

This is not to conclude that Galatians has nothing to do with the imperial cult. The good work of Brigitte Kahl, Davina Lopez, and Crossan and Reed, to name some not engaged by this discussion, suggests otherwise.



Instone-Brewer, D 2002 – *Divorce and remarriage in the Bible: The social and literary context*

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As the subtitle suggests, Instone-Brewer examines in great detail the social and literary context of marriage and the associated topics of divorce and remarriage in the Old and New Testament periods. He attempts to show that because of the background knowledge and assumptions of the first-century reader, based on developments in the abovementioned periods, the conclusions they would have reached on Jesus' and Paul's teachings on divorce and remarriage would have been different than those of later readers, because by the second century, such knowledge and assumptions had already been forgotten.

Instone-Brewer begins by looking at ancient Israel and the Near East and its influence on Mosaic material. In these times a marriage was primarily seen as a contract which involved payments, agreed stipulations and penalties. It was almost impossible for a woman to remarry. The Law of Moses brought the divorce certificate which gave woman the right to remarry, especially in the case of abandonment. The Mosaic Law also stipulated the ways in which a husband had to care for his wife. This included supplying her with food, clothing and love.

In chapter three the point is made that the prophets often portrayed the relationship between Israel and God as a marriage, from which God divorced Godself because of a breach of the marriage contract. The intertestamental period, discussed in chapter four, brought great changes that increased both the rights of woman and the security of marriages within Judaism. By the first century there was general agreement concerning most aspects of divorce and remarriage within rabbinic Judaism. According to divorce law, the decision to end the marriage contract was that of the husband, because he had to write the divorce certificate. A wife could force a husband to divorce her if she could prove to a rabbinic court that he had broken the marriage contract, but it seldom happened. The author claims that one development during these times influenced almost all divorces among Jews. The Hillelites introduced a new interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 by which they allowed divorce for "any matter", while the Shammaites interpreted the same text as saying "for a matter of indecency". Most Jewish divorces therefore took place on Hillelite grounds, because there was no need to prove anything in court. It is worth noting that the Shammaites accepted the validity of this type of divorce even though it was contrary to what they would have decided. Meanwhile, in the greater Greco-Roman context it became easier for both men and woman to initiate a divorce, and anyone could divorce simply by separating from one's spouse.

Instone-Brewer approaches the problem of Jesus' radical teaching about divorce and remarriage from an interesting angle. An important investigation in this regard concerns the abbreviated texts that we find in the Gospels. He claims that usually the exegesis was largely absent from these debates because these text were regularly used in the synagogue and

because it was widely known at the time. By the second century what used to be common knowledge was quickly disappearing, largely because of the disappearance of the Shammaite group. Commonly understood phrases were also removed, but would have been mentally added by first century readers. The added phrase "for any matter" as it appears in Matthew 19:3 which does not appear in Mark or Luke, is one such example. This phrase referred to the Hillelite interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, an interpretation Jesus did not agree with at all – hence the view that remarriage after this type of divorce is invalid. As far as this issue is concerned, Jesus differed from opinions within Judaism, including that of the Shammaites. Furthermore, the author concludes that in instances where the Gospels are completely silent about an important matter like the silence about remarriage after the death of a spouse or Jesus' opinion about the grounds for divorce in Exodus 21:10-11, Jesus' silence can be ascribed to the fact that on these points he agreed with the unanimously held opinion of Judaism. One such example is Jesus' silence about the Old Testament grounds for divorce. The author claims that the assumption that Jesus regarded the exception of *porneia* as the only ground for divorce is wrong, because it would mean that the Shammaites too had allowed divorce only on the grounds of adultery, which is simply not the case. At first these arguments appear to be rather weak but the author's extensive research is convincing. The author delicately adds to the exegeses and arguments from their abbreviated forms and concludes six separate matters about which Jesus taught.

Chapter seven shows that the world in which Paul lived was completely different from that in which Jesus lived. It is shown that Paul reacts mainly to the practice in the Greco-Roman world in terms of which anyone could divorce simply by separating from one's spouse. Like Jesus, Paul emphasized ways to stay married, rather than ways to divorce.

Chapter eight deals with the marriage vows in Judaism and Christianity and concludes that the Christian marriage service can be regarded as a version of the biblical marriage contract, largely because the wording "cherish, honor and love" can be traced back to the Bible and Old Testament marriage contracts.

This reviewer regards chapter nine as the most important chapter in the book because it traces the history of interpretation of these difficult texts and the reason for the wrong assumptions that were regularly made from early on. Because virtually all non-Hillelite teaching was lost during the late first century, the question of divorce on the grounds of the "any matter" interpretation was understood as a question about "any divorce". Similarly, when Jesus condemned divorces for "any matter", he appeared to condemn all divorces. When he affirmed the interpretation "a matter of indecency" he appeared to have made an exception for adultery only.

Instone-Brewer brings new insights because of his reading of the text in a culturally sensitive way through the eyes of a Christian living at the time when the texts were written. He shows convincingly that the traditional view most churches hold, is based on reading the text through the eyes of someone from the second century or beyond, when specific details of the first-century culture have been forgotten. This is why most churches regard divorce per se as a sin, which is not the case in the New Testament where sin lies in the breaking of the marriage vows. This does not mean that divorce should be encouraged. Because of his research Instone-Brewer has a more pastoral view of divorce and remarriage, while at the same time concluding that according to the New Testament divorce should be avoided whenever possible. A believer should never break the marriage vows and should try to forgive a repentant partner who has done so.

By taking into account the social and literary context to an extent never seen before, this book offers new insights into the original meaning of Jesus' and Paul's teaching about divorce and remarriage. Instone-Brewer succeeds both in simplifying the original meaning of the texts and in complicating matters for the modern church which for centuries has based its teaching on wrong assumptions. It challenges the church to review its teaching and makes an exemplary contribution to this field of enquiry.