

**“The Meaning of Porneia in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9,”** David Janzen, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 80 (2000): 66-80.

Janzen argues that we can find a plausible explanation for the divorce exception clauses that Matthew uses by investigating common practices of divorce in Israel and its cultural neighbors. He suggests that Matthew’s use of the term *porneia* (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) is best understood as a reference to the notion of divorce without just cause; an idea presented throughout the ancient Near East and first-century Judaism. Just cause includes actions on the part of the woman that constitutes the man’s right to divorce without repayment of the dowry. Matthew excludes the possibility of divorce without just cause, and limits just cause to *porneia*, sexual intercourse during betrothal or marriage with one other than the wife’s husband. Jesus did indeed authorize divorce, but only divorce with just cause. Just cause is strictly limited to adultery (Gk. *moicheia*) or intercourse during the betrothal period (Gk. *porneia*).

Much of the debate surrounding these passages centers on Matthew’s usage of the word *porneia* instead of the technical term for adultery: *moicheia*. The thrust of this article is to demonstrate that Matthew uses *porneia* instead of *moicheia* because he wishes to indicate that it is not simply sex during marriage that constitutes a permissible reason for a man to divorce, but also sex during betrothal. Janzen believes that Matthew is aiming at a narrow interpretation of ‘*erwat dabar* (“some indecency,” Deut. 24:1), one that encompasses only intercourse on the part of the woman with a man other than her fiancé or husband.

Janzen makes a case for his position by consulting Jewish and Ancient Near East history. However, this writer does not find extensive arguments based on extra biblical history especially convincing. But for those who are intrigued with the exception clauses in Matthew, this is worthwhile reading.