* QUESTIONS FROM READERS

Jesus told the Sadducees that resurrected ones “neither marry nor are given in marriage.” ([Luke 20:34-36](jwpub://b/NWTR/42:20:34-42:20:36)) Was he talking about the earthly resurrection?

The question is an important one, especially for those who have lost a beloved mate. Such ones may yearn to be reunited in marriage with their resurrected spouse in the new world. One widower said: “My wife and I did not choose to end our marriage. It was our heartfelt desire to remain united in worship as husband and wife forever. These feelings have not changed for me.” Is there sound reason for hoping that resurrected ones will be able to marry? Put simply, the answer is that we cannot say.

For years, our publications have said that Jesus’ words about the resurrection and getting married likely refer to the earthly resurrection and that those resurrected to life in the new world will evidently not marry.a ([Matt. 22:29, 30;](jwpub://b/NWTR/40:22:29-40:22:30) [Mark 12:24, 25;](jwpub://b/NWTR/41:12:24-41:12:25) [Luke 20:34-36](jwpub://b/NWTR/42:20:34-42:20:36)) While we cannot be dogmatic, is it possible that Jesus’ words refer to the *heavenly* resurrection? Let us examine what Jesus said.

Consider the setting. **(Read** [**Luke 20:27-33**](jwpub://b/NWTR/42:20:27-42:20:33)**.)** The Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, tried to entrap Jesus with a question about the resurrection and brother-in-law marriage.b Jesus responded: “The children of this system of things marry and are given in marriage, but those who have been counted worthy of gaining that system of things and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. In fact, neither can they die anymore, for they are like the angels, and they are God’s children by being children of the resurrection.”​—[Luke 20:34-36](jwpub://b/NWTR/42:20:34-42:20:36).

Why have our publications said that Jesus was probably talking about the earthly resurrection? That conclusion is primarily based on two lines of reasoning. First, it is reasoned that the Sadducees likely had in mind an earthly resurrection and that Jesus would have answered them accordingly. Second, Jesus ended his reply by referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob​—faithful patriarchs who are in line to be resurrected to life on earth.​—[Luke 20:37, 38](jwpub://b/NWTR/42:20:37-42:20:38).

However, it seems possible that Jesus had in mind the heavenly resurrection. On what basis might we reach that conclusion? Let us consider two key phrases.

*“Those who have been counted worthy of gaining . . . the resurrection from the dead.”* Faithful anointed ones are “counted worthy of the Kingdom of God.” ([2 Thess. 1:5,](jwpub://b/NWTR/53:1:5-53:1:5)[11](jwpub://b/NWTR/53:1:11-53:1:11)) They have been declared righteous for life on the basis of the ransom; thus, they do not die as condemned sinners. ([Rom. 5:1,](jwpub://b/NWTR/45:5:1-45:5:1) [18;](jwpub://b/NWTR/45:5:18-45:5:18) [8:1](jwpub://b/NWTR/45:8:1-45:8:1)) Such ones are called “happy and holy” and are deemed worthy of a resurrection to heaven. ([Rev. 20:5, 6](jwpub://b/NWTR/66:20:5-66:20:6)) In contrast, those who are resurrected to life on earth will include “the unrighteous.” ([Acts 24:15](jwpub://b/NWTR/44:24:15-44:24:15)) Can it be said of them that they are “counted worthy” of a resurrection?

*“Neither can they die anymore.”* Jesus did not say: “They *will not* die anymore.” Rather, he said: “Neither *can* they die anymore.” Other translations render that phrase “they are not subject to death any longer” and “death has no more power over them.” Anointed ones who finish their earthly course in faithfulness are raised to heaven and given immortality​—endless, indestructible life. ([1 Cor. 15:53, 54](jwpub://b/NWTR/46:15:53-46:15:54)) Death no longer has any power over those who receive a heavenly resurrection.c

In view of the foregoing, what might we conclude? It is possible that Jesus’ words about marrying and the resurrection apply to the heavenly resurrection. If so, then his words would tell us several things about those raised to heavenly life: They do not marry, they cannot die, and they are in some respects like angels​—spirit creatures who inhabit the spirit realm. Such a conclusion, however, raises several questions.

First, why would Jesus refer to the heavenly resurrection when answering the Sadducees, who probably had in mind an earthly resurrection? Jesus did not always answer his opposers in accord with what they were thinking. For example, to Jews who demanded a sign from him, he said: “Tear down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Jesus likely knew that they were thinking about the temple building, “but he was talking about the temple of his body.” ([John 2:18-21](jwpub://b/NWTR/43:2:18-43:2:21)) Perhaps Jesus felt no need to answer the insincere Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection or in the existence of angels. ([Prov. 23:9;](jwpub://b/NWTR/20:23:9-20:23:9) [Matt. 7:6;](jwpub://b/NWTR/40:7:6-40:7:6) [Acts 23:8](jwpub://b/NWTR/44:23:8-44:23:8)) Instead, he may have wanted to reveal truths about the heavenly resurrection for the benefit of his sincere disciples, who would one day be in line for receiving such a resurrection.

Second, why would Jesus end his discussion with a reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who will be resurrected to life on earth? **(Read** [**Matthew 22:31, 32**](jwpub://b/NWTR/40:22:31-40:22:32)**.)** Note that Jesus prefaced his comment about those patriarchs with the words “regarding the resurrection of the dead.” That transitional phrase may allow for a shift in focus. Then, drawing from the writings of Moses, which the Sadducees claimed to accept, Jesus used the words of Jehovah to Moses at the burning bush to give added proof that the resurrection​—an earthly one—​is a sure purpose of God.​—[Ex. 3:1-6](jwpub://b/NWTR/2:3:1-2:3:6).

Third, if Jesus’ words about the resurrection and getting married apply to the heavenly resurrection, does this mean that those who come back in the earthly resurrection will be able to marry? God’s Word does not give a direct answer to that specific question. If Jesus was, in fact, talking about the heavenly resurrection, then his words do not shed any light on whether resurrected ones on earth will be able to marry in the new world.

Meanwhile, we know that God’s Word definitely says that death dissolves the marriage tie. Hence, a widower or a widow need not feel guilty if he or she decides to remarry. That is a personal decision, and such ones should not be criticized for seeking the warm companionship of a marriage mate.​—[Rom. 7:2, 3;](jwpub://b/NWTR/45:7:2-45:7:3) [1 Cor. 7:39](jwpub://b/NWTR/46:7:39-46:7:39).

Understandably, we may have many questions about life in the new world. Rather than needlessly speculating on the answers to those questions, we will just have to wait and see. But of this we can be sure: Obedient humans will be happy, for Jehovah will satisfy all their needs and desires in the best possible way.​—[Ps. 145:16](jwpub://b/NWTR/19:145:16-19:145:16).

See [*The Watchtower,* June 1, 1987, pages 30-31](jwpub://p/E:1987409/).

In Bible times, brother-in-law, or levirate, marriage was a custom whereby a man would marry his deceased brother’s sonless widow in order to produce offspring to carry on his brother’s family line.​—[Gen. 38:8;](jwpub://b/NWTR/1:38:8-1:38:8) [Deut. 25:5, 6](jwpub://b/NWTR/5:25:5-5:25:6).

Those who come back in the earthly resurrection will have the prospect of receiving everlasting life, not immortality. To learn more about the difference between immortality and everlasting life, see [*The Watchtower,* April 1, 1984, pages 30-31](jwpub://p/E:1984250/).