

**Jesus Questioned About Marriage in the Resurrection**  
**Matthew 22:23-33**  
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Matthew 22 involves a series of questions designed to trap Jesus. These were from the various sects within Judaism, the Pharisees, Herodians, chief priests, scribes and elders. In Matthew 22:23-33, we find the Sadducees (Matthew 22:15-40) join in the questioning of Jesus. This is another attempt to undermine His authority (Matthew 21:23) and sought to challenge Him as a teacher and to attempt to show that He does not understand the Old Testament Law.

This account of Jesus' answer about marriage in the resurrection is also found in Mark 12:18-27 and Luke 20:27-40. All three Gospels place this question immediately after the question by the Pharisees about paying taxes to Caesar. This question is posed to Jesus on Wednesday before His crucifixion.

**The question by the Sadducees (22:23-28)**

Matthew notes the question occurred "*on that day*," which is literally "in that hour." Since the crowds were still listening to this question (cf. Matthew 22:33), it is likely that this question was fairly soon after the prior question about paying taxes to Caesar (22:15-22). These were the same people that had gathered to listen to His parables and His response to the chief priests and Pharisees in the temple area.

This question about marriage was posed by the Sadducees. Matthew, along with the other Gospels, noted that the Sadducees "*say there is no resurrection.*" This introduced the basis for their question for Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke all included this to make certain that their readers would understand why the Sadducees asked the question that they did. It was because these Sadducees said there was no resurrection that shaped their question to challenge Jesus' authority.

Their question they asked Jesus was, "*Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP CHILDREN FOR HIS BROTHER.'* Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her."

They addressed Him as a “teacher,” just as the Pharisees did in the previous question (cf. 22:16). This was a common way that we see people who did not follow the teachings of Jesus address Him in Matthew (cf. 8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; and 22:36). As a teacher, Jesus would be expected to answer theological questions such as this.

The basis for this question is the Jewish practice of levirate marriage, which encouraged the younger sibling to marry his older brother’s wife in the case the older brother passed away before having children. The word levirate came from the Latin word for the brother of one’s husband. The Jews would consider the first born child to be the older brother’s heir and this would provide offspring for the family lineage. If the next older brother was already married, this responsibility would fall upon his next younger brother.

While the Sadducees quoted Deuteronomy 25:5, this custom actually predated the Law of Moses by hundreds of years to the time of the patriarchs. *“Now Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD took his life. Then Judah said to Onan, “Go in to your brother’s wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother”* (Genesis 38:6-8).

The Mosaic Law formalized this practice in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, *“When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.”* This explained that the purpose of this practice was for family names, and thus inheritances would be kept in place.

We find this being practiced in the history of Israel with Boaz, who took Ruth as his wife when her husband, Mahlon, died. Although no male relative closer than Boaz was able to take this role, Boaz did (Ruth 4:1-10). The result was the divine preservation of the lineage of Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 1:5).

These Sadducees used this practice to attempt to show the problem of believing in the resurrection of the dead into eternity. They had a sharp disagreement with the Pharisees over this doctrinal issue and they had undoubtedly used this argument against the Pharisees with success in the past. They fully expected Jesus to also be tripped up by their reasoning, knowing that He also believed in a resurrection.

This disagreement can be seen when Paul was on trial before the ruling council in Acts 23:6-8, *“Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”* As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.” The Sadducees were passionate about their belief about the resurrection and this would be a specific issue of contention between them and Jesus.

The wording of Matthew 22:25, *“Now there were seven brothers with us...”* implies that the Sadducees actually planned this question by bringing seven brothers together to Jesus. While this scenario was possible, it is most certainly hypothetical, posed to lead Jesus into supporting either incest and adultery or to arbitrarily assign one of the seven brothers to be the eternal husband.

### **The answer by Jesus (22:29-33)**

Jesus answered forthrightly, *“You are mistaken...”* This word means they were deceived, resulting in completely wrong conclusions based upon their preconceptions. People often do this, by basing their beliefs upon preconceptions that those around them perpetuate. Our beliefs must come from the word of God, which is why Jesus rebuked the Sadducees for *“not understanding the Scriptures.”* Also, by adding *“nor the power of God,”* Jesus emphasized the ability of God to do something far greater than anything that worldly people can imagine.

Examples of mistaken concepts regarding the resurrection include the doctrine of purgatory, which does not reflect the Bible’s teaching of forgiveness of sins, nor does it recognize God’s power to forgive sins. Also, the issue regarding cremation, where people are doubtful of God’s power to provide us with our resurrection bodies (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Or the rejection of eternal destruction, by believing that hell is simply imagery and the unsaved are presumed to just cease to exist (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Jesus addressed each of these two failures in reverse order, beginning with their lack of understanding about the power of God. By teaching that *“in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven,”* Jesus countered their assumption that things in eternity must continue in the same way that it has been on earth. God is certainly powerful enough to change the present reality to be something better in heaven. God is not limited, as the question posed by the Sadducees assumed. God’s power will be displayed in the change of the God-made concept of marriage.

There will be no need for weddings or marriage in the resurrection, because there will no longer be procreation when we have heavenly bodies. Marriage was created by God and is a temporal institution, existing only while people are in their earthly bodies. Just as there is no death in eternity, there are no sexual relationships that bring about procreation. Reproduction and childbirth will no longer be necessary, for there is new life. All whom God created will be done so before the resurrection.

When Jesus said that in the resurrection we *“are like angels in heaven,”* He meant that there will be no exclusive relationships, as everyone will be perfectly related to each other in the same way as angels are. Like angels, we are eternally and equally holy. Therefore, the seven brothers would all be equally related to the wife who supposedly passed away after being wed to each of them.

In His answer, Jesus added a rebuke of their rejection of the supernatural. The Sadducees not only did not believe in the resurrection, but they also did not believe in the existence of angels. *“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all”* (Acts 23:8). Jesus contradicted their view by affirming the existence of angels in heaven.

Of course, we must recognize that Jesus only compared our relationships in heaven to angels. He did not state that we would be angels, but only be like angels in heaven in this regard. In Luke’s account, we are only like angels, but are sons of God, *“for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection”* (Luke 20:36). We can expect to have knowledge of our earthly life and relate to everyone with godly love, in purity (cf. 1 John 3:2-3). This is the power of God displayed.

Jesus then addressed their first failure of not understanding the Scripture, *“But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: ‘I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”* In Matthew 22:32, Jesus quotes directly from Exodus 3:6. This passage is specifically important to the Sadducees, since they only viewed the first five books of the Old Testament to be Scripture. Therefore, Jesus proved the resurrection to them from the words of Moses, which they accepted.

Jesus’ point was based upon the present tense of the *“I am”* used in this passage. Although Moses wrote the Law centuries after the death of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God referred to them in the present tense, indicating their continued existence, and thus proving the resurrection. They did not just cease to exist, as the Sadducees believed, but God was still their God.

To increase the clarity of His quotation of Exodus 3:6, Jesus plainly stated the necessary implication of this verse, *“He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”* Not only does this communicate that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob continue to live, but that God, who is sovereign over everything, is over the living, not the dead. In other words, everyone, like the patriarchs, will continue to live for God is over them all. Most certainly, God’s special relationship with His elect guarantees their resurrection unto eternal life, which is the essence of His promises made to His people in the covenant to Abraham. This point was completely missed by these Sadducees, which Mark records with Jesus’ words, *“You are quite wrong”* (Mark 12:27).

This truth that people who have passed on from this present life and continue to be living is also taught in Hebrews 11:13-16, *“All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.”* That God continues to be their God and prepared a place for them necessarily means there is a resurrection from the dead. Such is true for us, *“In My Father’s house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2).

The parallel to this passage in Luke 20 notes that these words were written by Moses, *“But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB”* (Luke 20:37; cf. Mark 12:26). Therefore, Jesus affirmed the Mosaic authorship of Exodus, and by extension, the entire Law, contrary to the opinion of many modern scholars. This point regarding Moses as the author of the first five books of the Old Testament is also found in John 5:46, *“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.”*

The quotation from Exodus is recorded in Matthew 22:31 as *“what was spoken to you from God.”* Therefore, what Moses wrote in Exodus 3:6 was from God and said not just to the people of Moses’ day, but *“to you,”* or also the people of Jesus’ generation. This is a clear indication of the character of the Scripture, that it is written to every generation, and that it is what God says to us, even today. All Scripture is to us, even if not all Scripture is for us. Some of the word of God, like the Old Testament Law, is for the nation of Israel, but is still to us as we can learn from the examples of them (cf. Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11).

Furthermore, by arguing His point based upon the present tense of the Scripture, Jesus informs us of the veracity of the word of God. This supports the doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture. That is that every word (verbal), is fully (plenary) inspired by God. Every part of every word is from God, down to the very tense of the words. This was also communicated by Jesus in Matthew 5:18, *“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”*

Matthew recorded the response of the people, *“And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.”* Luke included the specific response of certain scribes, *“Then some of the scribes answered, ‘Teacher, you have spoken well.’ For they no longer dared to ask him any question”* (Luke 20:39-40). The scribes and Sadducees were unable to oppose what Jesus said and the people knew this.

### **Conclusion**

The attempt by the Sadducees to discredit Jesus was the third time that a distinct sect within the leadership of Israel opposed Him. This challenge ended in the same failure as did previous attempts by the Pharisees and chief priests. They were mistaken in their understanding of the Scriptures regarding the resurrection of man, and they were likewise ignorant of the true power of God.

God is not constrained in the way that we are, and the resurrection will transcend creation as we know it. Even those destined for condemnation will be resurrected unto judgment (Revelation 20:12), which is eternal destruction, *“They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”* (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Those who are resurrected unto life will enjoy a future glory that will be revealed that cannot be fully understood presently, *“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the eagerly awaiting creation waits for the revealing of the sons and daughters of God”* (Romans 8:16-19).

Whenever we encounter death, the truth of the resurrection is comforting for us. Rationalists today are like the Sadducees, believing that this life is the entirety of man’s existence. Yet even those who profess the resurrection from the dead may act as if this present life is all that matters for us. As we grow in our understanding of the word of God, and we experience the power of God in our own lives, we should grow in our confidence in what God has in store for us in the life to come.