

## **2. A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN!**

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The image of the relationship between God and His people as a marriage is founded in the OT. Repeatedly did the prophets think of Israel as the chosen bride of Yehovah; **“I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion ...”** (Hosea 2: 19-20. Other examples are Is. 54:5; Jer. 3: 14; Ez. 16).

This marriage metaphor runs all the way through the NT too: Jesus’ parables liken the kingdom of God to a marriage feast a king threw for his son, to a guest without a wedding garment and there is even mention of a bridal chamber. Then there are the guests of the bridegroom, the ten virgins waiting for the wedding banquet, and the Church is likened to a pure virgin espoused to Christ (**Matt. 22: 2, 10-11; 25: 1; Mk. 2: 19, Jn. 3: 29; 2 Cor. 11: 2; Eph. 5: 21-33**).

How significant then, that as the last pages of the Bible were being written, the subject turns to **the marriage supper of the Lamb, the Wedding Banquet**. Without this final grand scene the whole story of redemption is incomplete. What’s a true love story without the honeymoon and the consummation?

**Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude ... shouting: “Hallelujah! For the LORD our God, the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready ... And he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb’”** (Rev. 19: 6-9).

When He sees all creation restored in a perfect harmony of love, righteousness and beautiful peace which He has promised and planned for, oh how his father’s heart will swell with pride and joy when he introduces His Son to the church, the bride. I think there will be more satisfaction in His Fatherly heart than when He first looked over His original creation and announced, **“It is very good!”**

In our previous article we cleared up a major misunderstanding as to when and where the wedding banquet takes place. The popular idea that **the wedding supper of the Lamb** takes place away from this earth --- away up there in heaven for the seven years during **the Great Tribulation** --- is a serious departure from the Biblical scheme. Now we examine a second misconception about *The Marriage Made in Heaven*.

**False teaching number two:- Christ’s Bride is only New Testament Christians.**

Ultra-Dispensational teaching would have us believe that the saints from the Old Testament are not part of the Bride of Christ. “Replacement Theology” draws a sharp

distinction between Israel who is called God's wife, and the NT church which is called Christ's bride --- as though the bride and the wife are two different women!

David Yonggi Cho is typical of this school. Yonggi Cho was the senior pastor of the world's largest megachurch in Seoul, Korea, for more than a quarter of a century. In his book *Revelation: Visions of our Ultimate Victory in Christ* this pastor of more than 50 years writes that the OT faithful will be at the wedding feast, but will only be there in the capacity as "friends of the Bridegroom". ( <sup>1</sup> )

Yonggi Cho writes that Abraham, the father of the house of Israel, was called the friend of God, and that John the Baptist summed up the position of all the OT people of God when he said, "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete" (John 3: 29). The Old Testament saints, therefore, are not the bride, but friends of the bridegroom. ( <sup>2</sup> )

What? So, Abraham and all the faithful from the OT age will only be onlookers at the wedding banquet? Faithful Jews from the first covenant can only stand by when they see the NT believers standing next to Jesus Christ as the objects of his special love in the kingdom of God! Frankly, I find this theology distasteful and delusional, for it makes all those who were commended for their faith before the day of Christ into second-class citizens (Heb. 11: 1). God forbid.

Under the OT Law an engaged woman was already considered to be the man's wife --- even though no sexual consummation occurred until the official wedding proceedings. In Deuteronomy 22: 24 the rape of an engaged woman was considered the rape of another man's wife. And in Jewish custom, to break an engagement required a divorce.

Remember when Joseph thought Mary had been unfaithful? He considered divorcing her quietly, that is, privately, for he was both a just man and a compassionate man. Matthew calls Joseph Mary's husband though she was still only engaged to be married and no sexual intimacy had yet occurred (Matt. 1: 19).

Most of our English Bibles translate the word  $\Gamma \upsilon \nu \eta$  (*gynē*) as "bride" in Revelation 19: 7; the wedding of the Lamb has come and his wife/woman has made herself ready. To be fair, this is one possible translation of *gynē* for, as we have just noted, in Jewish tradition a betrothed woman was already considered as the man's wife before the wedding ceremony.

*Gynē* is the more general word which may be translated as "woman" or "wife", depending on local context. ( <sup>3</sup> ) Therefore, it is perfectly acceptable to translate the verse to read, the wedding of the Lamb has come and his wife/woman has made herself

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<sup>1</sup> David Yonggi Cho, *Revelation: Visions of Our Ultimate Victory in Christ*, Creation House, FL, USA, 1991, p148

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p 148

<sup>3</sup> Our modern word *gynaecology* is derived from this Greek word as it relates to womens' health issues.

ready --- as the King James & Revised Versions, for example, do. (<sup>4</sup>) However, there is a particular word for “bride” and it’s not the word used in Revelation 19: 7. (<sup>5</sup>)

The NT teaches that the OT saints and the NT believers who have all believed the promises of God in Messiah will be glorified together as one body. The faithful Jews who surround us like a great cloud of witnesses ... were all commended for their faith still have not yet received what was promised. God had planned something better for us [i.e. NT Christians] so that only together with us they [i.e. OT saints] would be made perfect (Heb. 12: 1; 11: 39-40). Old and New Testament believers look forward to the one and very same day --- still future --- for their consummate perfection.

So, those who wish to make a hard and fast distinction between OT Israel as the wife of God, and the NT Church as the bride of Christ, divide the Body of Christ who shed his precious blood to make the two (Jews and Gentile believers) one, and who has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall so there might be one body and one hope (Eph. 2: 14f; 4: 4).

At Christian wedding services the officiating minister will say, “What God has joined together, let not man separate.” Well may we say concerning The Marriage Made in Heaven that, “What God has joined together in the union of His Son and the Bride, teachers of the Bible must never separate!” Our life is now hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3: 3) and, pledged to him in holy matrimony, we are already considered in God’s purpose and plan as Christ’s wife.

How complicated some Bible teachers make things! Any reader of Scripture knows that ultimately there are only two groups of people ...

There are only those who come to God for mercy like Abel and who are saved by the blood of an acceptable sacrifice or those who rely on their own self-made righteousness like Cain.

There are only those who are inside the ark when the deluge comes or those who are outside.

There are only those on the narrow road that leads to life or those on the broad road that leads to destruction.

There are only those who build on the solid foundation of obedience to Christ or those who foolishly build on the sand and who end up washed up down the river.

There is only the wheat in God’s barn or the chaff blown away --- only those who revere the LORD and who will stand accepted before Him in the judgment or those who sit with scoffers and who will not stand in the judgment.

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<sup>4</sup> This grammatical distinction between “bride” and “wife/woman” is preserved later on in Rev. 22: 17 where the bride (*nymphē*) invites all to come and join her while there is still time before the marriage ceremony happens.

<sup>5</sup> νύμφη (*nymphē*)

There are only the sheep and the goats --- those who follow the voice of the Good Shepherd and the heedless who perish.

Just so, when we get to the very end of the story, there are only two women. There is Babylon the Great Prostitute and there is the elect Lady, the chaste virgin-wife of Christ.

We state categorically that Christ's bride consists of all the faithful of God from all generations reaching back to Adam. If anything, we who are Gentiles by natural birth are most privileged to be included as part of the bride of Jesus Christ. It is *we* who ought to be over the moon because God's grace has included us as members of the one body of His Messiah. Thank God there are no second-class believers in Christ Jesus. What mercy. What grace. What love.

Ultra-dispensationalists fail to understand the Jewish understanding which forms the background to the NT teaching about the bride of Christ: The bride is the wife! They therefore fail to see that, if the wife must only refer to Jewish believers from the OT 'dispensation' then, by their own concocted distinction, they disqualify themselves from the bride of Christ!

## ANOTHER METAPHOR

Our dispensationalist friends have not taken note of another powerful metaphor John uses to illustrate who enters the kingdom of heaven. The New Jerusalem, which itself descends to earth like a **beautifully dressed bride** is described as having twelve gatehouses with **the names of the twelve tribes of Israel** written over them, and as having **twelve foundations** with **the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb** written on them (**Rev. 21: 12, 14**).

These inscribed names denote the organic unity of God's people and the Church's universal continuity with the ancient people of God. The holy City consists of the 'saved' of both covenants as represented by the prophets and the apostles. **God's household is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone in whom the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2: 19f).**

## WHO ARE THE FOOLISH VIRGINS LEFT OUT OF THE WEDDING BANQUET?

Someone might well ask, "Well then, what about the five foolish virgins who were locked out of the wedding feast for lack of adequate oil for their lamps? Who are they if not some section of the people of God who don't at first enter the kingdom to enjoy the wedding banquet?" (**Matt. 25: 1-13**)

I listened to a sermon where the preacher stated that the lamps in the parable represent the light from the Bible, and that the foolish virgins whose lamps went out were those churches which do not teach the Bible as God's word!?

A popular evangelical understanding also, is that oil in Scripture is a symbol of the holy Spirit. Since the foolish virgins did not have an adequate supply of oil for their lamps, we are assured that any Christian who is not walking in the Spirit at the moment of Christ's return runs the risk of being left out of the wedding supper of the Lamb. Oh sure, they may not be lost eternally, but will forfeit the wedding celebrations at the time.

This second class, so this teaching goes, are really 'saved' --- they have *some* oil --- but for the moment they are excluded from full kingdom participation with the bridegroom.

Interpreting Scripture allegorically has always led to all sorts of wild speculations. It fails the Bible 101 principle --- the historical setting and context of the audience of the day. Whatever else the parable has meant to every subsequent generation, its first setting was an urgent appeal directed to the Jews of Jesus' own day.

Those Jews listening to and seeing Jesus were privileged beyond measure. They were the chosen people of the Chosen People because they were the very generation of which every previous generation of their ancestors had longed to participate in. Their Messiah was standing right there in their very midst. Their whole history was one of getting ready, being prepared for the hour of the Promised Son of God, their Messianic Lord. After all the millennia of promises deferred, God had finally delivered!

And, depending on their reaction to Jesus in this unique historical moment of crisis when the kingdom was being offered to them, they would judge themselves wise or foolish, faithful or unfaithful. Will they receive him? Will they welcome him? Will they recognize the Bridegroom who was the LORD's heir and inheritor of the Kingdom-Estate? "Lock-out" (as opposed to the current Covid-19 "lockdowns"!) was staring them in the face if they refused to follow. The moment of decision had arrived. But they were not alert to this crisis. They did not know their hour!

Consequently, **the door was shut**. And all their banging on the door pleading to be let into the wedding banquet was met with the tragic refusal, **"I don't know you"** (Matt. 25: 10-12).

So, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins does not teach that only NT believers are going to the marriage supper of the Lamb. It's primary lesson is that the unbelieving Jews who rejected Jesus the Messiah were locked out of the wedding altogether --- definitely not that they were God's wife!

## THE CHARACTER OF THE BRIDE AND GROOM

Let's not miss a most critical point. It's not called the wedding banquet **of the Lamb** for nothing. Note the character of the Bridegroom. He is **the Lamb** who was **slain** so as to **purchase men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation with your blood** (Rev. 5: 9).

There is only one in all the created universe who is worthy to step up to the One God of heaven and to take the book of redemption's unfolding **out of the right hand of Him Who sat on the throne**. It is **the Lamb who had been slain who is worthy to open the seals** of the book of salvation (Rev. 5:1f)

It is by the blood of Christ that we have **redemption, the forgiveness of our sins** (Eph. 1:7). It is by his sacrificial blood we have atonement and stand justified by the grace of God (Rom. 5: 8-9). It is only the poured out blood of Jesus the Lamb of God which could secure and seal God's covenant promises. There will be no man or woman at the wedding supper who has not entered by way of the saving power of the blood poured out for sinners at Calvary.

Yes, it's the atoning blood of the pure and innocent Lamb of God alone which guarantees any of Adam's fallen race a place at the banquet table. Is it not significant that Jesus is described as **the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world** (Rev. 13:8)? That is to say, Jesus was always in God's mind and purpose from the very beginning of time as **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (John 1: 29)!

Because Jesus laid down his life for the sheep he is supremely qualified to have the biggest wedding celebration of all time. He has proved his love for his Bride because he loved us to the death. Here is a Groom not content to just say he loves us, but who has laid down his life for us.

How amazing to know that at the heart of the universe is suffering love. **Sacrifice sits on the throne for the Lamb of God is at the Father's right hand!** Is there anything more calculated to draw out the affections of a wife for her lover than to know he will protect her and lay down his life for her and always provide for her, no matter what the cost to himself?

Does not your own heart never feel so close to your Lord as when you **"survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died"**? Does not your heart leap for joy when you know the Son of God has stopped short of nothing to bring you to himself and to his God?

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet?  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Now, note the character of the Bride. The church is described as those who have prepared themselves for the occasion; **his bride has made herself ready** (19: 7). True, she is not arrayed with the purple and silk and silver and the pearls which the Prostitute church dressed herself in. But her spotless character, her love for her Lord, her **righteous acts** are what has drawn out his adoration and joy (Rev. 19: 8) ( <sup>6</sup> ).

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<sup>6</sup> δ ι κ α ι ὄ μ α τ α, *dikaiōmata*, speaks of righteousness of character as evidenced by good and excellent works.

## THE DISTINGUISHED GUEST LIST

The Groom and the bride are perfectly matched in love and character. God will bless this holy union forever!

Remember how the Creator was at the very first wedding ceremony when He Himself **brought** the woman to the man? We can be certain the angels watched on. When God had said, “**Let us make man in our image**” the Jewish rabbis understood that the LORD was inviting the “sons of God” to spectate and to learn in wonderment.

Even the strongly pro-trinitarian **NIV Study Bible** commenting on the *us ... our* in “**Let us make man in our image**” states; **God speaks as the Creator-King, announcing his crowning work to the members of his heavenly court (see 3:22;11:7: Isa 6:8; see also 1 Ki 22: 19-23; Job 15: 8; Jer 23:18).**

So you can be sure that at that great wedding banquet day when God introduces the Bride to His Son at the Second Advent, that all the pomp and ceremony of that heavenly court will be there. There will be singing, there will be laughter, there will be joy unspeakable and full of glory, there will be feasting, there will be everlasting peace. The only tears will be tears of joy.

The angels who witnessed that first wedding ceremony between Adam & Eve had no idea they were watching a parable in action. They never guessed the plans in God’s heart for a whole redeemed humanity. They never imagined there would be **the marriage supper of the Lamb** to complete the ages!

On that day there will not only be the Groom and his Bride in the place of highest honour. But there will be a mighty host of heavenly creatures and glorious angels joining the festivities, for they are **ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1: 14)**. With us, the bride, they will shout, “**Amen, Hallelujah! For the LORD God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory (19: 4, 7)!**”

Yes, above the mighty heavenly hosts and in pride of place will be the Lamb’s wife. In that one Body, there will be righteous **Abel**, and of course the man who walked with God, **Enoch**, and the man who saved his own family and the world when the Flood came, **Noah**.

There will be **Moses** the man of God, and **Joshua** and **Samuel**, and **Ruth** and her grandson king **David**, and there will be **Daniel** and **all the holy prophets**.

There will be the mother of our Lord Messiah, **Mary**, and **Anna** the prophetess and **Simeon** the old man filled with the Spirit of God.

There will be **John the Baptist** whose head was carried to herod on a plate but now with a halo of glory wrapped around his head.

There will be **the apostles** of our Lord and all who have believed and staked their lives on their faithful testimony, and all feasting and rejoicing with great joy in the grace, mercy and peace of God our Father Who has faithfully kept His covenant promises.

But, *but, if it were possible*, there will be one man there who will be perhaps overcome with more joy and gratitude than most. For Jesus promised,

**I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ... (Matt. 8: 11).**

I imagine the patriarch **Abraham** with **Sarah** and their sons will look over this massive crowd of the redeemed at the marriage feast. I think I can see Abraham --- the only one in the OT called God's friend! --- with tears of bursting joy in his eyes; "O LORD God, ever since You made Your promise to me I looked forward to this day. I rejoiced by faith to see where, according to Your word, my descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as numberless as the grains of sand of the beach! Now my eyes behold. Now I can really see it. **Hallelujah! For the LORD God the Almighty reigns!**"

Abraham lifts his glass and all the redeemed raise their glasses to our heavenly Father, and to the Lamb, and in chorus we all toast, "To the bride and groom!" And all the angelic hosts echo, "To the bride and to the Lamb!" Heaven and earth unite in praise, "Hallelujah! For the LORD God the Almighty reigns!"

Does your heart with mine say, "Amen! Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

Yes, there will be nothing like this ***Wedding Made in Heaven!***