

1. A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN!

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Who doesn't love going to a wedding? Preparations can go on for months. Every detail is planned and prepared for in minutest detail --- who will be in the bridal party, who will perform the ceremony, who will be invited, which venue for the reception and what menu, which flowers, which photographer, etc.? The big day is often preceded by lots of stress but usually ends up with great celebration and joy!

I have known mothers of the bride to spend more time picking and choosing their own dresses than the bride does for her gown! It's a bit different for blokes ... the suit we wore 10 years ago will usually do! On the big day we all seem to scrub up pretty well.

Here comes the Bride! Yes, but in *The Marriage Made in Heaven* it's really, "Here comes the Groom!", for it is the Bride who waits for his **glorious appearing (Titus 2: 15)**! Christ's glory is our glory, for **when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory (Col. 3: 4)**.

WEDDINGS ARE A PICTURE OF *THE* ULTIMATE MARRIAGE BANQUET

The Bible tells the story of God's meticulous preparations to bring the cosmos to the grandest wedding of all time. It's called **the wedding of the Lamb** and it's the marriage made in heaven (**Rev. 19: 7 NIV**).

It's the story of how Almighty God is going **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ**, and how the saints who belong to him will reign with him forever in a perfect union over the household of God (**Eph. 1: 10**).

It's the story of "rags to riches" for every 'saved Cinderella', who will be joined to the Prince --- here described under the metaphor of **the Lamb** --- because, by his sacrificial death, the Lord Jesus has inherited all His Father's kingdom. The Lamb has won the whole estate (**Rev. 5: 9-10**) and the Bride of Christ has married true Royalty!

It's the story of true love for the beloved Son of God laid down his life to win the heart of his Bride --- the church --- which he redeemed with his own precious blood at Calvary.

It's the story of good news for all are invited (**Rev. 19: 5**). You are invited. I am invited. Nobody needs to be left out no matter how sad and sullied our past has been. But we must accept the invitation. We must prepare. The condition of participating is repentance and loyal commitment to the Gospel of the Son of God.

This then, is the story of *The Marriage Made in Heaven!* However, before we get to the wedding celebrations, there is some necessary background to consider.

THE CONTEXT OF THE HALLELUJAHS OF REVELATION CHAPTER 19.

Before the marriage of Christ and his Church, **Revelation chapter 19** starts with a shout of triumph and joy; **After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God ...”**

The word “**hallelujah**” is a Hebrew word that has become a universal word of praise in all languages --- but it actually appears in our Bibles on only four occasions. They are all in this very chapter where we read about the wedding of the Lamb and his Bride!

“Hallelujah” literally means “Praise” (the Hebrew word *hallal*) and “Jah” (the shortened name of God, *Yehovah*). True, it does occur in a translated form in other parts of the Bible for example, as the first phrase in **Psalms 106, 111, 112, 113, 117, 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150.** where we read, *Praise God*. But it’s only here in this chapter of **Revelation 19** that it is transliterated and thus retained in English as in Greek in it’s original Hebrew form ... **Ἄ λ λ η λ ο υ ἰ ᾶ** (*hallēlouia*).

So, the context of the “hallelujahs” is to celebrate the just judgments of God in the world;

After this [i.e. after God has destroyed Babylon the Great Harlot and avenged the blood of His servants in the previous chapter] **I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”**

And again they shouted: “Hallelujah”! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever (Rev. 19: 1-3).

Before **the marriage supper of the Lamb**, there is going to be the destruction of a false religious system which has persecuted God’s true people. God is praised because He has at last intervened in just judgment on the Great Harlot who has persecuted the Bride of Christ. God is vindicating His people through Babylon’s destruction ... **Hallelujah! All praise to the Almighty Yehovah!**

This false religious system is going to exercise great control over the peoples of the earth, who are wedded to her in an unholy union of economic wealth and politico-religious tyranny against the truth of God’s Gospel. In contrast to the redeemed of the Lord who come to the marriage supper of the Lamb dressed in **fine linen, bright and clean** representing her **righteous acts (19: 8)**, the great Prostitute has bedecked herself with **excessive luxuries** consisting of **gold, silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen, purple and silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine**

flour and wheat, cattle and sheep; horses and carriages, and bodies and souls of men (Rev.18: 3,11-13).

She boasted that, “I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn” (Rev. 18: 7). But God will bring this antichrist system down in the space of a day.

“LET US REJOICE AND EXULT”

The great multitude of the heavenly host in Revelation 19: 6-8 let out their roar of praise; “Hallelujah! For the LORD God Almighty reigns. 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” (v. 7)

With the final defeat of the Satanic religio-political Harlot, all opposition to the LORD God is obliterated and God’s Kingdom can finally begin. There is only one other place in the whole of the New Testament where these two verbs rejoice and be glad (ἄγαλλῆι ὤμεθα from *agalliaō* and χαίρωμεν from *chairō*) occur together. It’s when Jesus promised in the sermon on the mount, “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven ...” (Matt. 5: 12). As William Barclay comments,

It is as if the multitude of the redeemed sent up their shout of praise because the promise of Christ to the persecuted ones had come abundantly true. (¹)
We can bank on the promises and the prayers of our dear Lord Jesus!

THE ALMIGHTY, THE PANTOKRATOR

The Book of the Revelation has another unique feature. Nine out of the ten times the NT calls God **the Almighty** [παντοκράτωρ, *pantokratōr*] occur in this book. (²) Here is great encouragement to the people of God. Our Father is the Almighty God who holds all things and all events and all destinies in His Sovereign Hand.

When John wrote the Apocalypse, Imperial Rome was fiercely persecuting the Christian church and the prospects for believers were grim indeed. But it never occurred to John and the faithful witnesses of Christ that God had lost His grip of the situation. They knew that the last word was always with the Sovereign God, the Almighty. His Son is Lord Messiah, the Lamb who has conquered, and his Bride will be vindicated precisely because the LORD God is *pantokratōr*.

This is why the LORD God sends out an urgent warning call to all who want to participate in **the Banquet** with His Son in the kingdom; **Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes** (Rev. 18: 4).

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John Vol. 2: The Daily Study Bible*, St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 4th Impression, 1965, p222

² Once it occurs in 2 Cor. 6: 18 which is an OT quotation, and the nine occurrences in the book of Revelation are in 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 17:7, 14; 19: 6, 15; 21:22.

The day must come when the true church which has been persecuted by the harlot, must be universally honoured. She has worn with her Lord the crown of thorns, but will now wear the crown of glory. She has been with him in the fight for righteousness and the Gospel witness. Now she will share his cosmic coronation of glory. She has suffered martyrdoms unto death, and will now share endless life in his spectacular kingdom.

The day of betrothal --- what we call the engagement --- has ended. The Church, prepared by loyalty through suffering, has prepared herself for her cosmic glory. God Almighty, our heavenly Father, at the last brings together in “holy matrimony” the Son and his glorious bride, the church.

FALSE TEACHINGS ABOUT **THE** MARRIAGE BANQUET

It's such a shame that we have to clear up a few common misconceptions about **the wedding banquet of the Lamb**. We will touch upon the first misconception here, and save the second till our next article.

False teaching number one:- The Wedding will take place for seven years up in heaven.

You know, it's been years, in fact, even decades, since I heard a sermon on **the marriage supper of the Lamb**. I thank God I grew up in a wonderful evangelical church that was not afraid to talk about the end times, and we did hear mention of **the** wedding banquet.

We thrilled to hear about the Second Coming of Christ with the mighty angels of God. We thrilled in the hope of the trumpet blast to raise all the dead saints unto eternal life. We were invited to think about how amazing it would be if we were that generation still alive for the catching up (the rapture of the church) to meet the Lord in the air. Then, we were taught, the Bride of Christ would be whisked away up to heaven to enjoy a marvelous wedding banquet full of feasting and joy unlike anything ever known on earth. That was great news.

We were told the Lord would hand out rewards to his faithful ones for service well done on earth at the marriage supper of the Lamb. And certainly there would be a special crown for any who had died a martyr's death.

But there was a dark side to the story. While the redeemed are celebrating the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven, everybody who has been left behind on the earth --- after “the secret rapture” of the church --- would endure the most terrible suffering of all time for the next seven years.

In heaven, the great throng of the saints will be rejoicing in supreme bliss, singing hymns of praise and shouting hallelujahs, but underneath, on this sin-cursed planet earth, the rest of humanity will be suffering through **The Great Tribulation** because they did not take the Gospel invitation seriously.

Plagues, judgments, environmental pollution, wars, ungodliness of all kinds of disasters will be the sign that God's wrath is being unleashed on earth. But in love, God was going to use this time of international disaster to continue to call the peoples of the nations to turn from their wicked ways and be saved. In particular, for those dwelling on earth, this will be a time of huge trouble especially for Israel.

But never mind, sad as that dreadful picture is, we, the Bride of Christ, would be attending the Wedding Banquet, **the marriage Supper of the Lamb!** So, we must get ready and prepare for any moment the heavenly call for Christ's Bride to come up yonder might be heard.

With my increasing years I must confess that, I now have great difficulty imagining the church up there in the heavenlies rejoicing in splendour with our blessed Lord Jesus, but all the while knowing that people down on earth --- presumably some of my own family, friends and acquaintances --- will be experiencing the severest suffering the world has ever known.

Although I have certainly not read every commentator and preacher on the subject, by far and away the majority of those I have read want us to believe the Lamb's wedding will take place away from the earth, away up there in heaven.

But, just because John the apostle saw the vision of this wedding feast in heaven, doesn't mean it's fulfillment is going to be "up there". Although the entire vision of the Revelation takes place while John is in a trance looking into heaven, all the events predicted really take place upon this earth. (³)

The same holds true for the wedding of the Lamb and the bride. Indeed, we see that the heavenly city itself comes down to earth in the metaphor of **a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Rev. 21:1-2)**. The wedding takes place on this earth!

The NT knows nothing of a secret catching up and away of the church into heaven for seven earth-years, before returning to earth after the Great Trouble. There are not two Second Comings! No, **the marriage supper of the Lamb** occurs **at** the "Second Coming".

The Expositor's Bible Commentary categorically states; **The marriage-day of Christ and his church is the day of his second advent. This is the more intimate and tender aspect of the divine βασιλεία (i.e. kingdom).** (⁴) The wedding banquet will not, cannot begin until the **parousia**, until the second advent of Christ!

The false escapist narrative that the marriage supper of the Lamb takes place away from earth may be easily dispensed with by remembering that the terms **"the kingdom**

³ Although your Bible reads that John **was in the Spirit** when he heard the instruction to write the book, it should be translated **in spirit** which is the expression used for a trance (Rev. 1: 10). Even when John is called to **"Come up here"** he does so **in spirit** --- that is, in an ecstatic trance-like state (Rev. 4: 1-2). Again, your English translations do not do justice to the anarthrous Greek expression, ἐν πνεύματι; *en pneumati*. There is no definite article before "spirit".

⁴ The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Revised Edition, Tremper Longman III & Davide E. Garland, General Editors, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2006, Vol. 13, p464 (My bold emphasis.)

of God” and **“the marriage banquet”** are synonymous. In fact, sometimes these terms appear together in the same verses;

Our Lord himself said, **“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son”** (Matt. 22: 1). The same parable, as told by Luke, is prefaced by the outburst of a guest who was eating a meal with Jesus and his friends, **“Blessed is the man who shall eat at the feast in the kingdom of God”** (Lk. 14: 15)!

So, to enter the kingdom of God is similarly described as going to a wedding banquet for the king’s son. The kingdom is the feast! And the kingdom of Messiah is the Millennial reign of Christ and the saints on this regenerated earth [e.g. Dan. 7: 27]. The wedding supper lasts an entire millennium. Some banquet!

As he shared the Last Supper with his disciples, and with the shadow of the cross hanging right over his head, it was the vision of the Messianic Banquet in the Kingdom of God which encouraged Jesus greatly in his darkest hour ... he promised them he would eat and drink new wine with his followers in the kingdom of God (Matt. 26: 29).

This is all very Jewish, for when the rabbis talked about the coming kingdom of God they called it *the Banquet* or, *Messiah’s Banquet*. **The wedding imagery, including the wedding supper, was for Jews a familiar image of the kingdom of God. Jesus used wedding and banquet imagery in his parables of the kingdom. (⁵)** There can be no doubt that in Jesus’ mind **the wedding banquet for the king’s son** was parlance for the Messianic kingdom of God on earth.

The marriage Supper of the Lamb will be on this regenerated earth. **Here in the Revelation the wedding is the beginning of the earthly kingdom of God ... (⁶)** Read that again! The marriage of the Lamb and the Church is the inauguration of the earthly kingdom of God!

And here’s the confirmation. John’s vision of the wedding banquet only takes place after the Lamb’s enemies have been routed. His enemies, who of course are the enemies and persecutors of His church, must be first destroyed and silenced. Babylon must fall before the feasting can begin! Babylon’s “woe” comes first (Rev. 18:10,16,19).

All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled ... **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels ... (2 Thess. 1: 5-8).**

Let us be clear; **The Marriage Made in Heaven** will be consummated right here on this renewed earth at the Second Advent of Christ when the kingdom comes!

⁵ The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Revised Edition, Tremper Longman III & Davide E. Garland, General Editors, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2006, Vol. 13, p755 (My bold emphasis.)

⁶ *Op. Cit.* , p 756 (My bold emphasis.)

