

# Matthew 22:29-33

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-22/matthew-2229-33/>

*Jesus answers the Sadducees loaded question about the resurrection by pointing out their error. He then proceeds to explain how people are not given in marriage in the resurrection, before demonstrating the resurrection from the books of Moses. The crowds are amazed at His answer.*

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 12:24-27 and Luke 20:34-38.

The Sadducees had just asked *Jesus* a preconstructed, hypothetical, extreme, logically-loaded, gotcha-question. Their question was whose wife would a seven-times widowed, childless woman be *in the resurrection* if she married seven consecutive brothers (Matthew 22:25-28). They referenced Moses's law from Deuteronomy 25:5-6 that *said* a brother should marry his deceased, childless brother's widow to construct their exaggerated scenario (Matthew 22:24). The Sadducees did not believe *in the resurrection* (Matthew 22:23). They were trying to outsmart *Jesus* and make Him look foolish, while justifying one of their primary distinguishing beliefs.

But *Jesus* rejected their framing and cleverly disarmed their trap before answering their question.

*Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken..."* He directly pointed out that what the Sadducees believed about *the resurrection* was incorrect.

Their mistake was a result of *not understanding* two things

1. *the Scriptures*
2. *nor the power of God.*

*Jesus* could have meant several things when He told the Sadducees, *you do not understand the Scriptures.*

*Jesus* could have meant that their *understanding of the Scriptures* was too restrictive. It is thought that the Sadducees only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament (the books of *Moses*) as canon. The first century Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that the Sadducees "admit no observance at all apart from the laws [of *Moses*]" (Antiquities 18:16). While the books of *Moses* do not expound upon the doctrine of *the resurrection*, it is present, but the Sadducees' hyper-narrow *understanding* of what *the Scriptures* include have shut themselves off from the clarifying light in other portions of God's word. That is why Paul would later teach Timothy to value the totality of *the Scriptures* and not neglect any part of it.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

(2 Timothy 2:16-17)

When we pick and choose which *Scriptures* we will follow and which *Scriptures* we won't, we distort *God's* word and try to subordinate His will to ours. When we deny portions of *the Scriptures* we replace what is absolutely true, with what our finite perspective dimly sees (Psalm 119:30); and replace divine insight for human blindness and confusion (Psalm 119:105; Matthew 15:14). When we cut and paste *the Scriptures* to our tastes, we are not following *God*; We are worshiping ourselves and we lack faith which pleases Him (Proverbs 3:5; Hebrews 11:6). We must be careful to not embrace (only) what we like from the Bible while neglecting or rejecting its hard edges—lest we become like *the Sadducees*.

Had the Sadducees accepted the later books of *the Scriptures*, namely Joshua through Malachi, with its history, wisdom, and prophecy, perhaps they would have had an easier time understanding things like *the resurrection*, angels, and the spirit of man (Acts 23:8).

Second, *Jesus* could have meant that their interpretation of *the Scriptures* themselves was *mistaken*. In other words, they did not understand or interpret *the Scriptures* correctly.

And *Jesus* may have referred to both their overly-restrictive *understanding* of which books *the Scriptures* included and their misunderstanding of what those *Scriptures* said.

*Jesus* explained to *them* the reason they were *mistaken* was because they did *not* understand *the power of God*. They did not understand how *the resurrection* was possible or how it made sense. And because they lacked an explainable *understanding* they chose not to believe. They were relying on their own understanding instead of *God's* (Proverbs 3:5). We too can be like these Sadducees when we trust in the finite understanding of what makes sense according to human logic instead of trusting in the infinite and infallible wisdom and *power of God*. As noted in Ecclesiastes, when we rely on human reason and experience to gain meaning in life, we can expect a result of madness, folly and wickedness (see commentary on Ecclesiastes [1:12-15](#)).

By pointing out and explaining how the Sadducees were *mistaken*, *Jesus* had unloaded the ammunition from their loaded question about whose wife the widow of seven brothers will be in the life to come. By acknowledging their mistake and their false assumptions that led to it, *Jesus* was now free to explain what was true.

*He* told *them*, *For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven*. People are not married in wedlock in the life to come. Marriages come to an end when one or the other of the husband and wife die. Those who are risen are not married. When those who were married live on *in the resurrection* they *are like angels* in this respect, *Jesus* explained.

After *Jesus* disarmed and answered the Sadducees' gotcha-question, *Jesus* then went on to demonstrate how *the Scriptures* from the books of Moses taught *the resurrection of the dead*.

*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'?*

*Jesus's question: have you not read* implies that these religious leaders had not read them, or if they had read them that they failed to understand its meaning as it regarded *the resurrection of the dead*. In either case, it was an accurate and embarrassing charge against the Sadducees who were not only the authorities of the Jewish temple but who also fancied themselves to be experts of the books of Moses. And *Jesus* chose examples from the first five books, which were the books the Sadducees believed to be authoritative.

Mark's gospel account quotes an extra dig from *Jesus* when He asked the question: "have you not read in the book of Moses about the passage of the burning bush, how God spoke to him..." (Mark 12:26). The passage that *Jesus* cited was Moses' famous encounter of the burning bush (Exodus 3:6). Practically every Jew over the age of three would have been familiar with this passage. By implying that they had never read a Scripture so well known as this with understanding would have been extra insulting.

Back to Matthew's account, the phrase, *spoken to you by God*, indicates that it was not Moses who spoke these words, but *God*, Himself. This is true in a general and a particular sense. It is true in a general sense that *God* spoke these words, because *God* is the divine inspiration and authority behind all *the Scriptures* (Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 119:160; Proverbs 30:5; 2 Timothy 2:16)—including the five books of Moses. The gospel writer John said something to this effect in the prologue to his gospel account when he wrote: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ [God become human]" (John 1:17). In this sense, all of *God's* words recorded in the Scriptures are spoken to you—that is the entire Bible includes His message to us for our benefit (Luke 11:28).

But while there is a general sense in which *the Scriptures* are a record of *what was spoken to you by God*, *Jesus* also cites a more direct encounter and specific sense in which *God* spoke about *the resurrection of the dead*. He quoted Moses's famous encounter of *God* at the burning bush in Exodus 3. When Moses saw the burning bush and turned aside, *God* literally spoke and called to Moses. When *God* introduced Himself to Moses, He said, "*I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*" (Exodus 3:6).

*Jesus* then explained how what *God* had *spoken to* Moses at the burning bush pertained to *the resurrection of the dead*: [God] *is not the God of the dead but of the living*.

When *God* told Moses *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*, He was speaking in the present tense as though these men were alive. These long dead and buried patriarchs were *living* and alive. This tells us that even the tenses in scripture are packed with meaning. *Jesus's* answer depends on noting that in this phrase from scripture *God* speaks in the present tense.

Remarkably, even though *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* had died and were buried roughly four hundred years before *God* spoke these words to Moses at the burning bush—they were somehow *living* when *God* spoke to Moses. How could these men still be alive after they had died and were buried, unless *God* had resurrected them from *the dead*?

Other *Scriptures* teach *the resurrection of the dead* in more detail, but *Jesus* likely chose this passage from Exodus (one of the five books of Moses) because the Sadducees likely only accepted the books of Moses as authoritative. Even though they were wrong to deny the rest of *the Scriptures*, *Jesus* was willing to use the portion they believed to show them that there was a *resurrection of the dead*. After explaining this to the Sadducees in Mark's account, *Jesus* added one final kicker: "you are greatly mistaken" (Mark 12:27).

*The resurrection* is central to *Jesus's* identity (John 11:25) and plan of redemption (1 Corinthians 15:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19; 2 Thessalonians 4:14). *Jesus* taught that His *resurrection* would be the clear sign proving He was the Messiah from God (Matthew 12:39-40; 16:21; 20:19; John 2:18-22). If the Sadducees or anyone did not believe in *the resurrection of the dead*, much of what *Jesus* taught would not make sense and it would likely carry less appeal.

*When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.* Matthew does not explicitly say why they were *astonished* as he did when he concluded *Jesus's* Sermon on the Mount: 'and they were *astonished* that He taught as one having authority' (Matthew 7:28-29).

They could have been *astonished* because what *He said* about *the resurrection* was new to their thinking—and insightful. They could have been *astonished* because *Jesus* had answered the Sadducee's trick question so well. They could have been *astonished* because *Jesus* challenged the authority of the Sadducees, exposed their ignorance of *the Scriptures*, and humiliated them in the temple. Or they could have been *astonished* for some other reason. It was possible they were *astonished* for all these factors.

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>29</sup> But *Jesus* answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. <sup>30</sup> For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. <sup>31</sup> But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: <sup>32</sup> 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the de**