself a glorious church"* (*Ephesians 5:25-27*) — the friend presenting the spotless bride.

7.5 The kinsman-redeemer

The deepest Old Testament shadow is the ga'al גֹּאֵל^{H1350} — the kinsman-redeemer who had both the *right* (he is kin) and the *means* (he can pay) to buy back the lost and marry the widow. Boaz, before ten witnesses:

Ruth 4:10, KJV · Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.

The redemption *is* the marriage. Christ is the true Redeemer: He took our flesh (the kinship) and paid in His blood (the means). Hosea acts it out — *"So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver"* (*Hosea 3:2*) — buying back his own adulterous wife. Redemption is remarriage: the gospel in one prophet's hand.

Chapter 8

The Covering

Scripture weaves one image around marriage: a man **covers** a woman, and the covering *is* the act of claiming and protecting her in covenant.

8.1 The spread garment-corner

kanaph כַּנָּף^{H3671} means both a *wing* and the *corner of a garment*. To spread one's *kanaph* over a woman is to marry her. God says it of Israel:

Ezekiel 16:8, KJV · Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.

Spread skirt, oath, covenant, "*thou becamest mine*" — a wedding in one verse. Ruth makes the human petition in the same words:

Ruth 3:9, KJV · And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

The inverse seals the meaning: to *uncover* a man's skirt is to violate his marriage — "*Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt*" (*Deuteronomy 27:20*). The garment-corner *is* the bond: spread, it makes a marriage; lifted, it defiles one. And the same *kanaph* is the *wing* of God's protection — "*under whose wings thou art come to trust*" (*Ruth 2:12; Psalms 91:4*). To cover is to shelter is to wed.

And the Bridegroom Himself takes up that very image — not to claim a bride, but to grieve over one who would not be covered:

Matthew 23:37, KJV · O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Hear which word He chose: *wings* — the same kanaph כַּנָּף^{H3671} Boaz spread over Ruth and God spread over Israel. And note that they are *chickens*, not eggs. The hen's wing does two works: it broods what is not yet alive, and it shelters what has already hatched. The covering therefore spans a whole life — brooding until there is life, guarding the living afterward, the same wing before and after. And there is a reason the Lord reached for *this* bird. When the fire or the hawk comes, the hen does not fly. She spreads herself over them and takes it, and the chicks are found alive beneath her. **The covering costs her life.** Days from His own cross, that is what He is saying He came to do — the very thing this chapter will name again in Paul's words: "*Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*"

And "*how often*" looks back across centuries, not weeks. He speaks as the One who had sent them prophet after prophet — "*thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee*" — holding the garment-corner open generation after generation. So the grief of the verse is not that He would not cover them; it is that **He would, and they would not come under it.** A covering may be spread; it can never be forced. That is the whole difference between a marriage and a seizure — and it is why free consent stands among the very strands that make a marriage at all. (*The brooding wing that hovers before there is life — rachaph רָחַף^{H7363}, Genesis 1:2; Deuteronomy 32:11 — is traced in [Through the Waters](#); what it is to be hatched out from under it, in [Born Again](#).)*

8.2 The veil

The bride veils herself at the bridegroom's approach:

Genesis 24:65, KJV · For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself.

The veil (tsaiph צִיפָּה^{H6809}) is a *bridal* sign, not everyday dress — "*the face veil as a regular article of dress was unknown to the Hebrew women*" (ISBE). Our word *nuptials* derives from Latin *nubo*, "to veil oneself" (Fausset).

8.3 Headship and order

The New Testament gathers these symbols under kephalē κεφαλῇ^{G2776}, "head":

First Corinthians 11:3, KJV · But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

Headship is grounded in creation order, yet guarded at once against overreach — *"neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord... but all things of God"* (First Corinthians 11:11-12). And it is cruciform, not domineering:

Ephesians 5:25, KJV · Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

The wife is the *"weaker vessel"* to whom *honour* is given, and the two are *"heirs together of the grace of life"* (First Peter 3:7) — co-heirs, equal before grace. Where headship covers, the wife crowns: *"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband"* (Proverbs 12:4). (How far Paul's headship-order extends in practice — and whether *kephalē* connotes *"authority over"* or *"source"* — is genuinely debated; the order itself in [ref:1 Corinthians 11:3] and [ref:Ephesians 5:23] is not.)

Chapter 9

What God Hath Joined

When asked about divorce, Jesus does not begin with Moses. He goes behind Moses to Eden.

9.1 Permanence is written into creation

Matthew 19:4-6, KJV · And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

God did the joining (syzeugnymi συζεύγνυμι^{G4801}); the prohibition falls on *man* — “let not man put asunder” (chōrizō χωρίζω^{G5563}, “to place room between”). Permanence is the default, built into the structure of creation.

9.2 Divorce is a concession, never an institution God authored

Deuteronomy 24 is often misread as the law that *establishes* divorce. It does the opposite: the divorce and remarriage stand only in the “when/if” clauses; the one command is the prohibition of verse 4. Jesus corrects the Pharisees’ very verb:

Matthew 19:8, KJV · He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

Moses “suffered” — permitted, not commanded — “because of the hardness of your hearts” (sklērokardia σκληροκαρδία^{G4641}, the Greek Old Testament’s word for the uncircumcised heart). Divorce is a tourniquet on a wound that sin had already opened.

9.3 The bond's boundary is the grave

Romans 7:2-3, KJV · For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth" (First Corinthians 7:39). The boundary of the bond is death, not the courthouse.

9.4 What God hates

Malachi 2:16, KJV · For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

(An honest note: the Hebrew of Malachi 2:16 is genuinely uncertain — the verb is third-person, and translations read either "the LORD hates divorce" or "the man who hates and divorces... covers his garment with violence." Either way the verse condemns treacherous divorce, and its closing charge — "deal not treacherously" — is firm.)

9.5 The hard cases, held open honestly

Three texts appear to qualify the absolute, and the church has never been unanimous on any: the **Matthean exception**, *"except it be for fornication"* (porneia πορνεία^{G4202}, Matthew 19:9), absent from Mark, Luke, and Paul's report; the **deserting unbeliever**, *"a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases"* (First Corinthians 7:15; First Corinthians 7:10-11), which Paul flags as his own counsel ("I, not the Lord"); and Malachi's contested text. Faithful readers divide between the **permissive** view (the innocent party may be freed) and the **indissolubilist** view (the bond endures while both live). What *no* reading can claim is that Scripture treats divorce lightly. Every strand pulls one way — *"from the beginning it was not so."*

9.6 Why permanence at all

Ephesians 5:31-32, KJV · For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Marriage is permanent because it images a covenant that does not fail.

Chapter 10

The Wife of His Covenant

Scripture's most sustained image for the covenant between God and His people is **marriage** — and Israel's turning to idols is named not merely rebellion but **adultery**.

10.1 God the husband

Isaiah 54:5, KJV · For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

The Sinai covenant is read by the prophets as a wedding — *"the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness"* (Jeremiah 2:2); *"I was an husband unto them"* (Jeremiah 31:32). Ezekiel narrates it as a betrothal: *"I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee... and thou becamest mine"* (Ezekiel 16:8).

10.2 Whom God runs toward

Look again at *"thy Maker is thine husband"* (Isaiah 54:5). The Hebrew for *"thine husband"* is **bo' alayik בְּעַלְיִי**^{H1166} — a **Qal active participle**: not a past legal status but a *continuous, present* act, *"the One who is, right now, being your husband."* And to whom does He say it?

Isaiah 54:6, KJV · For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

He speaks it to *"a woman forsaken... when thou wast refused."* This is the prophets' steady pattern: wherever the covenant's language is used to leave the rejected and deserted in shame, **God's movement is toward that person** — not toward the institution, not toward the one who wields the law, but toward the one the system left behind. He is *actively* her husband in the very hour of her disgrace. The God who was Himself betrayed runs to meet the betrayed.

10.3 Idolatry as adultery

Once the bond is a marriage, idolatry becomes infidelity. *zanah* זָנָה^{H2181} ("to go a-whoring") is used both of sexual sin and "*figuratively, to commit idolatry (the Jewish people being regarded as the spouse of Jehovah)*" (Strong's):

Ezekiel 16:32, KJV · But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband!

10.4 Ishi, not Baali

The renewed covenant even purges the language of the false gods. In Hosea, God promises Israel will call Him by the intimate "*my husband*" and no longer by the proprietary word that doubles as an idol's name:

Hosea 2:16, KJV · And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.

Ishi (ishi אישׁי^{H376}, "my man, my husband") is the warm word of Eden. *Baali* ("my master," from ba'al בעל^{H1167}) is the **same word that is the name of the god Baal**. God renews the marriage so deeply that the very syllables of the false husband are taken out of her mouth (*Hosea 2:17*).

10.5 Redemption instead of divorce

Under the Law the adulteress is put to death (*Leviticus 20:10*), and the divorced-and-remarried wife may never return (*Deuteronomy 24:1-4*). Israel has earned both. Yet God buys her back:

Hosea 3:2, KJV · So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley:

And He leaps over His own statute by mercy — "*yet return again to me, saith the LORD*" (*Jeremiah 3:1*); "*I will betroth thee unto me for ever*" (*Hosea 2:19*; *Hosea 2:20*). The offended Husband pays the redemption price for the wife who wronged Him. This is the cross in miniature — and the reason every true marriage is holy: it images a covenant love that redeems.

Chapter 11

The Bridegroom and the Bride

Human marriage is not the deepest reality. It is the **earthly sign** of a heavenly one — the union of Christ and His Church.

11.1 The great mystery

Ephesians 5:31-32, KJV · For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

mystērion μυστήριον^{G3466} is not a riddle but a **secret once hidden, now unveiled**. Paul is saying the one-flesh union of Genesis 2 was, from the beginning, a sealed sign — and its meaning is now opened: it always pointed to Christ and the Church. (*The word is "mystery," not "sacrament"; the Vulgate's sacramentum here is a mistranslation, as Fausset notes.*)

11.2 The bridegroom comes

John the Baptist names the roles:

John 3:29, KJV · He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

nymphios νυμφίος^{G3566} (bridegroom) and nymphē νύμφη^{G3565} (bride) — and the Baptist is only the *friend* of the bridegroom, whose whole joy is another's wedding. Jesus claims the title openly, and foretells His death in the same breath: *"the bridegroom shall be taken from them"* (Matthew 9:15).

11.3 Loved unto death, presented spotless

Ephesians 5:25-27, KJV · Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse

it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The husband's love is cruciform — it gives itself for the bride. And the church is *"members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones"* (*Ephesians 5:30; Second Corinthians 11:2*) — Adam's own words over Eve. As Eve was formed from the opened side of the sleeping Adam, the Church is born from the wounded side of the crucified Christ (*John 19:34*). The cross is at once the death of the Bridegroom and the birth of the bride.

11.4 The bride answers

The Bible's last invitation is the bride's own:

Revelation 22:17, KJV · And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The meaning of marriage is not, finally, about marriage. It is about Christ and the Church.

And if the Church is the bride, there is a place where she is joined to Him. To receive Christ is the betrothal; the water is where the vow is spoken and the covenant entered — the wedding, not the wedding photograph. That thread is followed in [Born Again](#) and laid out in full in [Through the Waters](#).

Chapter 12

The Marriage of the Lamb

Scripture opens with a marriage in a garden and closes with a marriage in a city. Everything between is the courtship.

12.1 The word is a feast

The chief New Testament word for marriage, *gamos* γάμος^{G1062}, means first **the wedding feast** — “a wedding banquet” (Thayer); the Greek Old Testament uses it for *mishteh*, “a feast.” So the kingdom of God is told again and again as a wedding banquet to which men are *called* (*Matthew 22:1-14; Matthew 25:1-13; Isaiah 25:6*).

12.2 The Bridegroom’s first sign

Jesus’ first miracle is at a wedding, where the feast had failed for lack of wine:

John 2:10-11, KJV · And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

The Bridegroom keeps the best wine for last.

12.3 The marriage supper of the Lamb

Revelation 19:7-8, KJV · Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

The bride “*made herself ready*” — yet the linen “*was granted*” to her. Her readiness is real, and her readiness is a gift. The New Jerusalem descends “*prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*” (*Revelation 21:2*); the angel says, “*Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife*” (*Revelation 21:9*).

12.4 No marriage in the resurrection — and why

Matthew 22:30, KJV · For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

This is not the diminishing of marriage but its **fulfilment**. The verbs name the *institution* that belongs to "this age" — marrying and giving-in-marriage — which ceases because death itself is abolished ("*neither can they die any more,*" *Luke 20:36; Isaiah 25:8*): there is no more raising up of seed against the grave. Earthly marriage was always the *sign*; when the Marriage of the Lamb comes, the sign yields to the substance. You take down the signpost only because you have reached the City. Marriage's reality — covenant, self-gift, one flesh — is not annihilated but taken up and enlarged in the union of the whole bride with her Lord.

Revelation 19:9, KJV · And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Chapter 13

The Grounds Scripture Names

The hardest question for a divorced believer is whether he is free to marry again. The previous chapter held the *general* debate open, honestly — because in general it is debated. But on **three specific grounds** Scripture is far clearer than the general question suggests, and they are the grounds on which the *faithful, sinned-against* party stands.

13.1 Not a Hypothetical: Hillel, Shammai, and "Any Cause"

When the Pharisees came testing Jesus, they were not inventing a hypothetical. They quoted a live legal phrase, one already running through the schools of the rabbis — κατὰ πᾶσαν αἰτίαν, *for any cause*:

Matthew 19:3 · The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

Two schools stood on either side of that phrase. The house of Shammai read Deuteronomy 24:1's "*some indecency*" narrowly — sexual sin, nothing less. The house of Hillel read it broadly — *any* cause at all, down to a wife spoiling a meal. The Pharisees were not asking Jesus to invent a position; they were asking Him to choose a side already drawn. He chose neither. He went past both schools to creation itself — "*from the beginning it was not so*" (*Matthew 19:8*) — and named the one ground His own lips would allow: πορνεία. Hillel's question stands behind them; Shammai's narrowness is not the answer He gave either. What follows is Christ's own line, not a rabbi's.

13.2 The grounds Scripture names

Porneia — Christ's own exception. The one ground the Lord names with His own lips is the unfaithfulness of the other:

Matthew 19:9, KJV · And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

The faithful spouse, whose partner committed porneia πορνεία^{G4202}, does not stand where the covenant-breaker stands. Christ Himself set this case apart.

Desertion — Paul’s own word. Where an unbelieving partner abandons the marriage, the believer is released:

First Corinthians 7:15, KJV · But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

“*Not under bondage*” — *douloō δουλόω*^{G1402}, “to be enslaved.” The deserted believer is not chained to a covenant the other has walked out of.

Neglect — Moses’ own word. A third ground stands beside these two, older than either — written into the Law itself before the prophets or the apostles spoke. It is explained fully below.

13.3 Rooted in the Torah, before the concession

The wronged wife’s freedom is older than Moses’ bill of divorce — it is written into the foundational Law, in the language of a *bondservant set free*:

Exodus 21:10-11, KJV · If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish. And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money.

A husband who withholds the three covenant essentials — food, clothing, and conjugal love — forfeits his claim: “*she shall go out free without money*,” the very release granted to a servant set at liberty (*Exodus 21:2*). If even a bond-wife went free when the covenant was broken over her, *how much more* a free woman betrayed and deserted. The release of the faithful party is not a late mercy tucked into Deuteronomy 24; it is rooted in Exodus, in the bedrock of the Law.

13.4 The Actual Words of the Vow

The three obligations named in this clause were not an abstract legal formula. They were, in substance, what a bridegroom in Israel actually promised his bride. Torah scholarship confirms what the Law itself implies: *she’er*, *kesut*, and *onah* — food, clothing, and conjugal love — together with fidelity, were the content of the Jewish marriage vow, later formalized in the ketubah, the Jewish marriage contract, and grounded by the sages in

this very verse of Exodus. What the Torah first states in the case of a bondservant wife, the sages extended to every wife in Israel. The Law does not merely regulate divorce from the outside; it enforces the very promise the couple made to each other at the wedding.

13.5 Not a Concession: What the Nations Around Israel Did

Moses did not invent this protection out of nothing, and it was not, as some suppose, mere accommodation to human weakness (*Matthew 19:8*). Measured against the law of the nations around Israel, it was the opposite — a mercy, not a concession.

Under the Code of Hammurabi, a wife wrongly neglected by her husband could seek release, but only by winning a formal hearing on the accusation: her conduct investigated by the community, her innocence proven, and if she was found at fault instead, the penalty was death by drowning. Under the Middle Assyrian laws, a wife whose husband simply vanished waited *two full years*, uncertain and unprovided for, before she could even be granted a certificate of release. Set beside these, the Law of Moses required no trial, no two-year uncertainty, and put no wife's life at risk to be believed: continuous default on food, clothing, or conjugal love was itself sufficient, and *"she shall go out free without money."*

What Jesus called a concession to hardness of heart was, against the world Moses actually legislated into, already the more generous law. The Law did not lower the bar for divorce; it raised the bar of protection for the neglected spouse above anything the surrounding nations offered.

13.6 Neglected, Though Not Deserted

The clause just quoted does not wait for a husband to leave. *"He shall not diminish"* — the failure is continuous, present tense, a man still in the house. Food, clothing, conjugal love: withhold any one of the three, and *"she shall go out free without money,"* whether or not he ever walks out the door. Desertion is one way a covenant dies. Slow starvation of it — a spouse fed, but not clothed; clothed, but not loved; present, but withholding — is another. The Law does not require the offender to leave before the wronged party may.

First Corinthians 7:3-5 · Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

Paul does not repeal this clause; he restates it, and widens it to both spouses equally — the husband owes the wife what Exodus already named, and the wife owes the husband the same, *"defraud not one another."* What Moses required of a husband toward a bondservant wife, Paul requires of both partners toward each other in full liberty. Neither may starve the other of it and call it faithfulness.

First Timothy 5:8 · But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

And material neglect Paul does not treat as a lesser thing. To withhold provision from one's own household is not a private failing between two people; it is named alongside denying the faith itself — **worse**, Paul says, **than an unbeliever**. A husband or wife who remains under the same roof yet persistently withholds food, clothing, or conjugal love has not merely sinned against a spouse. By the Torah's own case law, carried forward by Paul, they have forfeited their claim on the covenant — no departure required. This is the third ground, standing beside porneia and desertion, not folded into either.

The full case behind this chapter — the rabbinic *"any cause"* dispute between Hillel and Shammai, the ketubah's own sworn terms of food, clothing and conjugal right, and the grounds of neglect and abuse that follow from them — is set out at length in [The Case for Marriage](#).

So the grounds are three: unfaithfulness, desertion, and neglect. But naming a broken covenant is only half the matter. The other half — and the half a wounded person actually needs answered — is **which of the two people is now free**. That is the next chapter.

Chapter 14

The Faithful Party Is Free

The grounds are settled: unfaithfulness, desertion, neglect. Now the question that follows them — and it is not an academic one. When a covenant has been broken, **which of the two people is free?** Scripture does not leave that to sentiment. It answers by looking at who did what.

14.1 Who is the faithful party

The words that name remarriage as adultery are aimed at the one who *puts away* a spouse and marries another — the covenant-*breaker*:

Mark 10:11-12, KJV · And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

They are not aimed at the one who was betrayed and deserted. Scripture everywhere parts the covenant-breaker from the covenant-keeper. **The faithful party did not put away; they were put away.** They kept faith while the other broke it.

14.2 Actions classify, not words

The covenant-breaker is named by deeds, not by claims. A spouse may protest innocence with the mouth while the feet walk another path — but God reads the conduct, not the slogan:

Jeremiah 2:19, KJV · Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

Jeremiah 2:35, KJV · Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned.

The unfaithful one's "*I am innocent... I have not sinned*" does not move God; He pleads *against* the one who says it. The infidelity falls back **wholly on the one who committed it** — it never stains the faithful party. So who broke the covenant is not settled by who claims faithfulness loudest, but by who *forsook*. The one who departed is classified by the leaving, whatever words go with it.

14.3 God Himself was the deserted Husband

He knows this from the inside. He was the faithful Husband of an unfaithful Israel who "*committed adultery*" — and He released her:

Jeremiah 3:8, KJV · And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

This was not faithlessness in God; it was the righteous release of a covenant the other party had already destroyed. The betrayed One understands the betrayed.

14.4 When the word is spoken beforehand

Where God forewarns such a release through a true prophet, Scripture gives one test — fulfilment:

Deuteronomy 18:22, KJV · When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

A word spoken in His name that *comes to pass* is, by His own measure, cleared of presumption — with one guard He also gave: even a sign that comes to pass is false if it leads away from the LORD (*Deuteronomy 13:1-3*). Fulfilment, and faithfulness to Him — together they are the test.

14.5 And freedom is not grudging

Lest any think release is given through clenched teeth:

First Corinthians 7:27-28, KJV · Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.

"If thou marry, thou hast not sinned." The loosed who marry are not in sin.

14.6 Honest about the debate, clear about the case

A minority tradition holds that the bond endures while both live, so that even the innocent may not remarry; the previous chapter honours that this reading exists. But the historic and majority witness of the church, standing on **Christ's porneia word and Paul's not-under-bondage word**, is plain: **the faithful party — freed by the other's unfaithfulness and desertion — is free; and "if thou marry, thou hast not sinned."** Where *both* grounds fall on the *same* innocent, deserted believer, the case is as clear as Scripture makes it.

14.7 Then only the state remains

A faithful party, freed by God, joined now to another believer who is also free — if the *state* then forbids the new marriage, that "no" is Caesar's, not God's. And a civil "no" does not reach what God joins:

Mark 10:9, KJV · What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Man there includes the magistrate. The freed and the faithful, both in the Lord, stand exactly where Scripture shows God blessing and rebuilding — *"Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth"* (Isaiah 43:19).

Chapter 15

When the State Says No

What if the state — the civil authority — refuses to recognise a marriage? Can a couple still be married in front of God?

The answer turns on one question: **does the state forbid what God forbids, or what God permits?**

15.1 The state has real but bounded authority

Romans 13:1, KJV · Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

This must be held honestly. Yet notice the *mandate* the same passage gives the authority:

Romans 13:4, KJV · For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

The state's God-given task is to **praise the good and punish the evil** (*First Peter 2:13-14*). When it forbids a *good that God ordains*, it steps outside the very mandate that gave it authority. There the higher rule applies:

Acts 5:29, KJV · Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Jesus holds both together: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (*Matthew 22:21*). The one-flesh covenant belongs to **the things that are God's**.

15.2 God's recognition is on its own axis

The state's acknowledgment is **neither necessary nor sufficient** for God's. It cuts both ways.

God acknowledges a marriage the state does not. Marriage exists because God joined it and God witnessed it (*Mark 10:9; Malachi 2:14*) — none of that runs through a civil registry. The licence was always a human witness to a divine act, never the act itself.

God does not acknowledge a marriage the state does. Herod legally, royally married Herodias — yet God’s verdict through John the Baptist was:

Mark 6:18, KJV · For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.

And the woman at the well lived with a man as husband, whom Jesus flatly called *not* her husband:

John 4:18, KJV · For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.

Human reckoning said *married*; God said *not*. The state was never the one whose acknowledgment makes a marriage real. **God’s is.**

15.3 The fork

- **If the state forbids what God forbids** — not male-and-female (*Genesis 1:27*), already bound to a living spouse (*Romans 7:2-3*), within forbidden kin (*Leviticus 18*) — the couple cannot marry before God either. But the bar is **God’s**, not the state’s. “Before God” is no loophole around God’s own law.
- **If the state forbids what God permits** — barring a union on grounds of race, class, status, persecution, or mere paperwork — the marriage is **still valid before God**. An unjust “no” cannot dissolve what God joins.

Chapter 16

When the State Said No and God Said Yes

These are not obscure footnotes. God deliberately built the bloodline of the Messiah through unions that human law and authority said **no** to. Scripture has no modern marriage licence, so the exact analogue is this: **the Law, the leaders, or the community declared a union forbidden — and God blessed it anyway, and it stood.**

16.1 Ruth the Moabite — barred by the letter of the Law

The written Law was explicit:

Deuteronomy 23:3, KJV · An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever.

By the letter, a Moabite had no place in Israel. Yet Ruth the Moabite married Boaz — and the elders at the gate, the very witnesses of the marriage, pronounced God's blessing on it:

Ruth 4:11, KJV · And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel.

Ruth 4:13, KJV · So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

That son was Obed, father of Jesse, father of **David the king**. Her confession — "thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (*Ruth 1:16*) — is the key: grace took in what the letter shut out.

16.2 Rahab the Canaanite — from the one nation Israel could not marry

The Canaanites were the category most strictly forbidden:

Deuteronomy 7:3, KJV · Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.

Rahab was a Canaanite *and* a harlot of doomed Jericho. Yet she married Salmon, a prince of Judah, and is named without apology in the genealogy of Christ. Hebrews then holds her up as a hero of faith (*Hebrews 11:31*).

16.3 Moses and the Cushite woman — the leaders said no, God judged the leaders

Here the opposition came from Israel's own highest leadership — Aaron the high priest and Miriam the prophetess:

Numbers 12:1, KJV · And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

God's response was not neutral:

Numbers 12:10, KJV · And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.

The authorities condemned the foreign marriage; God publicly judged **the authorities**, not the marriage.

16.4 Hosea and Gomer — God commanded a union man would forbid

Hosea 1:2, KJV · And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.

No priest or moralist would have sanctioned a prophet marrying "a wife of whoredoms." Yet it was God's direct command, and the marriage became a living sermon of His covenant love.

16.5 The capstone: the genealogy of Jesus

Matthew makes the point unmistakable. He names **four women** in Christ's line — every one irregular, scandalous, or forbidden by human reckoning:

Matthew 1:3, KJV · And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram.

Matthew 1:5, KJV · And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse.

Matthew 1:6, KJV · And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias.

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba — by deceit, by Canaan, by the Moabite bar, by adultery the law condemned. The Spirit threaded the Messiah's own bloodline through unions that **man's law said no to** — and **God said yes**.

Chapter 17

Every Marriage in Scripture

One thread runs through every marriage in the Bible: **God renders His verdict on His own terms.** (*Hebrews 13:4*) The state, court, or community appears only as witness or regulator — never as the authority that makes or unmakes the bond. Watch it hold from Eden to the Lamb.

17.1 Eden — God the only authority

Adam and Eve. No state, no priest, no ceremony, no witness but God Himself, who built the bride and brought her (*Genesis 2:22*) and ordained "*one flesh*" (*Genesis 2:24*). The first marriage had **no human recognition** and was wholly real to God.

17.2 The patriarchs — marriage with no state at all

Isaac and Rebekah — "*he took Rebekah, and she became his wife*" (*Genesis 24:67*); Jacob with Leah and Rachel. No government, registry, or court existed — yet God recognised these marriages and built the covenant nation through them. **Marriage never needed a state to be real to God.**

17.3 Foreigners the letter excluded — whom God blessed

The Law could exclude, yet God blessed across the line:

- **Joseph and Asenath**, an Egyptian priest's daughter (*Genesis 41:45*).
- **Moses and the Cushite woman** — the leaders condemned it; God struck Miriam (*Numbers 12:1*; *Numbers 12:10*).
- **Salmon and Rahab** the Canaanite; **Boaz and Ruth** the Moabite — both barred by the letter (*Deuteronomy 7:3*; *Deuteronomy 23:3*), both grafted into the line of David and of Christ.

17.4 The counter-cases — foreigners God condemned

Solomon — *"they will turn away your heart after their gods"* (First Kings 11:2). **Ezra and Nehemiah** — the people must *"put away... the strange wives"* (Ezra 10:3; Nehemiah 13:27).

Why bless Ruth and Rahab but condemn these? **The line was never race.** Ruth said *"thy God my God"* (Ruth 1:16); these wives pulled Israel toward idols. God's barrier is **always covenantal and moral, never ethnic** — *"only in the Lord"* (First Corinthians 7:39); *"be ye not unequally yoked"* (Second Corinthians 6:14).

17.5 A marriage God commanded

Hosea and Gomer — *"Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms"* (Hosea 1:2). No man would have blessed it; it was God's own word.

17.6 Betrothal — binding before any wedding

Mary and Joseph — only *espoused*, yet *"Joseph her husband"* (Matthew 1:19) and *"Mary thy wife"* (Matthew 1:20) before they came together. The bond preceded ceremony and registry.

17.7 Marriage God regulated by His own Law

- The **levirate duty** (Deuteronomy 25:5).
- The **captive-woman provision** (Deuteronomy 21:11).
- The **seducer who must marry** (Exodus 22:16).
- The **bill of divorce** (Deuteronomy 24:1).

God legislates marriage **directly** — His institution, His jurisdiction.

17.8 What God did not acknowledge — even where men did

- **Herod and Herodias** — legal, royal, recognised; God's verdict: *"It is not lawful"* (Mark 6:18).
- **The Samaritan woman's live-in** — *"he whom thou now hast is not thy husband"* (John 4:18).

- **A woman joined to another while her husband lives** — *"she shall be called an adulteress"* (Romans 7:3).
- **Forbidden kin** (Leviticus 18:6).
- **What falls outside *"male and female"*** (Genesis 1:27).

Human recognition could not make God acknowledge what He forbids.

17.9 The marriages that crown the Bible

- **God is Israel's husband** — *"thy Maker is thine husband"* (Isaiah 54:5).
- **Christ and the Church** — *"a great mystery"* (Ephesians 5:32).
- **The marriage of the Lamb** — *"these are the true sayings of God"* (Revelation 19:9).
- And in the resurrection *"they neither marry, nor are given in marriage"* (Matthew 22:30) — earthly marriage is for this age, a sign of the eternal one.

From Eden to the Lamb, marriage is God's from end to end — the state is nowhere in the arc.

17.10 The verdict

Will God acknowledge a marriage 100%, even if no state or court will?

Yes — 100% — on one condition, and it is His, not the state's: that it is lawful to Him. Every case says the same. God's verdict is rendered on His own terms, untouched by human recognition in either direction: a court's *"no"* subtracts nothing; a court's *"yes"* adds nothing.

Lawful to Him means His five conditions — the only ones He has ever applied:

1. **A man and a woman** (Genesis 1:27; Mark 10:6).
2. **Both free** — neither bound to a living spouse, not within forbidden kin (Romans 7:2-3; Leviticus 18:6).
3. **Covenant and consent before God** — not mere cohabitation (Malachi 2:14; John 4:18).
4. **In the Lord** — not an idolatrous yoke (1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14).
5. **Sealed in one flesh** (Genesis 2:24).

If those are met, **no government, court, or judicial system on earth can remove one degree of God's acknowledgment.** He joined it (*Mark 10:9*), He witnessed it (*Malachi 2:14*), and it is His — 100%. Their refusal is simply outside His jurisdiction.

The one honest boundary: the 100% is anchored to **His law, not to the state's refusal.** The state's "no" never makes a marriage, and the state's "yes" never saves one He forbids — Herod held the certificate and still heard "*it is not lawful.*"

God's acknowledgment is 100% independent of the state, and 100% certain when His own conditions are met. The state can neither grant it nor revoke it. God joins; God witnesses; God alone decides — and what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Chapter 18

How to Read It, Step by Step

Look carefully at *what kind* of "no" God overruled in every example. It was always an **ethnic, ceremonial, or social** barrier — Moabite, Canaanite, foreigner, shameful reputation. In not one case did God bless a union that broke **His own moral law**. That gives us a clean test.

18.1 The test, step by step

Apply these in order to any real case:

1. **Step 1 — Is it a man and a woman?** If not, it is not marriage in God's design, whatever any state says, for or against (*Genesis 1:27; Mark 10:6*). Stop here.
2. **Step 2 — Are both free to marry?** Neither already bound to a living spouse (*Romans 7:2-3*); not within forbidden kin (*Leviticus 18*). If not, it is adultery or incest, and "before God" cannot sanctify it. Stop here.
3. **Step 3 — Is there a covenant, freely consented, before God?** Not mere cohabitation (*John 4:18*), not feeling alone, but a sworn, exclusive, lifelong pledge with God as witness (*Malachi 2:14*). If it is only living together, it is not yet a marriage.
4. **Step 4 — Is it sealed in the one-flesh union?** The covenant consummated (*Genesis 2:24*).
5. **Step 5 — Only now ask: why does the state say no?**

18.2 Reading Step 5

- **If the state's "no" echoes God's "no"** (Steps 1 or 2 fail) — then God says no too. The bar is His. Herod's state-recognised marriage still drew "It is not lawful" (*Mark 6:18*).
- **If the state's "no" is merely man's** — race, class, status, persecution, paperwork — then it is the kind of "no" God has overruled again and again: Ruth, Rahab, Moses, the whole genealogy of Christ. The marriage is **valid before God**, though no government on earth records it.

18.3 One line to remember

God overrides every human "no" that He did not author — but He never contradicts His own.

18.4 A word on witness

A marriage valid before God without civil recognition is real, but **legally unprotected** — the wife and children lack the safeguards the law would give. This is why Scripture prizes public witness so highly: "the LORD hath been witness" (*Malachi 2:14*); the elders at the gate (*Ruth 4:11*).

So where you cannot obtain the licence, still **gather the witnesses**. God's acknowledgment makes it a marriage; human witness is what protects it. Render to God what is God's — and to Caesar what can honestly be rendered (*Matthew 22:21*).

Chapter 19

A Sidenote: Threads in the Letters

This is a sidenote, and it wears its caution on its sleeve: what follows is **contemplative**, **not proof**. The weight of this book rests on the open Scripture, never on a hidden cipher. With that said, two quiet patterns are worth seeing.

19.1 The marriage words in the marriage chapter

Read the Torah as an unbroken stream of letters and search for equidistant-letter sequences — words spelled out at a fixed skip — and the marriage vocabulary threads through Genesis 2, the chapter where marriage is made. **חתן** *chatan*, "bridegroom," appears at a skip of just **four letters**, its thread crossing **Genesis 2:23** — the very verse where Adam first beholds his bride. Around it, in the same passage, run **אשה** *wife*, **איש** *man*, **בשר** *flesh*, **אחד** *one*, and **ברית** *covenant*.

It is lovely to see — but honesty requires the cold water. These are short, common Hebrew words, and rigorous testing (searching a deliberately shuffled Torah of the same letters) yields the same clustering. By that measure the pattern is **within chance**, not beyond it. So receive it as a curiosity that delights, not as evidence that proves. The marriage of Genesis 2 is established by its plain words — "*they shall be one flesh*" — long before any code is sought.

19.2 Love, one, and the Name

The second pattern is exact arithmetic, and it is genuinely lovely. In Hebrew *gematria*, where each letter carries a number:

- ahavah **אהבה**^{H160}, "love," totals **13**.
- echad **אחד**^{H259}, "one," also totals **13**.
- And $13 + 13 = 26$ — the number of **יהוה**, the name of the LORD.

Love and oneness share a number; and love added to love — two becoming one — equals the Name. Two who love become one, and one plus one is God.

Here too the caution holds: any two Hebrew words can share a value, so gematria proves nothing by itself — it only illuminates. But what it illuminates, Scripture already says plainly: *"they shall be one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24); *"the LORD our God is one LORD"* (Deuteronomy 6:4); *"God is love"* (First John 4:8). The number is a lamp held to a truth that was always shining on the surface of the page.

19.3 What it is, and is not

Let these threads be what they are — a quiet adornment on the hem of the garment, never the garment itself. They do not prove the marriage; they only echo, in the letters and the numbers, what the open Word declares outright. **What God has joined, He joined in the plain light of His Word** — and that is where it stands.

How this was made

This is the author's own work. It was composed with [junifye](#) and an AI assistant, drawing its Scripture and original-language work (Greek, Hebrew, cross-references) from [Darash](#) (Hebrew *darash*, “to seek, inquire, study”), a tool and reference work for the Bible in its original languages.

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