

# Dating and Marrying Unbelievers

**Why do many believers oppose the practice of dating unbelievers and marrying unbelievers? Are they being cold, cruel and uncaring? What does the Scripture teach about seeking a wife? Does Yahweh really care whether or not we marry “in the faith”? Should we attempt to follow the guidelines and principles in the Scripture or is it alright to make up our own rules in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Believe it or not, the Scripture explicitly prohibits a believer from entering into any serious relationship or marriage with a non-believer.**

As a Brother in the faith once said, “There can be no doubt that a godly, righteous marriage, between two individuals who truly love one another, is one of the GREATEST BLESSINGS of this present human life!”

Marriage is a divine institution, a blessing created by Yahweh. Marriage is also a covenant or contract and should not be treated lightly. The laws of marriage and divorce apply to *all* mankind. It is very important therefore, that we seek wise counsel when considering getting married. There are obligations and needs that must be met by both parties.

The Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) provides very little guidance with regard to the *procedures* of a marriage. The method of finding a spouse, the form of the wedding ceremony, and the nature of the marital relationship are all explained in the *Talmud*, the most significant collection of the Jewish oral tradition interpreting the Torah.

According to Jewish oral tradition, the process of marriage occurs in two distinct stages: *kiddushin* (commonly translated as betrothal) and *nisuin* (full-fledged marriage). The *nisuin* (from a word meaning “elevation”) completes the process of marriage. The husband brings the wife into his home and they begin their married life together.

In the past, the *kiddushin* and *nisuin* would routinely occur as much as a year apart. Today, the two ceremonies are often performed together. But the question is, who should we seek to marry?

As stated in the introduction, we will prove from Scripture that Yahweh prohibits a believer from entering into any serious relationship with a non-believer. One of the first references to this subject is found in Deuteronomy 7:1-4:

*“When Yahweh thy Elohim shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;*

*And when Yahweh thy Elohim shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:*

*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.*

*For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other elohim: so will the anger of Yahweh be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.”*

Here the children of Israel were admonished not to marry the children of Canaan because “they would turn your sons away from following me, to serve other elohim.” In other words, the non-believer will cause the believer to fall into sin.

The spiritual principle that Yahweh is trying to teach should be plain. That which is unholy makes that which is holy, unholy. But that which is holy cannot make that which is unholy, holy. This spiritual principle is at the root of Yahweh forbidding His people to covenant with those who are not His people. Since believers have a hard enough time striving to follow Messiah as it is, how well are they going to do if they attach themselves to those who are not believers?

The believer, who now has a new nature, can choose to be perfected in holiness. *“But as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.”* (1 Pet.1:15). But because he also has to deal with his carnal nature, his flesh, he can and does still sin. The non-believer on the other hand, has no new nature. He/she has only the sinful nature. He/she is a slave to sin, according to Yahshua (John 8) and the Apostle Paul (Romans 6), and can only choose to what degree he/she will sin. Therefore, the believer can be influenced by the non-believer to sin, since he is able to sin, but the non-believer cannot be influenced by the believer not to sin, since he is bound to sin.

Also, after the exile of Israel, Nehemiah (the same prophet who teaches us that buying and selling is not in keeping with the spirit of the Sabbath (4<sup>th</sup>) commandment), pointed out to the remnant (the surviving children of Israel), that the great King Solomon was led astray by his relationship with women who served other elohim. In Nehemiah 13:23-27 we read:

*“In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.*

*And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.*

*So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by Elohim, saying, “You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves.”*

*Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his Elohim; and Elohim made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, pagan women caused even him to sin.*

*Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our Elohim by marrying pagan women?"*

In 1 Kings 11:4 we read:

*"But King Solomon loved many foreign women . . . from the nations of whom Yahweh had said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you...For surely they will turn away your hearts after their elohim.' Solomon clung to these in love . . . and his wives turned away his heart . . . His wives turned his heart after other elohim; and his heart was not loyal to Yahweh his Elohim."*

This is the story of the wisest man who ever lived, yet if anyone could have resisted the temptations to give in to the ways of the ungodly, you would think that it should have been King Solomon. But the spiritual principle prevailed.

You see, the principle spans all of time and is just as relevant for us believers today as it was for the Jews under the old covenant. True followers of Messiah are no less guilty of disobedience when they marry non-believers than were the Jews of the Old Testament. Unlike slipping into sin as we might do, marriage is not something one does by accident. It is planned, and therefore if it is a marriage between a believer and a non-believer, it is premeditated, willful disobedience.

When a believer marries a non-believer, the family is divided and as Yahshua said, "A *house divided against itself. . . cannot stand.*" (Mark 3:25). While one desires to live for and serve Yahweh, the other person's priorities are focused primarily on the affairs of this life. Since they are headed in different directions, they cannot grow together (unless the believer compromises at every juncture). They can only grow apart, thus the divided house cannot stand.

It was never Yahweh's intent that a man have more than one wife or a wife have more than one husband. In the beginning, in the book of beginnings, Genesis, we read:

*"Therefore shall a man leave father and mother, and shall CLEAVE UNTO HIS WIFE: and the TWO shall be ONE FLESH."* (Gen.2:22-24).

We believe that the implication is very clear here, that Yahweh intends for one man to have one wife, and that union is meant to endure FOR LIFE! A marital union, then, should be based on true love, commitment, real romance -- two becoming one, in body, mind, and spirit, through serving Yahweh together, and growing in grace, truth and knowledge together, helping each other, sharing thoughts and sharing the ultimate goal in life -- to become the perfect children of Yahweh in the resurrection! The covenant is to become one body, one flesh, one spirit. How can one achieve this "oneness" with an unbeliever?

It is not only the Old Testament that teaches that believers should not seek out and marry unbelievers, but also the New Testament. The Apostle Paul says emphatically that believers are

only to marry “in Yahweh” (1 Corinthians 7:39). In other words, they should marry only another believer. This is wise advice since both can seek Yahweh, who created marriage, for growth and guidance together as they become “one flesh” and grow together in “oneness” with the Messiah.

*“The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in Yahweh.” (KJV).*

*“A woman is bound to her husband during the whole period that he lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to marry whom she will, provided that he is a Christian.” (Weymouth).*

He goes on to show that it is utterly contrary to the Messiah’s teachings to be involved in a serious relationship with unbelievers. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, we read:

*“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Messiah with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”*

The Revised Standard Version reads, *“Do not be mismatched with unbelievers.”* Although Paul does not explicitly mention the topics of dating and marriage in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, it clearly has meaning for such relationships. In this passage Paul points out that we should not be united with, or bound to *persons who are contrary to Messiah*. Throughout Paul’s practical admonitions, are echoes of Old Testament passages calling on Israelites to be separated from outsiders who did not recognize the Elohim of Israel.

Not only should Christians avoid dating and marrying non-Christians, 1 Corinthians 5:9-12 would seem to indicate they also should not become involved with people who say they are following Messiah, but do not live godly lives.

*“I wrote unto you in my letter—not to be mixing yourselves up with fornicators;—Not at all, meaning the fornicators of this world, or the covetous and extortioners, or idolaters,—else had ye been obliged, in that case, to go out of the world! But, now, I have written unto you not to be mixing yourselves up,—if anyone named a “brother,” be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such a one as this, not so much, as to be eating together, for what have I to do to be judging them who are without? Do, ye, not judge, them who are within, whereas, those who are without, Yahweh, judgeth? Remove ye the wicked man from among, yourselves.” (Rotherham).*

The underlying principle here is two-fold. First, we belong to Yahweh and are called to glorify Him in every aspect of our lives (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Secondly, wrong relationships can produce bad attitudes, wrong behaviors, wrong standards, and wrong values. In 1 Corinthians 15:33 Paul warns us: “Do not deceive yourselves: Troublesome companionships corrupt good morals.” The danger in dating and marrying non-believers is that a worldly mind-set begins to creep in and a believer’s walk with Messiah becomes spiritually dry and barren. There are other important questions. How will the children be raised? In what faith, if any?

There is the concern, expressed by many, about a practice of some Christians who date non-believers with the intent to try and lead them to faith in Messiah. In its ideal form, the goal may seem worthy and pure, but such practice is biblically flawed and presents the Christian with certain risks.

At stake are the Christian's personal testimony, as well as his/her own physical and spiritual well-being. Many who have involved themselves in such dating practices have unexpectedly found themselves caught in an unhealthy relationship, one without Yahweh at the core.

Some have even chosen to marry unbelievers thinking they can win their partner later in marriage, yet the Apostle Paul states:

*“For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?” (1 Cor.7:16).*

The Apostle seems to imply, “Why take the risk?” Although there have been instances where unbelieving spouses have been won to Yahweh, many Christian spouses have either been restricted in their faith, become lethargic or have tragically fallen away from Messiah as a result.

Clearly the biblical rule of 2 Corinthians 6:14 forbidding yoking with non-believers suggests that dating to evangelize is not a practice for committed followers of Messiah. The biblical imperative for all Christians is to date only those who are likeminded and likewise committed to Messiah.

It is not with an unloving heart that I speak of the heartache involved in marrying a non-believer. When you do this, you have stepped into disobedience to the Scriptures (II Corinthians 6:14). What sometimes seems to happen is that people will rush into marriage with a non-believer, instead of waiting for Yahweh's best for them, or due to hurts they have experienced in the past from Christians, they have chosen to believe there is no difference, and thus enter marriage just as anyone would that doesn't know Yahweh.

What if a person becomes converted to the faith and is already married to an unbeliever? The Apostle Paul answers this question in his letters to the Corinthians.

*“To the rest I say, not Yahweh, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For Elohim has called us to peace.” (1Cor.7:12-15).*

It is true that believers are not perfect and there have been devastating things happen in families that profess to know Yahweh. But Yahweh's best is always best! Patience is a virtue. Pray daily and ask Yahweh to bring a godly mate into your life.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, *“My thoughts toward you, says Yahweh, are thoughts of good and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

Seeking a wise, godly, and good mate is like searching for a great white pearl or hidden treasure. Yahweh wants his people to be happy. We may have to exercise some patience, but we must also do our part...looking! You must be diligent, prayerful, spend your time wisely, and don't look in unreasonable or improper places.

When you get to know someone and you really believe that you have found the right person, in the Faith, take the time to get to know their personality and their character, preferably over a minimum of four seasons. Observe how they act, react, interact and speak under a number of different situations and circumstances. You want to build a solid relationship, so it must be built upon a good, solid foundation.

Avoid the temptation to become intimate prematurely. Although this world exalts sensualism and has no regard for purity, let us be reminded that Yahshua said: *“What is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of Elohim.”* (Luke 16:15). Although society today scoffs at morality as prudish, we are commanded to *“flee sexual immorality”* (sexual intercourse between two people who are not living together as husband and wife) (1 Cor. 6:18) and *“keep yourselves pure”* (1 Tim. 5:22).

Don't let yourself fall in love with anyone who doesn't love Yahweh and Yahshua more than he or she loves you. If he or she loves Messiah first, and you second, you will do much better than if you are loved first and Yahweh is somewhere down their list.

Solomon also wrote, *“A prudent wife is from Yahweh.”* (Prov.19:14).

He also said, *“Whoso findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of Yahweh.”* (Prov.18:22).

*“But seek ye first the kingdom of Elohim, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”* (Matt.6:33).

You may feel like you are limiting your choices if you follow this counsel. But don't settle for *second best...or third best...or fourth*. Put Yahweh *first* in your life and trust Him! *“Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”* (Prov.3:5, 6).