

Lesson # 61 The Marriage Supper of the Lamb - Revelation 19:7-10

Date: August 12, 2012

Revelation 19: 7-10 (ESV)

⁷Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." ¹⁰Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

I. The Marriage of the Lamb vv. 6b-8

In Rev. 19:2, we were reminded of the judgment of the harlot – Mystery Babylon – the false religion of the Antichrist's system. Now, the voice of this great multitude that John hears is rejoicing over another 'woman' – this time, The Bride of Christ. The 4th hallelujah rings out (v. 6b) to praise God because the marriage of the Lamb has arrived. ①

The imagery of marriage as a connection to spiritual union with God / Christ is seen often in the Bible. It is used especially in the NT to represent Christ's relationship with His church. Paul makes note of this in both **II Cor. 11:2** and **Eph. 5:22-23**.

When we think of a marriage or wedding in our own culture, we have some idea of what is involved and how the pieces of the whole fit together – courtship between two people who like each other and eventually fall in love, engagement, planning, a bridal shower, a bachelor party, the actual wedding ceremony, the wedding reception and dinner, gifts and finally consummation and life together as a couple, and if God blesses, children. However, in ancient Israel some aspects of a marriage were vastly different from what we understand today. Some modern Middle-Eastern cultures still practice these customs. The marriage was of course a big event and the greatest celebration of those ancient times. The preparation and celebrations lasted much longer and were more elaborate (as the family could afford) than what we go through today. A marriage generally consisted of 3 stages.

1.) The betrothal or engagement. The marriage was arranged by the parents who contracted the union of their children. It was a legally binding agreement and once made, only divorce could break it. Note **Matt. 1:18-19**. At this stage in Mary & Joseph's relationship, this step had been taken so they were considered married, yet they had not physically consummated the marriage...note, "before they came together". In order to separate legally, they would need a divorce nonetheless to annul the marriage.

This marriage contract was often drafted / signed before the 2 people were 13 or 14 (considered marriageable age in that culture). Since the marriage was in a sense, the union of 2 families, the parents were heavily involved during this stage. There were often years of preparation and courtship before the actual ceremony took place.

2.) The presentation. This was a time of preparation and festivities just prior to the actual ceremony, and could last a week or more depending on the financial where with all of the families. It is at this stage of a wedding in Cana that was the occasion of Jesus' first miracle as recorded in **John 2:1-11**. Since this was such an important social event and very public, to have run out of wine would be a considerable embarrassment and became an opportunity for Christ to show great compassion.
3.) The ceremony. At the end of the presentation time, the groom & his friends (the attendants) would go to the bride's house and take her and the bridesmaids to the ceremony, after which would be a festive meal, followed by consummation of the marriage.^①

The church's betrothal took place before the foundation of the world when the Father promised the Son a redeemed people and wrote their names in the Book of Life of the Lamb.^② According to John MacArthur, the presentation began at the Rapture and **John 14:23** is related to that idea of the Bridegroom bringing His bride to the ceremony location, the Father's house. The 7 year Tribulation period will be the presentation period, and at the end of that 7 years, as we now see in Revelation 19, the ceremony comes and the marriage of the Lamb takes place, the final aspect of which is a great supper.^③ Those rejoicing and shouting in this heavenly scene in vv. 6-8 are overjoyed and glorify God because His redemptive purposes are fulfilled. He has accomplished what He promised and the Son has His bride.

Having presented this outline of an ancient marriage, it would not be prudent to go on without looking at something that rises to the surface of our thinking regarding this parallel of a marriage in human terms and to how it relates to this marriage of the Lamb in at least one indispensable element. Who is the bride of Christ? You may think you know the answer to that question already, but bear with me.

II. Who is the Bride of Christ?

The fact is that once you pose this question, the actual answer is not as cut and dried as you might expect. For me, this question came up because of the timing implied in Rev. 19 – just prior to Christ’s return to earth to set up His kingdom, and notice the wording in v. 7, “the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready...” (ESV) or in the NKJV (‘wife’). So here it is, my dilemma – if the marriage has come, and the Bride is in heaven, and Christ has not yet returned to earth and there are more people to be saved during the 1,000 year Millennium, and many on earth are saved and untranslated as yet, then what is the relationship of the saved on earth during the Tribulation and the as yet unborn elect during the Millennial Kingdom to come to this marriage? Are they the bride too?

Also, if we understand Daniel’s prophecy in **Dan. 12:2** to mean that OT (Jewish) saints don’t rise from the dead until the end of the Tribulation (as some people understand this passage), then what about the saved during the OT – are they also the bride? Or is the honour of being called the bride reserved for the church alone - from Acts 2 to the Rapture? Remember, this is not a question of ‘are they saved or not?’ or how they were saved, but rather it is an attempt to understand how saints from all ages fit into this scene in Revelation 19. Is it possible that the Bride of Christ is specifically the Church and the OT saints, Tribulation saints and Millennium saints are the invited guests to the marriage supper? I believe this to be the case, and I hope to show from Scripture the viability of this theory. ③

i.) Bridal Imagery in the OT

a. Spiritual adultery

It is common for most believers who have spent any time in church to be familiar with the concept of the relationship between God and Israel being explained as a marital relationship with Israel as God’s betrothed or His wife. Sometimes it is referred to by inference in passages where Israel is said to have committed adultery or played the harlot, with God clearly being cast in the role of cuckold or the husband who has been betrayed by this spiritual adultery. At least one OT book, Hosea, has this concept as its underlying theme.

In fact, one of the chief reasons for the edict of God regarding adultery by one of the marriage partners in a human marriage is that the human marriage is supposed to reflect or be a shadow of the marriage bond between God and His chosen people.

The book of Hosea is meant to provide this picture for us of a faithful husband who takes “a bride of whoredom” (ESV), “Harlotry” (NKJV) – cf. **Hosea 1:2a**. This is to be a direct picture of the relationship God has with His people (**v. 2b**), the Land being synonymous with Israel here.

Throughout the book, the idolatrous actions of Israel and the righteousness of God in chastising and disciplining Israel for her indiscretions are prevalent themes as God portrays this human turmoil of Hosea, married to a woman who regularly commits adultery with other men, yet he remains faithful and loving towards her, finally purchasing her from a slave market and remarrying her after she has rejected him and been caught in slavery. See **Hosea 3:1-5**. This passage shows interestingly, in v. 5 the time frame for the reconnection of God with His wife, Israel, and it is definitely tied to the coming Millennial Kingdom, which is the next step in the text of Rev. 19:7-9, which we have been examining. Yet, here it is “the marriage of the Lamb”. **Hosea 3:4** is a prophecy of the time we are now in, and Israel’s lack of a place of real worship (no Temple) and her broken relationship with God are definite parallels to what Hosea is describing. We know this is not only as a result of OT transgressions but chiefly because they have rejected and murdered their Messiah.

Look at **Hosea 2:10-13**. This depicts prophetically God’s punishment of His adulterous wife, and this punishment has gone on now for centuries, but then, from **vv. 14-23**, the promise of remarriage comes up. Note especially v. 16,19,20 & 23. This is referring to the restoration of the marriage as well as a revitalization of the Land – Millennial Kingdom again.

Notice just a smattering of verses in the rest of Hosea which depict the desolation caused by Israel’s adultery – **4:1-3,7,10,15; 5:7; 6:6; 7:4; 9:1**. The book of Hosea is an important one to show the grief that God (the husband) has as a result of His wife’s (Israel’s) unfaithfulness, but also to show how His response to the sin of Israel elicits punishment, followed by promises of restoration and grace, because even though Israel is under discipline, God still loves her. ④

Although Hosea is well known for this theme, other OT passages also depict this idea of spiritual adultery, which presumes a marriage relationship must exist first. For example – **Isa. 57:3-8; Jer. 3:6-10, 14, 20; 23:9-10; Ezek. 6:9**. We do not have the time to pursue in depth, but Ezek. 16 & 23 are entire chapters which show God as a faithful husband and Israel (or Jerusalem specifically) as a faithless, adulterous bride – cf. Ezek. 16:8,14-15,30-43 & 23:36-49.

The record of much of the OT depiction of the marriage of God to Israel – the covenant between them, is marred by Israel’s wayward lusting after other gods yet in the passages we have looked at, along with other prophetic passages which don’t necessarily mention any marriage covenants, God promises to restore the relationship in a glorious way, and once He does, it will never be severed again.

b. Other Bridal Verses in the OT

In the book of Isaiah, the image of God and His bride is found in a number of verses that do not fall into the category of unfaithfulness. Note **Isa. 49:15-18; 54:5-8; 61:10-11 & 25:6-9**, which may be picturing the marriage supper which will take place in the Millennium. Many people see the Song of Solomon as a

portrayal of human lovemaking as compared to Christ & His bride as well, but we will not take the time to look at that. The beauty of the bride, the strength and beauty of the husband and the intimacy of the love within the marriage bond is shown in flowing and beautiful poetry.

Aside from narrative accounts of human marriages in the OT, these passages we have looked at here from the basis of understanding the relationship between God & His people as a marriage of sorts – a spiritual, intimate union. But it remains to be seen if these passages are connecting the wife of God – Israel – to the marriage of the Lamb, or are these 2 separate things?

c. A Bride for Isaac Genesis 24

Genesis 24 is an interesting chapter. The flow of thought and the progression of Isaac's life seems normal enough, and chapter 24 is a chronological continuation of his growing into manhood. However, there may be a shadowy connection here of something in type that relates to our topic on the Bride of Christ.

In Gen. 22, we see Isaac portrayed as a type of Christ – being offered up as a sacrifice by his father, Abraham, and the connections between this scene and the scene at Calvary at Christ's crucifixion are absolutely astounding.

As Gen. 22 ends, Isaac is left on the mountain (in type cf. Gen. 22:19), which we know to be Jerusalem; Gen. 23 talks about the death of Sarah and Abraham's first purchase of a piece of the promised land (for her burial). Then we move on into chapter 24 and Isaac, who had been left on the mountain (typologically) is about to get a wife. But note, that in the culture of that day, the parents pick the wife and Abraham sends his servant to select a bride for Isaac. Note some of the interesting specifics; ⑤

- **vv. 2-7** – the wife must be chosen from among Abraham's people, not from the heathen Canaanites, but from his family (v. 4). In v. 7, God will send His angel ahead – ostensibly to prepare the right woman to be the bride of Isaac.
- **vv. 10-14** – God's sovereignty here is obvious as the servant's journey is made successful through his response to the servant's prayer. Note that the servant is never named – he remains anonymous (just as the nameless, faceless church is a parallel to this as she evangelizes to bring more of God's elect people into relationship with Him through union with Christ. Note the servant's prayer, especially v. 14b... "let her be the one You have appointed for your servant Isaac."). Throughout the rest of the chapter, we see how God brings the marriage of Rebekah to Isaac about – by her family's willingness to let her go to Isaac and by her willingness to go herself – cf. **24:61-67**.

This narrative, which is worthy of more serious, in-depth study, is a portrait of God the Father's servants, the church whose mission it is to search out a bride for Isaac (Jesus Christ the antitype, after his death & resurrection). The implications of the typology of Gen. 24 gives us clues as to the fact that God is

preparing the hearts of His elect so they will respond when His servants present His gospel message. It is the Father who sends the servants out and also prepares the hearts of the recipients of His gospel so that the response of the hearers will be affirmative – cf. 24:58, “I will go.”

Those being saved in the NT are depicted as sheep with Christ as their good Shepherd; as sinners in need of a Saviour; as people estranged from God and in need of a High Priest; and as we will see next, as a Bride of Christ in intimate relationship with the Bridegroom, Christ.

Let’s examine some of the NT passages to see if we can arrive at a conclusion about who the Bride of Christ is and to establish whether or not the adulterous wife of God in the OT is part of the NT Bride or not when she is restored by God.

ii.) New Testament Passages

a. II Corinthians 11:2

Here is a clear indication that Paul believes that his own evangelistic efforts at Corinth have been used of God to “betroth” them “to one husband.”, and to “present them” as a “pure virgin” to Christ. The obvious meaning of their being presented as a pure virgin to Christ is as a Bride for Christ, and that is also borne out by Paul in Eph. 5:31 -32.

He feels divine jealousy for them because he feels (vv. 3-4) that they are in danger of being led into spiritual idolatry by the wiles of Satan – and note vv. 5-15 to get the full impact of Paul’s concern that they not be deceived and drawn away from this ‘marriage’ relationship they are now in.

In v. 3, their faithfulness as this virgin bride is to be characterized by “a sincere and pure devotion to Christ”; and in Rev. 19:7b-8,14, there would appear to be an allusion to this same sentiment of purity and sincere devotion, which is represented by the Bride having been made ready and being “granted to clothe herself with fine linen, bright & pure...” – cf. Ezek. 16:9-11; Isa. 61:10 & Rev. 3:4-5.

The Bride of Christ will exhibit that purity and devotion to Christ, but that cannot be said of the OT Israel saints. Those who were devoted then were devoted to Jehovah, and to Christ only by foresight & faith, looking for the coming of the promised Messiah. Paul speaks of the general problem of Israel in Rom. 10:1-4.

In this passage in II Corinthians, written to the church at Corinth, but undoubtedly meant to be applied to the church in general (it is not only the Corinthians who are under Satanic attack or who are to remain pure and chaste), there is a uniqueness implied. Paul makes no connection here to the OT imagery of God’s bride, Israel, which he surely was aware of, but presents this as

a new category entirely – the church as the betrothed, presented to Christ as His bride.

b. Ephesians 5:22-33

This is one of the clearest passages to identify the Bride of Christ in the NT. Paul uses the example of human marriage to demonstrate Christ's relationship with His church – wives are to submit to their husbands as The church is to submit to Christ, because He is the head of the church (vv. 23-24), and husbands are to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her”. Sacrificial love is what is in view here (v. 25). In vv. 26-28, Christ is said to sanctify, wash (with the water of the Word) her so that she might be holy and without blemish. This is reminiscent of Jude 24 – to present her as a blameless...with great joy to the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord...”

Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies and this is what Christ does for His church / bride. He nourishes and cherishes her “because we are members of His body”, He will sanctify her, give Himself for her, and present her to His Father blameless.

Are we in a position yet to identify who the Bride of Christ is? Paul has told us in 2 different passages now that the bride is the church and in Ephesians 5, he has made it especially plain. However, where do we place the saints from the OT, & those saved in the gospels (which is still the OT economy)? ⑦

So far, it seems we have 2 groups who are brides of God (Israel) or Christ (the Church). From what Paul has written for us, there seems to be no direct connection between the 2 unless we accept the argument of those who preach replacement theology (ie. the church has replaced Israel permanently) so that all the blessings promised to Israel have been bestowed on the church. I do not accept that argument, so for me, this is not a solution to the problem. Therefore, we need to look at more NT passages to try to uncover more evidence to shed light on the solution to the problem.

c. Matthew 9:14-15 / JN 3:29-30

Friends of the Bridegroom

There are also NT passages which deal with the Bridegroom and in these passages, the context clearly points to Christ as the Bridegroom, as we would anticipate, since He is the Lamb. One thing these passages do help us see, however, is the idea that there is not just a bride (implied by the presence of the Bridegroom), but there are also friends, those who will be invited as guests to the wedding feast. The ‘wedding supper of the Lamb’ is mentioned in Rev. 19:9, and is actually expressed in the form of a beatitude, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” Since no bride is ever ‘invited’ to her own wedding, these invited guests are not the Bride of Christ, or the Bridegroom, but if the wedding feast takes place anytime after the Tribulation

period, these guests can only be believers. So this seems to provide a clue that the Bride is limited to a group that does not include the guests, whoever they are.

Notice first Matt. 9:14-15 (repeated in MK 2:19-20 & LK 5:34-35). This passage has a Kingdom & Messianic flavor to it. The Bridegroom is with the disciples, so fasting is not necessary – they are experiencing a time of rejoicing because they are with Him. Jesus is here identified again as the Bridegroom, but the disciples here are identified, not as the Bride, but as wedding guests. Note Jesus’ response to the Pharisees in v. 14, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them?”

Based on this response, & Jesus is referring to His 12 disciples here, who are really among the OT saints, having been saved before the New Covenant has been instituted in Christ’s blood. He is saying they are wedding guests (ESV; HCSB). (or NKJV – “friends of the Bridegroom; NASB – “attendants of the Bridegroom”; NIV – “Guests of the Bridegroom”). Never in any translation are they referred to in this passage as “the Bride”.

Another mention of the Bridegroom is found in **John 3:28-30**, where we find John the Baptist responding to a dispute between a Jew and his followers about purification or baptism. John the Baptist’s statement is informative and helpful to our inquiry – see **v. 29**. John the Baptist is calling himself “the friend of the Bridegroom”, but in this passage, we have something we did not have in the Matthew passage we just looked at. He mentions the Bridegroom, the friend of the Bridegroom and the Bride. ⑧

John’s role was unique. He was prophesied to be the forerunner of the Messiah (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6) whose main duty was to introduce the Messiah (JN 1:29) to the waiting people of Israel, and to announce the gospel of the Kingdom and command repentance and obedience to this gospel. His role was great but once it was fulfilled, he realizes he must step aside as 3:30 tells us, and allow Christ to increase in stature as he decreased. His joy was complete, but he was not the Bridegroom or the bride – he was a friend of the Bridegroom.

But does this mention of the bride in v. 29 assist us in answering our question? There are a number of ways to assess that. Keep in mind that the church at this point in time is still a mystery and a mention of the bride in John 3 related to Christ as the Bridegroom could still be referring to Israel as the bride. Does the wording, “the One who has the bride is the Bridegroom”, have to be seen as an existing body of believers which is as yet incomplete, as in the elect of Israel? Or, can we see this wording as proleptic – stating a fact as yet unrealized, but so certain to occur that it can be stated as if it is already a fact in evidence? I think the latter is correct.

John, who calls himself a friend of the Bridegroom, and the NT passages already reviewed show a distinctly separate group of people (OT people) not included as “the Bride”, but who will attend the marriage supper as guests. We have to

account for these guests found in Matt. 9, MK 2, LK 5 and Rev. 19:9 – because they are not the Bride, but are undoubtedly believers. Where do they fit in?

The Wedding Feast Parables

1.) Matt. 22:1-14 The Parable of the Wedding Feast

We have seen that, when Paul mentions Christ's Bride, he calls her the church. In this parable and the next one we'll look at in Matt. 25, there is a marriage supper going on, but the Bride is not mentioned and the action revolves around the Bridegroom and the guests – those who would not come and those who did.

This is the wedding feast of a king's son – the greatest social event of people's lives in that day. It would be a once in a lifetime honor to be invited and a chest full of memories after it ended. Yet, here, those who were invited (vv. 3,4,8) would not come. This is astounding, and their responses were; "indifference – v. 5; too busy – v. 5; outright rebellion – beating and killing the king's servants – v. 6.

This parable is an outright expose of Israel's rejection of her Messiah and His kingdom, and this wedding feast symbolizes that feast in the Millennial Kingdom. The main point of the parable is to demonstrate to the hearers (cf. 21:45 – the Chief Priests and Pharisees) their failure to recognize Christ and to desire His Kingdom. In this regard, the parable of the vineyard tenants (21:33-44) paints a similar picture with the imagery of the vineyard, and v. 45 tells us they fully comprehended the rebuke and were offended by it. 9

The parable of the wedding feast takes it a step further though, and adds the dimension of offering the guest places to those who were not originally invited. Note **22:9-10**, and the servants went out and invited all whom they found – "both good and bad". IOW, Gentiles and the Great Commission. This is referring to those who would one day make up the church. But note – they are to be invited guests too, not the bride (v. 11 a). See **Acts 28:23-28; 18:4-6**. Matt. 22:7 is possibly a prophecy of AD 70 and the razing of the temple and Jerusalem as a reflection of the King's (God's) anger at this rejection of the joy offered by Him at His Son's wedding celebration.

In v. 11, the king is at the banquet now, sees the guests and notices one who does not have on a wedding garment. The point here is not that someone could sneak into the wedding of the Lamb uninvited, but is to show what is required to enter – proper wedding apparel. Isa. 61:10-11 sheds some light on this perhaps, and there is also an element in our Rev. 19:7b-8, 14 text as well. No one enters the kingdom apart from being clothed in righteousness. Although both good and bad people are sought for the kingdom, and we know that God saves the ungodly (Rom. 4:5), they do not remain in the state that God finds them, but they are changed, declared righteous and Christ takes their sin on Himself to the cross.

Now, in Matt. 22:13, another group who are at the wedding banquet are called into service – the servants (NKJV) or attendants (ESV), who are commanded to capture the interloper, bind him hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness. This adds a dimension of eternal punishment to the parable attached to the transgression of attempting to enter the Kingdom (wedding feast) clothed in one's own righteousness. The result of such an attempt is disaster. These attendants are likely the holy angels who elsewhere (MT. 13:36-42; JN 15:6; Rev. 14:14ff) are said to gather the wicked and toss them into the fire.

As I mentioned earlier, the one thing missing in this parable is the Bride. We can identify Israel, and the church here, the King and the Son who is the Bridegroom, but Israel is disinvented and the church is the guests. This is one reason we cannot draw our theology from parables. They make a certain point, but not every T is crossed or I is dotted.

2.) Matthew 25:1-13

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

This parable also mentions the Bridegroom along with ten virgins, who apparently represent the Bride, but there is no way to identify them as Israel or the church. However, the point of this parable is not to identify the bride, but to exhort us to be ready when the Bridegroom, who has been delayed in coming to gather the ten and take them to the father's house. Matt. 25:1 tells us this is a "Kingdom parable", so Jesus is drawing an illustration of what the Kingdom will be like in some regard.

The Bridegroom is delayed in coming for the bride because the preparations for the feast are incomplete, so until all is ready – food, guests, table settings, attendants, etc., He will not come for them. But they are to be ready when He does come. The 5 wise virgins are ready, and the oil for their lamps have been maintained, which is symbolic of readiness. However, the other 5 have let their oil run out or never had enough to begin with. They want to borrow some from the wise virgins but are refused, as there would not be enough then for any of them if the Bridegroom continued to be delayed.

In v. 10, while the foolish 5 go to get oil, the Bridegroom comes and takes the wise virgins to the wedding and "the door was shut". Once the feast began, and the bride was there, access to it had ended. Verses 11-12 are solemn reminders by Jesus of what is at stake regarding the Kingdom, and v. 13 stresses the point – we must be ready because He could return at any moment.

Again in this parable, a wedding is part of the setting, but the bride is really not mentioned in a way that helps us see who she is, except that she is to be prepared for the return of the Bridegroom to get her. Some see this parable as a Rapture themed parable and that is somewhat plausible but surely not conclusive. You cannot harmonize either of these 2 parables fully enough to help us with Rev. 19:7-9, and so we have to realize that not every illustration of marriage in the bible is designed to teach us about Rev. 19:7-9.

Spiritual Adultery in the NT

Well, if marriage / parabolic illustrations do not give us a full enough picture to see who the bride of Christ is, then maybe there is another angle we can approach the topic from. Adultery or some permutation of it (adulterers, adulteresses) is found a number of times in the NT, however, most instances refer to the actual sexual act of adultery, or as in Matthew 5, the lust which is considered adultery. There are a few times when it used to relate to the spiritual immorality of believers.

In Matt. 12:39; 16:4; MK 8:38 – the people are called an evil and adulterous generation. The adulterous reference brings up a connection to a marriage relationship that exists, but once again, since we are in the gospels, we are dealing with Israel and not the church.

However, there are 2 verses where spiritual adultery is mentioned that do not refer to Israel, but to the church. The first is **James 4:4**. In this passage dealing with the church, James calls them “you adulterous people!”, and in v. 5, he even mentions of God that, “He yearns jealously over the Spirit He has made to dwell in us”, so the church is in sight here.

The 2nd reference is in **Rev. 2:22** – where Christ’s letter to the church at Thyatira mentions that some in the church are tolerating “Jezebel...a prophetess” (v. 20) & in vv. 20,21 she is teaching & seducing God’s servants to commit sexual immorality and she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Then, those in v. 22 who commit adultery with her will be thrown into great tribulation unless they repent. Again, this is without question the church and adultery implies broken marriage vows over & above sexual immorality which occurs outside of a marriage relationship. ⑪

So we have two places in the NT which mention broken marriage vows and refer to the church. In Rev. 18:3 (twice) & 18:9, the term describing the idolatry is “sexual immorality”, not adultery, and those committing it are ‘the nations & kings of the earth’, not God’s people. So a distinction can be made – adultery is only possible once one is married, but sexual immorality describes sexual sin outside of marriage.

So we have seen that Israel in the OT (& in the gospels) is seen as God’s bride or wife, and her idolatry is called adultery. In the NT, the church is the only entity called the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-23; II Cor. 11:1-2) and Christ is referred to as the Bridegroom. Idolatry and sin are called adultery only when referring to the church in the NT. And then we arrive at Rev. 19:7-9 and are faced with a dilemma. Who is this bride?

I am convinced that the Bride here is the church – the elect from the church age only and it does not include Israel (except for those who are saved within the church age as Jews), or those saved during the gospels, those saved during the

Tribulation or in the Millennium. Now, let me quickly point out that all who are saved are saved by the blood of Christ – there is NO other way of salvation. But the Bride of Christ is a unique honour reserved for the church in God’s providence. Just as Israel was chosen for a unique role in redemptive history – note Paul’s words in **Rom. 9:4-6** for example – a special, parenthetical age began after Israel rejected her Messiah (thus saying ‘no’ to her invitation to the wedding feast), and God chose to focus His redemptive efforts on the church from Acts 2 until the Rapture. It is my belief that only those saved within that parenthetical time frame are legitimately “the Bride of the Lamb”.

I would also agree with John MacArthur that by the time the eternal state arrives, all the redeemed will be united to God in the same way, and “we will occupy the glories of that eternal state and that bridal adornment.”⁴ The idea of the bride and bridegroom is a Kingdom thing & probably does not extend as a unique relationship into the eternal state, and this may be why the eternal city – the New Jerusalem, descends as “a bride”, which we will look at shortly.

For the purposes of the “Bride of the Lamb” & the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (which likely last throughout the Millennium), the church is the Bride, the holy angels are the attendants, the saints of the OT and the Tribulation are the invited guests, the Father of the Bridegroom is God the Father, and the Bridegroom is Christ.

Is there a way of determining more from the structure of the marriage ceremony compared with the marriage of the Lamb that could help us? Maybe. 12

The Marriage Ritual

We have already laid out in point form earlier in this lesson how an ancient marriage differed from today’s, but let’s flesh it out the first aspect a bit more here. As a reminder, there were three main steps involved: the betrothal, the presentation and the ceremony/banquet.

The betrothal was a form of contract into which 2 sets of parents entered as they promised one another’s children to be married once they were of age. This was done when the children were very young, sometimes before they were born. It was considered legally binding and could only be broken by divorce. This was the legal condition of Joseph and Mary when she was to give birth to Jesus.

Because marriage age was then about 13 – 14, there were many years of preparation and courtship before the actual presentation and ceremony took place. Now, in the case of the church, there are not 2 sets of parents, but promises that could be considered a betrothal took place in eternity past. Notice such verses as **Titus 1:2** & **II Tim. 1:9** – the promise of the Father to the Son of a redeemed people as their names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life – the promise of the election to salvation of those who would come to faith in Christ & spend eternity with Him.

The Bridal City

Rev. 21:2

Let's jump ahead just briefly to look at one other place where a bride is mentioned in conjunction with heaven. In Rev. 21:1-2, the culmination of God's purposes for what He created has come (Rev. 20:11-15) in the form of judgment and the dissipation of the original universe. Now, a new heaven and new earth are created and in v. 2, John records, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Notice **vv. 3-4** here as well. We will examine this section in more detail later on, but for now, reflect on verse 2, "as a bride adorned for her husband." The city is described as "like a bride", but the bride / the church will occupy this city. How do we make sense of this? Here is John MacArthur's take on it;

You say, "Well is the bride the church or is the bride the city?" The answer is yes. The bride is the church that occupies the city. It becomes the bridal city. But listen carefully to what I say to you. The bride is distinctively the church, but it is more than the church. At the end of the time of the Tribulation Daniel says that the Old Testament saints are going to be resurrected. They will be gathered together with the New Testament church. During the Tribulation, Tribulation saints will be gathered together into heaven, into glory. They too will be a part of that redeemed humanity that occupies the Kingdom, that glorified humanity. During the time of the millennial Kingdom, people on earth will believe, will be born again, will come to the knowledge of God. Many of them will be translated, transformed into that glorious band of glorified saints. All of those saints collected not only from the church but resurrected bodies from the Old Testament era, resurrected Tribulation saints, redeemed Kingdom saints are all going to make up the final form of the bride and occupy that glorious bridal city, the new Jerusalem.®

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But why should the church – those saved from Acts 2 to the Rapture alone enjoy the privilege of being the Bride of the Lamb while others, saved the same way throughout the millennia of history be the guests only? Well, why did God choose Israel over all the other nations? See **Deut. 7:6-9** for the answer. He chose to.

Remember, although the church has this unique role given to her as the Bride of the Lamb, all will have unique roles in the Millennial Kingdom. Israel will rule, the apostles will sit on thrones overseeing the 12 tribes and Jews will be exalted to be the ones bringing the nations to see Christ in Jerusalem on His throne (Zech. 8:23; Isa. 45:14).

Look at the imagery prophesied in **Isa. 61:10-62:12**. That's a part of the glorious picture John sees of the New Jerusalem coming down to a new earth and all the redeemed will be folded into God's bridal people.

John MacArthur comments again, "*so Israel forfeited rights but will be guests and ultimately be included in the bridal people. Whatever distinctions are made*

*in Scripture, all believers in all ages eventually will enjoy the fullness of the celebration and the glories of eternity.”*⁶

Robert Thomas holds an alternate viewpoint, as many others probably do as well. His position is that, without separating the Elect into categorized groups based on when they are saved, we must see that ALL the Elect are God’s people and consistent theology that is dispensational about the end times but reformed regarding soteriology must say that, regardless of the time frame of the marriage ceremony of the Lamb, all of God’s Elect are involved in it somehow. It would be a neater package if it all took place after the final elect person is saved, but that does not change the fact that all the elect are the Bride of Christ. Perhaps elect who are not yet saved when this actual ceremony takes place are added to “the Bride” as they are saved or glorified. Thomas says, “*The Bride represents then, a growing body of the people of God because the New Jerusalem is also Christ’s Bride (Rev. 21:2,9-10)*”.⁷ The problem boils down to a chronology issue – timing – but timing is not an issue for an eternal God.

III. His Bride Has Made Herself Ready

vv.7-8

Verse 7 tells us that “His Bride has made herself ready”. This seems to imply a people who already exist as saved individuals. If those who will inhabit the Kingdom, and be born and saved in the Kingdom are included here, to say that they have made themselves ready before they exist seems odd. It could be a prophetic statement, but I don’t think this context bears that out. This refers to those who have lived their lives out and been glorified. The Tribulation saints could be included here, but we are not certain that they have received glorified bodies yet (cf. Rev. 6:9; 20:4 = ‘souls’). It may be that all these will not receive glorified bodies until just prior to or concurrent with the beginning of the Millennium. Those raptured and risen from their graves at the Rapture will already have glorified bodies (cf. **I Cor. 15:50-55**).

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The church in the NT is not portrayed as a faithless or divorced wife, but as a chaste virgin (II Cor. 11:2). Israel from an OT perspective can never be called that again – note **Lev. 21:13-14**. There is evidence to support the church as the Bride & we have examined much of it. To return to earth with Christ in Rev. 19:11ff presupposes resurrected bodies, and only these will have had the chance to put on the fine linen described in Rev. 19 for the return with Christ.⁸ Daniel 12:2 is ambiguous as to who rises when in the end times, but I Cor. 15:51-52 is clear that “the dead in Christ will rise first”. **I Thess. 4: 14-18** concurs.

Since this phrase, “His Bride has made herself ready”, is immediately followed by v. 8, “it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints”, we should see this as a sort of sentence construction parallel to Phil. 2:12-13 – compatibilism. The Bride has made herself ready and God has made her ready. Note **Col. 1:29**. The deeds can only be done in a righteous manner because it is God in us doing these deeds. By this time, the Bema Seat Judgment will have taken place – I Cor. 3:12-15 – and the

Bride will be flawless, blameless, and unblemished, at glorification not only declared righteous, but made righteous with all the dross burned away – cf. Jude 24-25; II Pet. 1:10.

The upshot of vv. 7-8 is that we work out our salvation, and God works in us to complete what He started – Phil.1:6. Robert Thomas puts it this way, “The Bride receives her garments from God, but she responds to the gift by her faithfulness to Him. In the immediate sense, the moral purity and activity upon which future bliss hinges are the outcome of human effort, but ultimately they are traceable to God & Christ.”^⑨

John MacArthur adds, “But now the church is clothed with a righteousness of its’ own; the glorified believers are intrinsically righteous like the holy angels. No longer will the church have only an imputed righteousness, but also an imparted holy perfection.”^⑩

The fine linen, bright and pure is said to be “the righteous deeds of the saints”, and according to Rev. 19:14, it is what Jesus armies will wear as they return with Him. This clothing has been earned by faithfulness but is a gift of God who has preserved each one of His saints and will never lose a single one!

IV. Two Suppers

v. 9

There are two suppers in this chapter. This one is the marriage supper of the Lamb, and v. 17ff describes the “Supper of God”. We want to participate in the first, but not the latter. Verse 9 is not saying that this marriage supper takes place right here in heaven, but carefully notice that it is an announcement of the blessing for those invited to this supper, being the 4th of 7 “beatitudes” found in Revelation^⑪. This supper does not take place in heaven, but on earth, and it is an event long sought after and hoped for by Israel’s prophets and faithful Israelites as well as the church. Note **Isa. 25:6-10**. Do you recall the promise made by Christ to His disciples in **Matt. 26:26-29**? “In My Father’s Kingdom.” It is in the Millennial Kingdom that this supper – this gathering of the saints of all ages - will take place, not in heaven. It is resurrected saints who participate, both OT & NT, as well as those who enter the Kingdom alive in unglorified bodies (Matt. 25:34). Some commentators believe that this marriage supper will last for the entire 1,000 years of the Millennial Kingdom.^⑫

The angel who announces this blessing ends it with, “These are the true words of God., referring most probably to the Beatitude just given in v. 9. This is said in order to ensure that John recognizes that this is certain to occur, despite the scenes of horror and destruction he has already observed, alongside the evil that had earned those judgments. This message would have been of great comfort to John, a good reminder of who was in charge.

V. Worship God

v. 10

Interestingly, vv. 9-10 here have a parallel in **Rev. 22:6-9**. A blessing is presented, it is verified by God's word, in both cases John worships the angel & is rebuked and told to worship God. John was likely overcome with the greatness of what had been shown to him in this vision of Rev. 19 and for a moment, lost track of where the message was really from. The angel was the messenger, but the message was God's. The worship of angels is strictly forbidden in Scripture: cf. Col. 2:18; Matt. 4:10, and this angel refuses to allow John to think his behavior is OK.

The angel calls himself a fellow servant of God, and angels are said to serve believers (Heb. 1:14; Rev. 22:9). They are especially linked to those who proclaim Christ as Lord & Savior, knowing that only those who follow Christ are true believers. In I Peter 1:10-12, we are told that angels long to look into the things the OT prophets were saying which ministered to the NT saints, and not even to themselves. Angels serve and protect God's people under God's authority, apparently bringing answers to prayers (cf. **Dan. 9:21ff; 10:12-14**), & can be delayed by Satan's angels. As amazing as Bible accounts of angels are, they are created beings like us and are not God or gods. We are to worship God alone, and this angel equates Jesus with God.

The "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" means that this is the true gospel. The prophets spoke of Him, His own incarnation, death and resurrection ^{①⑥} were part & parcel of the spirit of prophecy so we are to hold to the pattern of the entire Bible's revelation of who Jesus is and why He came. See **I JN 2:18-22; 4:1-6; 5:1-5; 5:10-13**.

Next lesson – Lesson # 62

Rev. 19: 11-16

The Conqueror

^① John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22, Moody, p. 201

^② IBID, p.201

^③ IBID

^④ John MacArthur, sermon entitled, "Heavenly Hallelujahs Part 2", Rev. 19:7-10; 6/12/94; GTY website

^⑤ MacArthur, sermon entitled "Heavenly Hallelujah's Part 3"; 6/19/94 – GTY website

^⑥ IBID

^⑦ Robert Thomas, in Dictionary of Premillennial Theology, Mal Couch (ed); Kregel; 1996; p. 248

^⑧ Robert Thomas, Revelation 8-22; p. 368

^⑨ IBID, p. 370

^⑩ MacArthur, Revelation 12-22, pp. 203-204

^⑪ The seven are: 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14.

^⑫ Thomas, Revelation 8-22, p. 366