



EQUIPPING FOR LIFE Studies

JESUS, the Bridegroom – the CHURCH, his Bride

REV 19:7b

“For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.”

Throughout Scripture, God likens his relationship to His people as a marriage. He sees our straying from Him, our placing of idols (whether actual other ‘gods’ or idols in the heart such as our own desires above His) as adultery. For example:

“How I have been grieved by their **adulterous** hearts, which have turned away from me.”
(Ezekiel 6:9b)

You **adulterous** people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?

(James 4:4)

- See the book of Hosea to see this fully.

The preparations, ritual and ceremony associated with traditional Jewish weddings, much of which has been passed down into modern times, are said to have been set out by God Himself and written down in the Torah, or book of the Law.

Prior to this, a man ‘took’ a wife quite literally. Once chosen, she was taken back to his home, where the marriage was consummated. They were then officially man and wife! The Torah set out rules and ceremony for this that made the ‘taking of a wife’ a covenant or binding contract between husband, wife *and* their fathers.

The fathers of both the groom and the bride were actively involved in the search for a suitable partner for their respective children. They were looking for people of integrity and purity and of course, would act in the appropriate way in the relationship.

Upon the selection of a suitable match, a **betrothal** was initiated. This was a binding contract that could only be broken by the issuing of a divorce and under very specific rules, ie adultery. (As Joseph intended for Mary – **Matt 1:18,19**) The groom prepared a ‘Ketubah’, or contract, which included a “Bride Price”. This price was set, taking into consideration the expense of raising a daughter (and therefore the more pure and skilled, the more was given), as well as being an expression of the groom’s love.



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On delivery of the contract, the groom would offer a cup of wine, and wait for his beloved's **acceptance**. The wine represented a blood covenant, (common throughout the Middle East as a binding contract between two people – see **Gen 15**). On acceptance of the contract, the bride would drink the wine, declaring her agreement to marry. The groom would then give gifts to his bride-to-be as a show of his love, and to woo her love.

He would then leave to prepare a room for his betrothed, usually as a marital bed chamber, and more often than not, as an add-on to his father's house. It was customary to announce....
"I am going to prepare a place for you, I will return when it is ready."

The groom then began preparations on his wedding chamber, and all work done required his father's approval. He was not allowed to bring the bride back to the chamber until his father had sanctioned the building and the timing. Indeed, if someone were to ask him when the date for the approaching wedding was, he would reply
"Only my father knows."

Meanwhile, the bride would be preparing herself for her groom's imminent appearing. She would go through cleansing, beautification rituals and would remain veiled in public as a mark of her betrothal. The bride did not know when her groom would come, and his appearing could be at any time of the day. As a result, it was customary for her to keep an oil lamp and veil, among other things, next to her bed.

As the days drew on, bridesmaids (usually family members) would also be nearby with lamps at the ready.

When the groom and his friends approached the house, they would give a shout and blow the shofar (trumpet made from a ram's horn), to alert the bride of their arrival. The entire wedding party returned to the groom's father's house and the bride was taken into the wedding chamber, where the marriage was consummated. Feasting and celebration lasted 7 days.

When we look at the wedding celebration as set out in the Torah, we can see a very direct association between the taking of a bride, and God's betrothal to the church. Firstly, our Heavenly **Father** chooses us for His son. We see God selecting a people to be united to His son. We, the bride, have been chosen.

"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has **chosen**? It is God who justifies."
(Romans 8:33)

"In him we were also **chosen**, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,"
(Ephesians 1:11)



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“Therefore, as God's **chosen** people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

(Colossians 3:12)

“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has **chosen** you,”

(1Thessalonians 1:4)

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but **chosen** by God and precious to him”

(1Peter 2:4)

“But you are a **chosen** people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

(1Peter 2:9)

The next step was the setting out of the contract (or covenant) and the bride price. For us in the church, the redeeming price was paid with the most expensive of commodities in the universe, Christ's own blood. Jesus died that we might be paid for in full. The price we deserved for our sin, was death. As Romans **6:23** says,

“For the **wages** of **sin** is death,”

However, Christ paid for the church with his blood. This is symbolic not only of the blood covenant so commonly made in biblical times, but also is a display of our bridegroom's love for his bride. Remember Jesus' own words in **John 15:13**

“**Greater love** has no one than this, that he lay down his life..”

So, we are chosen by God, Christ has paid the price and for the betrothal to be complete, then there is but one thing for us to do. Accept. Drink of the cup. For the sinful man, it is for him or her to accept the offer of betrothal Christ has lain before every one of us. The offer is the same for all men, but the betrothal is only complete upon its acceptance. Some say Christ died for everyone's sin, and that is true! But the price paid is only attributed to the individual upon their acceptance and the drinking of the wine.

Of course communion, instituted by Christ prior to his death, is an allegory of the acceptance of the betrothal Jesus offers. It is, when taken in sincerity, a resounding yes to the offer of marriage the Lamb of God gives. Upon this acceptance, Christ gives gifts to his church, the first of which is a continuation of **Romans 6:23**.



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“For the **wages** of **sin** is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Of course this, the most precious and important of the gifts the bridegroom gives us, is not the only gift we receive upon acceptance. Gifts of the Spirit, given to empower our new way of living, are given to the believer. **(See 1Corinthians chapter 12 & 14)** They are for the individual, for the church and as an expression of Christ’s love. It is part of his wooing his bride.

The next step in the marriage betrothal required the groom to leave his bride and prepare a place for his wife-to-be. God says throughout Scripture that he will never leave us, nor forsake us **(see Deut. 31:6-8)**, however Christ told his disciples:

"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come."

(John 13:33)

But Christ’s betrothed, as God promised, are not left alone:

"I will not **leave** you as orphans."

(John 14:18)

"But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

(John 14:26)

Christ meanwhile, quotes the groom’s promise in the betrothal when he says:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. **I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me** that you also may be where I am".

(John 14:2,3)

In the mean time, before the groom returns, the church prepares itself for Christ’s return with joy and anticipation. (See John the Baptist’s role as the attendant of the bridegroom, **John 3:28, 29**) Having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb (**1Peter 1:19**) the church purifies herself by obeying the truth (**1Peter 1:22**) and readies herself for Christ’s appearance. Christ himself warns his followers to be ready in the parable of the ten virgins. First he tells his disciples to beware, because:

" you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

(Matthew 24:42)



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And he goes on to explain that the day of his return will be like that of a wedding day...

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

(Matthew 25:1-13)

Jesus is warning us that just like the betrothed brides of his day needed to be ready for the groom's return at any hour, so too must we the church. And like the groom, who did not know the date of his own wedding, as this was set by his father, so too, Jesus did not know the date of his return to his bride, as we also see from the book of Matthew.

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, **but only the Father.**"

(Matthew 24:36)

What we do know about the day of our Lord's return is this. That it will come with a loud cry and the sound of the shofar, as was customary for the arrival of the groom at the home of the bride.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God:"

(1Thessalonians 4:16)

And so it will be on that day that Christ will return to take his bride to the place that he has prepared in his Father's house. Revelation describes it like this:



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“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, “These are the true words of God.” **(Revelation 19:7-9)**

So clearly there is a parallel between the ceremony and betrothal associated with marriage, and the marriage of the church and Christ. But what does the bible say we can learn about our marriages from this relationship. The most profound biblical reference to this comes from the book of Ephesians. About wives, the Scripture is quite brief.

“Wives submit to your husbands, as to Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as Christ is head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”

(Ephesians 5:22)

As in the perfect relationship between Christ and the church, which should submit its will to Christ (both as individuals and corporately), so too the Christian wife should submit her will to the common good of her family, as discerned by her husband. As Christ calls His church to “follow me’ **(Matt.4:19; 9:9)** so too the wife should follow the leading of her husband. Of course, as Jesus told many of His disciples, there is a cost. Such obedience may lead to a lack of permanent dwelling **(Matt. 8:20)**, moving away from family **(Matt 8:21, 22)**, it may also lead to the giving away of your possessions for the common good, **(Matt 19:16-22)**. However, despite these perceived negatives, Scripture is clear that obedience both to Christ and to husbands is expected of the wife. Of course, where the will of the husband clearly contravenes Scripture, obedience to the word of God (and therefore to Christ) must take precedence.

This does not mean however, that a wife should sit meekly by; silently accepting all that is decided by her husband. Just as the church is called to speak its heart to God, so too the wife should make her desires known to her husband, so that they might be taken into consideration in the final decision. As Paul Says:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, **present your requests to God.**” **(Philippians 4:6)**



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So, as we are expected to pray to God, making known our deepest thoughts and desires, so too the wife should reveal her heart's desires to her husband. Speak to your husband – spend time with him planning the future, find that quiet time. Just as the busyness of life should never get in the way of time spent with God, so too it is important for the wife to make time to talk with her husband. Unlike the relationship with Christ however, remember, men do not know what you will ask before you say it. Don't assume they know what you want unless you spell it out clearly – we are simply not that clever! Subtle hints do not work.

Another secret (man to woman), comes from the persistent woman, (**Matt 15:21-28**), who came to Jesus with her requests, was granted that request after discussing her daughter's illness and petitioning Christ with her cause. Such requests, given logically and without excess emotion to a man, also will bring such a response in most cases. However, nagging does not! About this, Jesus said,

“And when you pray, do not keep babbling on like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” **(Matt. 6:7)**

Remember also that the woman with the issue of blood was given what she asked for (**Matt 9:20**), not because she kept on at Jesus, (indeed not because she said anything to him at all), but because she followed him faithfully. In the same way, the Christian wife should follow her husband, let her needs be known, and expect in faith, that which she desires in her marriage. Peter says:

“Wives.....be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, that they will be won over *without* words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.” **(1Peter 3:1,2)**

Unfortunately, much preaching and study has been done, emphasising the need for submission in the wife. However, when the whole of Scripture is taken into account, the responsibility level placed on the husband is far greater. If we continue reading from **Ephesians 5:25-33**, we see that the husband has a much larger set of directives. First he is told to love his wife as Christ does the church. This means giving up his very life for her. In essence this means making every decision with her best interests in mind (this of course might not mean she gets what she wants, but what is best – just as we might desire something that may ultimately be destructive in our Christian walk and Christ will not grant it).

This mindset also means that the husband should pursue his wife's interests with such vigour that he would give up his life for her – unto death! In this way, the wife's submission will actually bring



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about her ultimate desires and needs. She, like the church, through this handing over of her will, will find herself fulfilled, cared for and leading a life of purpose.

The husband is also called to treat his wife as his own body, nurturing her, caring for her, cleansing her, exercising her and leading her. Anything that will hurt her should hurt the husband. Indeed, in a very real way, the expectation of submission God has placed on the husband is far greater than that of the wife. In short, the submission of the wife in a Christian home pales in comparison to the responsibility placed upon the man. The man's submission under Christ is greater; his will set aside completely as he first follows God, then cares for his wife & family, and himself last. This is the plan God has placed in His people's marriages and His church.

How much easier it would be for the wife to fulfil her submission to her husband, if all husbands were taught and practiced the total submission of their marriages under Christ!