

The End of Eternal Celibacy: A Response to Sarah Giles's "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage"

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Abstract

This paper is a critical response to Sarah Giles's 2023 two-part study on the interpretation of Jesus's response to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36, which traditionally suggests that marriage and procreation cease in the resurrection. Giles challenges this traditional view, arguing that Jesus's statement condemns mixed marriages among Jerusalem's elite in the present age rather than advocating for eternal celibacy in the resurrection. She situates the passage within the context of late Second Temple Judaism, arguing that Malachi's critique of intermarriage influenced his response to them. While Giles presents some compelling arguments, this paper offers a brief constructive critique, highlighting two significant issues. First, it addresses the astral-celestial conception of angelic existence in Jewish thought, which complicates her dismissal of angelic celibacy. Second, it examines the unresolved tension between marital continuity in the resurrection and the purity laws governing proximity to God's presence, which require further exploration. The paper acknowledges Giles's valuable contribution to the scholarly debate, especially her emphasis on the absence of a universal belief in eternal celibacy in Jewish eschatology but argues that her analysis has not eliminated eternal celibacy as the belief behind Jesus's response.

Christianity traditionally maintains that human existence in the resurrection will be devoid of marriage, including sexual activity and procreation, a view that may date back to its inception.¹ This perspective is primarily based upon Jesus's response

1 All English translations of biblical passages are from the NRSV. English translations of Dead Sea Scrolls are from Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1998). To avoid repetition, this paper uses terms such as "resurrection," "eschatological future," "age to come" interchangeably when referring to life after the inauguration of God's eschatological reign; although, "resurrection" pertains to those who will have died before its commencement. Additionally, the Latter-day Saints, and possibly other traditions, hold that certain marriages continue into the next life.

to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36 and its synoptic parallels. Most scholarly works on Jesus’s view about marriage in the resurrection focus on reception of this response within early Christianity and subsequent interpretations.² The publication in 2023 of Sarah Giles’s two-part study in *CATR* challenges this traditional Christian understanding of Jesus’s reply and advances ongoing scholarly discussion over its interpretation.³ What did Jesus mean when he stated that those worthy of the resurrection would be as angels, immortal and neither marrying nor giving in marriage? Giles situates Jesus’s response within the discursive critiques of late Second Temple priestly leadership, emphasizing its “Hebraic” background. However, she downplays or overlooks two significant factors that complicate her conclusion: astral-celestial conceptions of angelic existence and the sexual purity requirements for proximity to God’s presence.

Since the following is intended as a constructive response to a welcome contribution, my comments on the many merits of Giles’s study will be brief so that I can devote more space to raising what I believe to be unresolved issues.

Reconstruction and the Future of Marriage: A Summary

Giles’s two-part study challenges the traditional (Christian) interpretation of Jesus’s response to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36 (and parr.), that marriage and procreation will cease in the afterlife, a view she terms *eternal celibacy*. In Part 1, she begins by briefly scrutinizing some of the foundations of the traditional reading, arguing instead that biblical promises and blessings frequently emphasize marital fruitfulness.⁴ She contends that the expectation of abundance generated by such promises during the exilic and postexilic periods was extended by writers like Ezekiel into an eschatological hope for a future Edenic age.⁵ Turning back to the Lukan passage, Giles presents a case that the phrase “sons of this age” in Jesus’s response refers specifically to wicked sons, while the expression “marrying and giving in marriage” denotes illicit marriages.⁶ For Part 1, she concludes that Jesus’s use of the phrase about marriage was a description of “the *sexual immorality* that would occur at the end of the age.”⁷

In Part 2, Giles begins by noting a few scholars who have also challenged the eternal celibacy interpretation of Jesus’s words. However, while these scholars generally maintain that Jesus was referring to marriage in a broad sense, Giles

2 Sarah Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage: Interpreting Luke 20:34–36 in its Hebraic Context,” *Canadian-American Theological Review* 12 (2023), I.54–61.

3 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” I.54–72; II.73–91.

4 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” I.55–57.

5 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” I.62–66.

6 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” I.66–72.

7 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” I.72.

believes she has demonstrated that Jesus's focus was forbidden marriages.⁸ She then provides a brief historical recounting and critique of marriages among the Jerusalem elite of the late Second Temple period, highlighting numerous accounts of intermarriage.⁹ Next, she examines three temple disputations in Luke, drawing a connection between Jesus and John the Baptist, whom she then links to the book of Malachi. Building on this framework, she argues that Jesus's response to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36 was not a statement about the absence of marriage in the afterlife but rather a condemnation of intermarriage—one rooted in Malachi's critique of the Jerusalem priesthood's intermarriages in his own time.¹⁰

Giles ultimately concludes that the traditional interpretation—that Jesus advocated eternal celibacy in Luke 20:34–36—is flawed. She argues that his phrase “sons of this age” was a negative expression for the Jerusalem priesthood, while by using “marrying and giving in marriage” he referred specifically to illicit intermarriages. In contrast, those deemed worthy of the age to come are those who uphold the law, including properly sanctioned marriages. According to her interpretation, marriage will persist in the resurrection.

Noteworthy Contributions

As Giles argues that Jesus may have envisioned the continuation of marriage—and therefore sexual activity—into the eschatological future, there is much to commend in her analysis. She effectively highlights the lack of references to a celibate afterlife in the orthodox Christian tradition, explicitly based upon Jesus's reply, until the mid-to-late second century.¹¹ Furthermore, she rightly underscores the prevalence of Jewish eschatological expectations by the first century for the continuation of marriage and procreation in the world to come. Her examination of the phrases “marrying and giving in marriage” and “eating and drinking” is both insightful and thought-provoking, even if I remain unconvinced that they refer exclusively to forbidden marriages.

8 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” II.73–74.

9 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” II.74–76. Some, such as this writer, may take a more skeptical approach toward Josephus's accounts and that of the Mishna. Josephus is both a key source for Jewish history of the period and yet known for polemically rhetorical accounts. As one example, his description of the Essenes (like that of Philo) characterizes them as akin to Greek philosophical movements in contrast to the picture one gets of the Qumran community from the sectarian scrolls, which many identify with the Essenes. Similarly, evidence is lacking among the Dead Sea Scrolls for his portrayal of the negative estimation of women and wives by Essene men, particularly his rationale—their misogyny.

10 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” II.77–88.

11 For example, this view is absent from the Apostolic Fathers. Aside from the central thrust of her argument, Giles privileges a modern western doctrinal perspective throughout her study, an approach acceptable to many and not uncommon. Doing so, however, allows for the exclusion of other early, now noncanonical Christian writings, such as the Thomasine literature. The Gospel of Thomas hints at such a belief, at least contemporaneously with the Apostolic Fathers, potentially adding support for the presence of this view within early strands of Christian thought.

More significantly, Giles makes some noteworthy contributions to analysis of the Sadducean controversy. First, few scholars, aside from William Loader, have devoted substantial attention to the marital dimension of Jesus's response in Luke 20:34–36 or its parallels, let alone in conjunction to its language about angels. Moreover, she synthesizes a theme Loader has explored across multiple studies into a concise, two-part analysis: the deep concern over intermarriage (exogamy) among pious Jewish circles in Jesus's time.

Second, Giles is less critical of the sources for Sadducean and priestly marriages than some might prefer. However, introducing the storyline of recent Jerusalemite priestly marriages into an analysis of this pericope is an innovative contribution that any future study of this topic must consider.

Third, Giles makes a respectable case that Malachi 1–3 provided an interpretive framework for Jesus's response, at least as presented in its Lukan form. In this regard, her analysis is reminiscent of Peter Bolt's persuasive essay that elements of the book of Tobit influenced Mark's account of the Sadducean controversy.¹² Consideration of both John Meier's and James McGrath's examinations of the importance of John the Baptist to the formation of Jesus could further support this portion of her argument.¹³

While the above highlights some of the strengths of Giles's study, a note of caution is suggested regarding two issues that bear upon the topic—one pertaining to a particular line of her argument, and the other to a related aspect that she either overlooks or does not fully consider. First, the astral-celestial descriptions of angelic beings in both pre and postexilic literature, along with their implications for the developing concept of eternal celibacy, do not so easily align with Giles's interpretation. Second, marital existence for the resurrected raises unresolved questions about the presence of sexual impurity in the eschatological divine presence. It should be emphasized that the following critique is not intended as a wholesale rejection of her analysis but rather as constructive engagement with specific components of her argument.

Like Angels, Astral-Celestial Existence

First, Giles largely bypasses astral-celestial conceptions of angels, instead relying upon anthropomorphic and animated or interactive portrayals, particularly those with priestly analogues. Yet there are many passages across Israelite and Judean literature that speak of angelic beings in astral-celestial terms, including as stars or the heavenly host. We can trace the equation of angels with stars back to preexilic

12 Peter Bolt, "What were the Sadducees Reading? An Enquiry into the Literary Background of Mark 12:18–23," *Tyndale Bulletin* 45.2 (1994): 369–94.

13 John P. Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, vol. 2 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (AYBRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 19–233; James F. McGrath, *Christmaker: A Life of John the Baptist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024).

biblical texts.¹⁴ For instance, Judges 5:20 describes the stars (Heb. כוכבים; Gk. ἄστρα) “from heaven” as waging battle against Sisera near Hazor alongside several Israelite tribes. Similarly, Isaiah 14:12–13 employs the imagery of a morning star (Heb. הילל; Gk. ἑωσφόρος) and stars of God (Heb. כוכבים; Gk. ἄστρα) in a metaphorical critique of the Babylonian king, a passage that later influenced Jewish and Christian views of Satan’s fall. In Job 38:7, God asks Job where he was when the morning stars (Heb. כוכבים; Gk. ἄστρα) sang together, and the sons of heaven rejoiced. Psalm 147:4 celebrates the creation of the stars, then Psalm 148:2–4 explicitly equates angels (Heb. מלאכי; Gk. ἄγγελοι) and the heavenly host (Heb. צבא; Gk. δύναμει), associating them with the sun, moon, and shining stars (Heb. כוכבים; Gk. ἄστρα). Writers often use the term “holy ones” (Heb. קדשים; Gk. ἅγιοι) to denote this angelic host (Ps 89:5, 7; Deut 33:2–3; Job 5:1; 15:15).¹⁵

These depictions generally present angels as a nearly fixed, luminous host, akin to stars adorning the night sky.¹⁶ E. Theodore Mullin’s entry “Host, Host of Heaven” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* catalogues these portrayals, describing the heavenly host alternately as a quartered heavenly army, as members of the divine council or, conversely, as celestial entities worshipped idolatrously by Israel and its neighbors.¹⁷ By the Hellenistic period, Jewish sources increasingly refer to angels as “spirits” as well (Heb. רוחות; Gk. πνεύματα).¹⁸ Meanwhile, Daniel 12:3 affirms that the wise and righteous, those who endure the persecutions of Antiochus, “shall shine like the brightness of the sky” and “like the stars forever and ever.” By the late first century, the author of Revelation identifies the “seven stars” as the “angels of the seven churches” (Rev 1:20) and depicts the dragon sweeping “a third of the stars of heaven” to the earth (Rev 12:4).

Taken together, these examples suggest that one could, within late Second Temple Judaism, envision angelic existence as astral and transcendent—celestial in both ontology and comportment—in contrast to more anthropomorphic depictions. This complicates efforts to situate interpretations of angelic ontology solely

14 That surrounding cultures made similar identifications is acknowledged but set aside to narrow this response.

15 Cf. later 1QS/4Q264 XI, 8.

16 Potential agency is sometimes implied through accompanying choral or military language. On the Greek chorus and its function as a “collective character,” see Albert Weiner, “The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus,” *Theatre Journal* 32.2 (1980): 205–12.

17 E. Theodore Mullins, Jr. “Host, Host of Heaven,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* III (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 302–04. Cat Quine has recently disputed interpretations of the heavenly host as a military force, “The Host of Heaven and the Divine Army: A Reassessment,” *JBL* 138.4 (2019): 741–55.

18 E.g., 1 En. 15:4a, 7b: “You were holy ones and spirits, living forever ... The spirits of heaven, in heaven is their dwelling” (also 6a, 10a; cf. Jub. 2:2; 1QH^{xix}.10–13). As several passages among the Dead Sea Scrolls attest, scribes sometimes used a shortened form of “gods” (Heb. אלים) for angels as lesser beings of the divine council (e.g., 1QM I, 10; cf. Exod. 15:11).

in priestly analogues and cautions against dismissing the possibility that Jesus's reply may have reflected or evoked an astral conception of angelic existence.

Coincidentally or not, such astral language includes no affirmations of angelic marriage or sexuality. This is precisely the point. Several narratives do depict angels with a semblance of individuality, agency, and mission—animated, in contrast to the above. Of these, only some evoke priestly functional imagery. But the extensive range of angelic depictions as heavenly ones, stars, holy ones, host, mighty ones, or the various terms by which some make up the divine council, in rather staid, celestial formulations, is large and spans the pre and postexilic literature. With no mention of feminine-gendered angels, marriage between angels, or sanctioned models of angelic sexual agency, there was significant space for imagining heavenly, immortal existence with God—devoid of marital or sexual activity—once Jewish writers began contemplating resurrection and its eschatological hope. No doubt, Platonic philosophy influenced the opposition between spirit and flesh that fueled celibacy and the restraint of sexual passion among many Christians and non-Christians by the first century and beyond. But the foundations for the notion that there is no sexual activity in heaven had already been set, descriptions of angelic existence with God, devoid of marriage and sex.

As for resurrected humans, Giles references a conclusion of William Loader when she asserts that “the idea of an eternally celibate state was virtually unknown to Jews at the time of Christ.”¹⁹ Furthermore, although she acknowledges, but only in a footnote, that “several biblical and extra-biblical texts do expect resurrected humans to possess a shining physical appearance like that of the angels (e.g., Dan 12:3; Matt 13:40–43; 4 Macc 17:5–6; Wis 3:7–8; 1 En 104:1–6; 2 Bar 51:1–11),” she then adds:²⁰

this glorified state is not said to entail a new asexual ontology. A rare contrast is the Jewish Platonist Philo, who opined that the deceased patriarchs have already become “equal to angels” since in his view they have shed their bodies to become permanently incorporeal and thus also by implication permanently celibate (*Sacr.* 2.5–6).²¹

The late Second Temple period was, however, a theologically dynamic era. While Loader and Giles may be correct in asserting that exilic and postexilic textual trajectories generally supported an emerging belief in a sexually fertile afterlife, it is important to note that no single, coherent Jewish view of the afterlife prevailed between 200 BCE and 70 CE. Simultaneously, some texts reveal speculations

19 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” 1.65; see William Loader, “Sexuality and Eschatology: In Search of a Celibate Utopia in Pseudepigraphic Literature,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 24.1 (2014): 50.

20 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” II.82, n. 30.

21 Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” II.82, n. 30.

about angelic transfigurations of the most righteous.²² Therefore, Philo's perspective above demonstrates that, within Jewish thought at the time, one could identify a connection between celibacy, a celestial notion of angels, and one's vision of life after death. Centuries earlier, the Book of Watchers solidified the concept of heavenly angelic celibacy where God links eternal angelic existence in his presence with celibacy: "But you originally existed as spirits, living forever ... therefore I did not make women among you" (1 En. 15:6–7).²³ Later, Revelation likened the redeemed 144,000 who stand before the divine throne to angels in their eternal praise of God (Rev 7:9–17; 14:1–3) and, in line with 1 Enoch 15:3–10, describes them as virgins (Rev 14:4).²⁴ When considered alongside broader evidence of astral conceptions of angelic existence, such sources indicate that, among Jews by Jesus's day, there was still no consensus that marital relationships would persist, even in a transformed state, in the eternal age to come.

Angels, Resurrection, and Sexual Purity before God

A second complication, which Giles does not address, concerns the prohibition of sexual impurity in God's presence. There is little dispute that angels and priests are often analogous in biblical and extrabiblical Jewish literature of the period. While the inherited nature of the priesthood incentivized marriage, it simultaneously demanded both moral and ritual sexual purity. Yet, this analogy introduces a notable tension once conceptions of the afterlife and resurrection begin to appear. Sexual activity, even within marriage, generates impurity, which cannot coexist

22 On the unsettled nature of Jewish views of the afterlife by the early first century, see C. D. Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism, 200 BCE–CE 200* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Jan Sigvartsen, *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature*, Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies, 29 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019); *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature*; and *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Pseudepigrapha*, Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies, 30 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019). On angelomorphism, see Kevin Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); and Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

23 Giles addresses this passage in a footnote, but views it as inconsequential because 1) it does not address resurrected humans, and 2) 1 En. 10:17 anticipates human marriage in a post-judgment world.

24 The author of Revelation is ambiguous about the location of God's dwelling in relation to the visions of the 144,000. Beginning in 4:1, the text locates God's temple and throne room "in heaven." This heavenly setting likely remains intact during the initial mention of the 144,000 in 7:1–17. However, in 14:1, the text describes them as "standing on Mount Zion," where they sing before the throne, which is presumably still situated in the heavenly temple (14:7). This hint of interplay between a heavenly temple and an earthly Mount Zion or Jerusalem introduces a degree of spatial ambiguity within Revelation. A similar, though more pronounced, tension between celestial and terrestrial realms is evident in the journeys of Enoch in the Book of Watchers (1 En. 6–36). See Daniel Olson, "'Those Who Have Not Defiled Themselves with Women': Revelation 14:4 and the Book of Enoch," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59.3 (1997): 492–510.

with God—residue that is both defiling and contagious. However, God will dwell among his people.

According to Torah legislation, priests were subject to specific sexual purity regulations that permitted them to marry, procreate, and serve in the temple so long as they maintained ritual purity. Given such practices in the present age, it is understandable that many in antiquity presumed that priests—and by extension, others—would continue in similar relationships in the age to come. Giles is right to highlight scriptural promises of marital fruitfulness into the future. Later, numerous texts from the Hasmonean-Herodian period attest to the prevalence of this belief. Her analysis of *4QPseudo-Ezekiel*'s reinterpretation of Ezekiel's own interpretations of the visions of the Dry Bones (Ezek 37:1–14) and Two Sticks (37:15–28) illustrates one way in which developing forms of resurrection theology could integrate earlier promises of national restoration and family continuity.

Although some texts presume marriage and procreation in the resurrection, Giles either overlooks or sidesteps the unresolved issue of sexual impurity in God's presence. Her innovative claim, that Luke 20:34–36 (and parr.) constitutes a condemnation of intermarriage, reflects the increased theological emphasis on endogamous marriage and procreation from the exile period forward. However, while Giles appears to present the Bible as uniformly opposing intermarriage, the stories of Ruth, Esther, Joseph, and Moses can be understood in part as presenting counternarratives, suggesting that not all intermarriages were viewed as transgressive.²⁵ Such stories may represent a view that intermarriage was not inherently illicit unless it led to idolatry or moral impurity, the graver concern in debates over exogamy.

Although sex was categorically “good” within the Torah, at least where the views of disputing parties converged, it nonetheless resulted in ritual impurity.²⁶ This impurity required specific purification rites, including washing and a temporary period of exclusion between emission and renewed access to others or the divine presence (Lev 15:16–18; Deut 23:10–11). Leviticus 21 outlines additional restrictions for priests, especially the high priest, whose proximity to the divine

25 Giles writes: “Indeed, as God’s angel-like messengers, the priests were to be models of holiness and purity. This required a personal fidelity to God’s law, including his statutes regarding the institution of marriage. But like their forebears in Malachi’s day, the Sadducean priests did not adhere to God’s marital laws and so failed to live out their holy calling,” Giles, “Resurrection and the Future of Marriage,” 11.83.

26 E.g., Gen 13:15–16; 15:1–5; 16:1–2; Exod 23:26; Deut 7:13; 28:4; 30:9. That God declares all creation “good” in the Priestly source, which includes sex, see Liane Feldman, *The Consuming Fire: The Complete Priestly Source, From Creation to the Promised Land*, Hebrew Edition (Oakland: University of California Press, 2024), 24–28, 30; cf. also the Song of Songs and the Book of Ruth.

presence necessitated heightened restrictions on both marital and sexual activity.²⁷ Such texts raise a critical theological question: if sexual impurity remained operative for priests in the present age, how might one reconcile ongoing marital relations with the full presence of God in the eschaton?

During the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, ritual purity observance became increasingly widespread across Jewish society.²⁸ Such concerns remained highly relevant into the early first century, a time when beliefs about resurrection and the coming reign of God were not fully settled. Among those influenced by texts such as Jubilees, marital intercourse on the Sabbath became explicitly prohibited.²⁹ The Temple Scroll, moreover, extends the sanctity of the temple precinct to encompass all of Jerusalem, with significant implications for purity. According to this view, a nocturnal emission or the onset of menstruation required temporary departure from the city until the prescribed time of purification had elapsed, thereby effectively prohibiting marital intercourse within Jerusalem's sacred boundaries.³⁰

However, since the Temple Scroll emerged from a group that had largely withdrawn from Jerusalem, its prescriptions likely did not reflect the lived reality of the city's inhabitants—practical challenges implementing such a policy notwithstanding. Notably, this same community produced a range of texts that seem to envision marriage and even procreation as integral components of the eschatological future.³¹ Yet no extant text offers a clear resolution to the tension these writers generated between their increasingly stringent sexual purity regulations and the expectation of marital abundance as a marker of covenantal faithfulness.³² The first-century accounts of celibacy among the Essenes may suggest one way certain groups attempted to navigate this tension. Given that some Dead Sea Scrolls depict worship as occurring together with angels, it seems plausible that a subset of the *Yahad* at Qumran perceived themselves as already participating in the

27 Feinstein argues that “sexual intercourse has a contagious effect” in the Hebrew Bible which “seems generally to be confined to the female partner. Through sex, the female is effectively ‘marked’ by the male in an invisible but very real way.” This lingering “essence” may not pollute the sanctioned marriage partner but “is negative and can be described as polluting” beyond the wife; Eve Levavi Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 91. Although she thinks only female partners seem to acquire this polluting “essence,” this imagery may convey how male Israelite society thought about the mechanisms which spread sexual impurity.

28 E.g., 4Q414; 4Q274; 4Q272 1 II, 3–7a; 11QT19 XLV, 11–12; XLVIII, 14–17; see William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 77–78; Yonatan Adler, *The Origins of Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022); Andrea Berlin, *The Middle Maccabees: Archaeology, History, and the Rise of the Hasmonean Kingdom* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021).

29 Jub. 2:25–27; 50:8; see also CD XI, 5; 4Q271 5 I, 1–2.

30 11Q19 XLV, 6–12; cf. CD XII, 1.

31 CD VII, 6; XIX, 12; 4Q471 1–10 III, 1–2a, 10–11; 11Q14 1 II, 11, 14b//4Q285 1 7, 9; 4Q423 3 1–5; 11Q19 LIX, 12.

32 At least by those anticipating an eschatological new age.

eschatological age. If so, celibacy may have functioned as one lifestyle adaptation aimed at facilitating perpetual or near-perpetual access to the divine presence.

The Hebrew Bible never explicitly addresses the sexual purity of angels.³³ However, this begins to shift in the Hellenistic period, which coincides with the era's increasing emphasis on purity restrictions and observance. 4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice states that angels "sanctify themselves perpetually" to remove the impurity incurred through interactions with "those of a depraved path."³⁴ Jubilees asserts that God circumcised his angels, perhaps to mark them with a covenantal sign of purity, thereby aligning them with the descendants of Jacob.³⁵ Although generally portrayed as male, biblical texts never depict angels married or producing progeny, apart from the rebellious angels in the Watchers tradition and Genesis 6. Instead, a defining feature that emerges in the Hebrew tradition is that angels are male-gendered heavenly beings who refuse to engage their potential sexual agency. This restraint serves to preserve both ritual and moral purity, a prerequisite for their continued immortal existence within the divine presence. If, as Lukan 20:34–36 and its parallels suggest, righteous humanity in the age to come are to be "like angels" in heaven, and if this statement was made in conjunction with the claim that those "in the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage," then it is plausible that Jesus's response implied an affirmation of angelic celibacy rather than a condemnation of intermarriage to some in his early first-century context. What, then, was Jesus's intended meaning?

Concerns about purity in the eschatological future were undoubtedly present in early Roman Galilee and Judea. Several scholars now interpret Jesus's healings and exorcisms not merely as isolated miracles, but as symbolic acts of purification—restorative gestures aimed at reintegrating those whom the law had excluded from God's presence, thereby preparing them for entry into his eternal kingdom. Just as prophetic acts in the Hebrew Bible were often meant to foreshadow broader events among God's people, Jesus's healings of a leper, a paralytic, and even raising a dead person may be seen as symbolically overcoming purity-based exclusions, such as those prescribed in Leviticus 21:16–23. Importantly, these acts did not abrogate the law but rather anticipated its eschatological fulfillment.³⁶

While the precise mechanism by which purity laws related to marriage and

33 Hellenistic era scribes clearly interpreted Gen 6:1–4 as a violation of divinely set boundaries that paralleled condemnations of intermarriage.

34 4Q400 1 I, 15–16.

35 Jub. 15:25–27.

36 E.g., Luke 5:12–26; 7:11–17. See Christopher Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 34; Jodi Magness, "'They Shall See the Glory of the Lord' (Isa. 35.2): Eschatological Perfection and Purity at Qumran and in Jesus's Movement," *JSHJ* 14 (2026): 102.

sexuality might be overcome in the eschatological age remains uncertain, it is clear that sexual activity, even sanctioned marital sex, consistently resulted in impurity and was therefore incompatible with God's presence. This was a shared assumption across the major forms of late Second Temple Judaism in Jesus's day.³⁷ Although speculative, it is plausible that Jesus's statement regarding the resurrected, being like angels who do not marry, reflects a response to this very tension: how could the realities of sexual impurity be reconciled with eternal existence in God's presence? Significantly, Luke's version of this saying—the focus of Giles's analysis—replaces the phrase “in heaven” (as found in Matthew and Mark) with “in that age,” a formulation that better accommodates a vision of a postresurrection existence on a renewed earth rather than in a heavenly realm.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, Giles's interpretation of Jesus's response to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36 provides an intriguing perspective, contributing significantly to the scholarly conversation about the nature of marriage in the resurrection and the age to come. By situating Jesus's statement within the context of late Second Temple Judaism and critiquing the traditional Christian interpretation of eternal celibacy, Giles prompts a reevaluation of the eschatological roles of marriage and sexual activity in the afterlife. Her innovative argument that Jesus's condemnation in this passage targets illicit, intermarital unions, informed by Malachi 1–3, rather than a general rejection of postmortem marriage, offers a substantive alternative to established readings. Future analyses must contend with her interpretation of Luke 20:34–36 and its parallels, particularly her reading of the cultural conflicts over marriage constraints and observance during the late Second Temple period.

Nevertheless, as this rejoinder suggests, there remain issues that demand further attention, particularly the implications of astral-celestial conceptions of angelic existence and the role of sexual purity in the divine presence. The tension between ritual purity laws and the expectations of marital continuity in the afterlife remains an area in need of deeper exploration. While I am not theologically committed to defending the traditional view, I am not entirely persuaded by her thesis. However, her contribution complicates the task for those who will continue to assert that Jesus's statement implies eternal celibacy. Ultimately, this dialogue underscores there is room for continued scholarly engagement with these themes, as they have profound implications for both historical theology and contemporary Christian thought on the nature of human existence in the resurrection.

37 In Jubilees, Eden is God's residence, the holy of holies (8:19). Its author depicts Adam and Eve's first marital intercourse before entering the garden (3:6) and resuming after their expulsion (3:34), insisting no marital sex occurred while in Eden. Cf. 11Q19 XLV, 7–12; 1Q28a II, 4–9a.