

A Marriage Made in Heaven

Introduction

In a crude attempt to trap Jesus, a group of Sadducees came to Him with a trick question. A lady married seven times, having remarried after the death of each husband. In the resurrection, which man will have that wife?

- The Sadducees did not even believe in the resurrection; they were being hypocrites.
- Jesus responded with two distinct truths.

“But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage” (Luke 20:35).

1. Those counted worthy **will be** part of that kingdom and experience the **resurrection**. Paul later defined that worthiness by one’s charity, patience and faithfulness in persecution (II Thessalonians 1:3-4), then concluded: *“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”* (vs 5 – NIV).
2. **Marrying** is not part of the future existence. Life in that coming age will be vastly different. The saved will be similar to angels. No one will die (Luke 20:36). Intriguingly, Judaism already held that angels do not need food nor will marry.¹

Christ, however, did give interesting parables related to **a future wedding**, even alluding to it in John’s apocalypse!

Jesus was repeatedly challenged by Jewish leaders. In one of His replies, He said that the kingdom of heaven was like a king who held a **wedding banquet** for His son. The storyline continues:

- Many select groups spurned his wedding invitation, which led to their demise.
- Finally, those from the streets and highways were invited. They came.
- The king even supplied those guests with wedding garments. To wear them would show respect to that king and his son, and for the invitation.

Before the great event, the king came to make sure everyone was ready and actually *“worthy”* to be his guest. That wedding garment represented the goodness of the son, his perfection that each guest assumed by wearing it!

- The king’s initial grace was pastoral, priestly and friendly.
- But – then came a judicial reaction to one without a robe:

¹ Bock, Darrell L.; *Luke 9:51–24:53*, vol. B (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI; 1996), p. 1623.

“He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. ‘Then the king told the attendants, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”” (Matthew 22:12-13 - NIV).

- This may seem harsh, but he spurned the king’s request. He flouted the invitation by even showing up!
- ***This was the wedding feast for his son.*** God the Father is the king – Jesus is that Son. This depicts the amazing final phase of heaven’s redemptive gestures – a marriage.

The kingdom of God requires the guests to be clothed with Christ’s righteousness, His saving perfection. Their righteousness is as *“filthy rags”* (Isaiah 65:6). Through His grace, His Spirit, that garment is wearable.

Jesus gave a warning through another illustration: *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21). Along with wearing that robe, charity and obedience, as previously noted, are paths to kingdom worthiness.

When the *“foolish virgins”* finally arrived at the banquet hall after replenishing their oil, they cried: *“‘Lord, Lord,’ ... ‘open the door for us!’”* But he [the bridegroom] replied, *“‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you’”* (Matthew 25:11-12 – NIV).

Once again, the kingdom of God is made up of selected individuals attending a **wedding feast**. In both instances, the rejection that follows relates totally to one’s personal decisions. Here:

1. Being on time and planning ahead are imperative.
2. Having a good supply of the *“oil,”* the Holy Spirit, with its penetrating light, is required (Zechariah 4:1-14).

Even with the ancient Jewish people, God saw His relationship with them as intimate:

*“Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for **I am married unto you:** and I will ... bring you to Zion”* (Jeremiah 3:14).

He wants His children to be in His family! That divine/human relationship is a wonderful spiritual theme. God wishes us to see ourselves eternally linked to Christ. The final “home” for this “husband” and “wife” will eventually be a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

But first, there has to be **an engagement** (betrothal), then ceremonies, then the wedding, all reflected by Hebrew tradition.

Ancient Marriage Customs – a Biblical Model

The engagement or *betrothal* was different from today. It was partially ceremonial, contractual and binding. The bridegroom presented a sum of money (or an equivalent) or even services to the bride's father (like the story of Laban, receiving years of service from Jacob – Genesis 29-31).

- Betrothal was more than a promise to “marry” one's daughter. They actually became, at that time, husband and wife (Deuteronomy 20:7).
- However, they did not live together until after a later wedding ceremony and feast.

In a restoration covenant promise, God said to His people:

- “I will **betroth thee** unto me for ever; yea, I will **betroth thee** unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even **betroth thee** unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD” (Hosea 2:19-20).
- In the interval between being betrothed and the wedding, the bride makes final preparation for the wedding.

When the actual wedding ceremony begins, the bridegroom goes to the bride's home to receive his wife. He escorts her to his home in a **major procession**, where final festivities occur, anciently lasting up to a week (paralleling the Feast of Tabernacles). It was a celebration honoring their legal betrothal. They then can live together.

These events illustrate wonderful spiritual messages: Christ is represented as the bridegroom. He signed the certificate of betrothal with His blood. “I promise, you will be mine, forever, if you are faithful.” The saints, when sealed, will have completed their part. They will then be “clothed” forever in a spiritual wedding robe.

- When Christ went back to heaven to His Father's house, the interval of separation began.
- The present is the final time for the bride to prepare herself – individually and corporately (the church). She is to dress in *fine linen*, symbolizing purity and holiness.

When the bridegroom comes (Christ's Second Coming), there will follow a remarkable procession heavenward, ending at the “Father's house” for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9).^{2,3,4} (Symbolic of the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles.)

² Naden, Roy C.; *The Lamb Among the Beasts*, pp. 262-264.

³ Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 4, Editor Merrill C. Tenny, pp. 92-102.

⁴ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ancient-jewish-marriage/>

The Apocalyptic Wedding

“And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Revelation 19:6).

This Hallelujah song continues from verse 1. The multitude of voices are the vast number of saved. They sound like vast, flowing water, then cascading as thunder. It appears as though there is a crescendoing of praise. At this point, Christ reigns! His role as priest has ceased. He now rules as King. This echoes:

- *“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).*
- *“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).⁵*
- *“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory” (Matthew 25:31).*

A great transition in history is portrayed. Christ can begin His kingly rule over His ***dominion of saints***. The great harlot that corrupted the earth and persecuted God’s people has been destroyed (Revelation 19:2-3, 16:19). The pure church, pure woman (Revelation 12:1) is ready for the bridegroom.

- In the New Testament Christ is the bridegroom of the church, as He is here (II Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25, Matthew 9:14, Mark 2:19-20, Luke 5:34-35, John 3:29). He is even the bridegroom in many parables (Matthew 22:2-14, 25:1-13, Luke 14:15-24).

Adding to the drama with this vast chorus comes another refrain:

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).

The Hallelujah singing has now become a wedding song!

- Many see this as following the seventh Vial Plague⁶ (Revelation 16:17-21).

The preparedness of the bride (individually and corporately) continues to indicate that they are personally responsible for being ready.

⁵ Beckwith, Isbon T.; *The Apocalypse of John* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI; 1967), p. 725.

⁶ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 8–22 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1995), p. 365.

- Though – through Christ and His Spirit, the church is able to “*make herself ready*”! (Ephesians 5:25-27; cf. Ezekiel 16:7-14).
- She must permit that process.

Isaiah 54:5 notes, “For your Maker is your husband – the Lord Almighty is His name” (cf. Jeremiah 31:32). Paul speaks of presenting the believers “*to one husband, to Christ*” as “*a pure virgin*” (II Corinthians 11:2). In Revelation, there are numerous messages of how the saints, the remnant, are pure and holy – by remaining faithful, maintaining their testimony for Jesus, enduring hardships and obeying God’s commands.⁷

John continues: “***And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints***” (Revelation 19:8).

In this book, the wedding guests and the bride are one – the same. The “*fine linen*” noted was, in reality, expensive cloth made from fine (almost invisible) flax fibers, mainly found in the Nile Delta and the Jordan Valley. It was extremely white. It appears that it was this cloth that Jesus’ body was wrapped in (Matthew 27:59, 66; John 19:40; Luke 23:53).

- Scriptures note that multitudes of the redeemed with Christ in heaven wear fine linen (Revelation 19:14).⁸
- Again, this linen represents purity and holiness.

God provides the robes for the saints – the wedding garments: “*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels*” (Isaiah 61:10). By this:

1. He permits the bride to use His clothes to dress herself – she is then ready!
2. He presents her (church – saints) to Himself “*without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish*” (Ephesians 5:26-27).
3. Those robes also symbolize the unswerving loyalty of the saints because they washed those robes in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14).
4. It is interesting that Daniel prophesied that at the time of the end “*many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and ... refined*” (Daniel 12:10 – RSV).
5. John expands on this even more: “*fine linen [also] represents the righteous deeds of the saints*.”⁹ They have nobly served the Savior in their lives (e.g., Matthew 25:34-40).

⁷ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 673-674.

⁸ Pictorial Encyclopedia, vol. 3, pp. 937-938.

⁹ Kistemaker, Simon J.; *Revelation* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 513-515.

The Bride's Deeds – Works or a Love Response?

There is a delicate balance between faith and an obedient response.¹⁰

The “righteous deeds” were part of the bride’s (church’s) loving response to their bonding faith in/with Christ. James even notes: *“Faith without works is dead”* (2:26).

- Paul observes, however: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- Faith in God and endearing service to others (whom He also died to save) is what saves. If there are only works to satisfy a requirement, no one would be justified (Galatians 2:16, Romans 3:20). Faith is a natural response to a personal heart experience with Christ!¹¹

When those “deeds” were done by the saints, they already had a “*faith relationship*” with Christ!¹² *“Let the one who does right continue to do right”* (Revelation 22:11 – NIV). God, in turn, acts for the saints by vindicating His people (15:3-4; 16:5, 7; 19:2, 11).

Word of God – Hearing – Conviction – Belief/faith it is true – Trust – Honor God by Witnessing, Deeds for others – Vindication of saints – Redemption

It is fascinating to observe the singing of that great-multitude choir! The church, Christ’s bride, is joyous (Ephesians 5:32). She is ready for the “*wedding*,” which anciently meant that she awaits the bridegroom’s coming to take physical possession of her!

- When was the bride engaged/betrothed?
- Revelation 7 shares that with us: *“Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads”* (Revelation 7:3). That is a covenant betrothal seal.
- *“And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.” “And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him”* (Leviticus 20:26, Malachi 3:17).

That Sealing

Ancient betrothals required a contract or compact between the two parties. The sealing on the forehead by God suggests a divine-human contract, that a covenant relationship has been completed. It authenticates a bonding relationship and also suggests protection.

¹⁰ Johnson, Alan F.; *Revelation*, p. 514, from Gaebelin, Frank E. (gen. ed.); *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. II (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 49530; 1981), p. 572.

¹¹ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 647.

¹² Beale, Gregory K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – 1999), pp. 935-937, 941-942.

- This is highlighted by John's Revelation, where he equates the name of Christ and God written on the saints' foreheads as their belonging to them (14:1, 22:4).
- In II Timothy 2:19, God's "seal" and "name" identify who belongs to Him.¹³

The seal sets the church apart as His betrothed!

"Then the angel said to me, 'Write the following: Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb!' He also said to me, 'These are the true words of God'" (Revelation 19:9 – NET).

Perhaps the Hallelujah chorus is still ringing in John's ears when this angel asked him to "write."¹⁴

- What words were John to record?
- Certainly, the hymn that he has been listening to from that vast multitude, plus those words of assurance. This is similar to Revelation 11:15, providing promises of the Christian's supreme hope that victory will come.¹⁵

The above is the fourth beatitude of seven in Revelation. Who are those invited guests? The way the symbols are described suggests that they are different from the bride. However, again, "in reality, they are the same. The bride in the collective sense consists of the guests who have been invited and who have been brought in, as pictured in the parable of the marriage feast in Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 14:15-21."¹⁶

The words "*have been invited*" means that the invitation went out in the past and those "*guests*" responded. They have received the gift of salvation.

Additional thoughts:

- "*And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God*" (Luke 13:29).
- A description of the feast in Isaiah 25:6-8 is prefigured:
 - a. There will be fine food and drink.
 - b. Death will be swallowed up.
 - c. Tears will be wiped away.

The conclusion of this verse is very solemn. "*These are true sayings of God!*" This leaves no room for doubt. It reinforces, it fixes firmly, the Christian's hope.¹⁷

¹³ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

¹⁴ Brighton, Louis A; *Revelation, Concordance Commentary* (Concordance Publishing House, Saint Louis), 1999, p. 498.

¹⁵ Beckwith, *op. cit.*, pp. 727-728.

¹⁶ Brighton, *op. cit.*, p. 499.

¹⁷ Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 516.

God invites everyone to the wedding feast. But the faithful are chosen and called. It is to them the wedding garment is given.

“As a Bride” – another dimension:

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2).

In verse 1 John saw a new heaven and a new earth. In the immediate context, he then sees that Holy City, the New Jerusalem, descending. The only other place the words “New Jerusalem” are used in the Bible is:

- *“I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name” (Revelation 3:12).* This Philadelphia church narrative represents those who are sealed and how.

This verse appears to be the fulfillment of ancient prophecies:

1. Jerusalem was expected to be the capital and center of the world (Isaiah 45:14).
2. John’s description of this city was referred to in Isaiah 60:19-20.
3. Ezekiel saw this city with twelve gates (Ezekiel 48:31-35).
4. He also notes that this was where God’s throne would be located (Ezekiel 43:7).
5. Even Abraham dreamed of this place: *“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).*

This city, descending from heaven, may have been one of Christ’s “projects” when He went back to heaven (John 14:1-3).¹⁸ Why is it coming down to the new heaven and new earth? ***To be that “center,” fulfilling those prophecies, where now God’s throne will reside!***

Now come more amazing thoughts. This “city” is as a “*bride adorned for her husband.*” This is a simile. Here, it is “like a bride.” But in 21:9, it notes:

- *“And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee **the bride, the Lamb’s wife**” (Revelation 21:9).* The description of the New Jerusalem follows.
- In 19:7 and 8, the saints (**the church**) are the bride. Here, the city (**the church**) is the bride. The church is dressed in fine linen (19:8); it is here adorned with God’s glory, radiating with gold, pearls and precious stones (21:18-21).

In Scripture the name “Jerusalem” is symbolic for God’s church, His people; and the New Jerusalem represents that body of believers who are eternally saved. Here, in Revelation, it is embellished as Christ’s bride.¹⁹

¹⁸ Stefanovic, Ranko; *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI; 2002), p. 576.

¹⁹ Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 556.

When the city descends, heaven and earth are finally united.²⁰

When is the Betrothal? When is the Wedding?

What follows is based on a broad view of many Scriptural clues that are associated with the end of time. There may well be additional thoughts that can refine this progression. For now, what is noted raises urgent concerns that our preparedness to see the face of Jesus should not be delayed.

1. In Revelation 2 to 3, in a Feast of Trumpets portrayal, is imagery of Christ courting His churches to repent. He wants them to be part of His kingdom. One group, the Philadelphia church, has already taken that step. The wonderful outcome is described (3:7-13).
2. An apocalyptic end is in sight. It was, however, delayed for God's chosen, the 144,000, to be ready. This picture is developed by a seal that is placed in the foreheads of that Philadelphia church (3:10) and, later, described in 7:2-8. This appears to symbolize the betrothal or when Christ and His church becomes husband and wife. They are not yet able to live together, based upon the ancient Hebrew model.
3. Then, in a remarkable interlude of Revelation 10, Christ takes an oath with His Father that *"time would no longer be delayed"* (10:6). In 11:2 and 3, time periods do begin.
4. Those who will be witnesses for His kingdom are identified (11:1). That selection apparently is the origination of the 144,000 (a symbolic number).
5. God's chosen witnesses make their last appeal over 1260 literal days. The mission will be successful (11:5-7a).
6. The salvation work and judicial proceeding are finally completed. The Day of Atonement, when all decisions have been made, comes. A seven-sealed record of why the wicked could not be saved is finished (Revelation 4 and 5).
7. The Son of Man goes to the Father with the clouds of heaven to prepare to receive His bride (Daniel 7:13).
 - This becomes a major transition in redemptive history. ***Christ is now ready to return to earth.***
 - This is when all the promises of the everlasting covenant will come to a focal point.
8. Many records of heavenly choirs bursting out in song fill the sacred record. One is noted especially at this point in time:
 - *"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15).
 - Their songs are recorded in verses 16 and 17.

It is time to bring His bride home!
9. Christ comes to earth to escort His bride back to His home – the Second Coming.

²⁰ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 762.

- *“Behold, he cometh with clouds”* (Revelation 1:7a).
- *“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”* (Matthew 24:30-31).
- *“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory”* (Matthew 25:31).
- He returns to receive all those who accepted the “wedding invitation.”²¹

“With anthems of celestial melody, the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng, attend Him on His way. The firmament seems filled with radiant forms – ‘ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.’ No human pen can portray the scene; no mortal mind is adequate to conceive its splendor. ‘His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise. And His brightness was as the light.’ Habakkuk 3:3, 4. As the living cloud comes still nearer, every eye beholds the Prince of life. No crown of thorns now mars that sacred head; but a diadem of glory rests on His holy brow. His countenance outshines the dazzling brightness of the noonday sun. ‘And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.’ Revelation 19:16.”²²

“The King of kings descends upon the cloud, wrapped in flaming fire. The heavens are rolled together as a scroll, the earth trembles before Him, and every mountain and island is moved out of its place [Revelation 6:12-14]. ‘Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people.’ Psalm 50:3, 4.

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” Revelation 6:15-17.”²³

“To the mind of Jesus the gladness of the wedding festivities pointed forward to the rejoicing of that day when He shall bring home His bride to the Father’s house, and the redeemed with the Redeemer shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb. He says, ‘As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.’ ‘Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; ... but thou shalt be called My Delight; ... for the Lord delighteth in thee.’ ‘He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing.’ Isaiah 62:5, 4, margin; Zephaniah 3:17.”²⁴

²¹ Kistemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 516.

²² *The Great Controversy*, p. 640.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 641-642.

²⁴ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.

10. Upon their return to heaven occurs that unspeakable wonder, the “*marriage supper of the Lamb*” (Revelation 19:7). That is consistent with the ancient Hebrew marriage rites, where the wife and husband then live together from then on.

“He has invited us to the wedding feast, and has provided for every one of us the wedding garment. The robe of righteousness has been purchased at infinite cost... Let no one put off the day of preparation, lest the call be made, ‘Go forth to meet the bridegroom,’ and you be found as were the foolish virgins, with no oil in your vessels with your lamps.”²⁵

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²⁵ *The Youth Instructor*, January 30, 1896.