

Doesn't Matthew 22:23–30 Contradict the LDS Doctrine of Eternal Marriage?

In response to the LDS doctrine of eternal marriage, you may hear Matthew 22:23–30 (or its scriptural counterparts: Mark 12:18–25 and Luke 20:27–36) brought up as proof that there won't be marriage in heaven. The Sadducees, who didn't even believe in the afterlife, deliberately tried to trip up Jesus by asking which of seven husbands a woman, who outlived them all, would belong to. The wording is almost identical in all three versions. Jesus answers:

Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. (Matthew 22:29–30)

There are three things you need to appreciate in order to answer this claim:

1. The Restored Gospel is not “biblicist” in nature, meaning we believe that the word of God is not subject to individual interpretation, but is that which proceeds from the mouth of a living prophet.
2. The Sadducees tried to set Jesus up with a hypothetical, self-contradictory question.
3. The original Greek in which the Gospels were written does not support our critics' claim that there will be no marriage in heaven.

Biblicism vs. Continuing Revelation. Believing in continuing revelation means the LDS believe we have prophets who can receive revelation on an ongoing basis on behalf of Jesus Christ. So to answer an objection like this it suffices only to show that the Bible does not *contradict* the doctrine of eternal marriage; we do not have to show from where in the Bible we get the doctrine. We teach from the scriptures but we teach the Restored Gospel, not the traditional collection of philosophy, creeds and theologies put together by men over the past nearly two millennia.

Deliberate Word Trap. There are a number of interpretations possible for Matthew 22:23–30. But Jesus side-steps the doctrinal issue by responding with a reproach of the Sadducees for not understanding the scriptures.

Translation is difficult and a translated passage does not always convey the nuances in the original. It helps our argument that all three versions of this account consistently use the same words in the earliest Greek. And in each version it says that “giving in marriage” will not occur after the time of the resurrection. It does not say that marriage, as an institution, will not occur.

This difference is the key to understanding the LDS interpretation of these particular scriptures. We believe the institution of marriage is divine and marriage bonds created under God's authority will not normally be dissolved, either in this life or in the life to come. However, we also believe that this life is the time to commit to follow the whole Gospel, and that includes the time to enter into celestial matrimony. After the resurrection it will be too late, as marriages will not be able to be entered into then (in other words, there will be no “giving in marriage,” exactly as Jesus says).

We appreciate that not all people have the opportunity to hear the Restored Gospel here on Earth, let alone enter into celestial marriage.

That's why God in His wisdom allotted the period between death and the resurrection, in a place we call Paradise or the Spirit World, as the time during which all of this can be completed. This is where God will resolve the kinds of issues raised by the Sadducees, as insincere as they might have been.

Interestingly, a non-LDS scholar has also made a similar point about the fact that apparent contradictions are, according to original Christian belief, to be sorted out in the afterlife:

[Matthew 22:]29. ‘You are wrong...’ Jesus’ reply is based on two premises: (a) the Sadducees are wrong because they are transferring to the resurrection-life considerations which properly belong only to life before death, a mistake which Scripture, for all its imagery, poetic or homespun, never makes. (b) God, who gave the Law, a Law which contains provisions for the regulation of marriage and the raising of children, cannot be unaware of considerations posed by the test case. On the main question of resurrection, the same two premises apply. The power of God is not confined by the mundane considerations adduced by the Sadducees, and in the resurrection-life marriage and birth are irrelevant to the discussion. [W. F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible, vol. 26. Matthew.* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 273–274.]

Original Language. A quick look at the original Greek of this passage emphasizes that there is a difference between the state of marriage and “marry[ing]” or “giving in marriage,” or wedding ceremonies, as referred to in Matthew 22:30. The word translated as “marry” is “gamousin,” the third-person form of “gameó,” which means “to enter the marriage state, to wed, to get married,” and thus clearly refers to an action at a point in time, not a state of being—“he/she/it marries,” as we'd say in English. The second term in the verse, “giving in marriage” is “gamizontai,” an alternative way of saying the same thing (with the nuance that one is doing it for one's own benefit; called the Middle Voice in Greek).

Some people may say that if you have been married, you have been “given in marriage,” and this is true. So what's the difference between the “given in marriage” in this sense, and in the sense of “being married?” In 1 Corinthians 7:33 we see exactly the phrase that describes a married person: “But he that is married (“gamésas” = “the married one”) careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.” If Jesus had wanted to deny the existence of eternal marriage, this is the word that would have been used in chronicling his confrontation with the Sadducees.

Summary: It will be too late for weddings after the resurrection, but the state of marriage itself can exist eternally, if entered into via the Lord's way.

The purpose of this article is to counter common claims by LDS critics and provide a simple introduction to this subject. If you would like more information on this and other LDS topics, contact



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