

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Jesus spoke about the signs of His return signs and of the end of the age. We read in Matthew 24 of a number of things:

The birthpains:

- Many coming in the name of Christ.
- Wars and rumours of wars.
- Famine, earthquakes and floods.

Then tribulation or persecution of the church:

- Christians persecuted and killed.
- Christians will be hated by all nations for the sake of the name of Christ.
- False prophets leading many astray.

Then the great tribulation.

The signs tell us that Christ is coming soon! For those who accept Christ, there is a beautiful engagement and wedding that will take place in parallel. There is a hope and a waiting. Jesus said: **John 14:2** (NKJV) In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

To fully understand what Jesus meant, we need to understand the rich symbolism in the Word of God regarding marriage between a man and a woman and how it points to the Church as the Bride of Christ.

MESSAGE

Ephesians 5:22-32 (NKJV) Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Paul, in instructing husbands and wives on the marriage relationship says. "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church".

Jesus is the Bridegroom and the church is the Bride - **Rev. 21:9**, "...Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

THE ANCIENT JEWISH WEDDING

Selection of the Bride

God selected us: Ephesians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

A Father wants the best for his son.

Genesis 24:3-4 and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; 4 but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

Abraham wanted the right bride for Isaac!

The Price of the Bride

The father of the groom would agree a price for the bride – a bit like the "labola" in African custom...

Our heavenly Father chose the highest price: **John 3:16** (NKJV) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Jesus' life would be the price for the church.

The Father and the Son paid together:

Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

THE 3 STAGES OF THE ANCIENT JEWISH WEDDING, 3 "C'S" (CONTRACT, CONSUMMATION, CELEBRATION).

Stage one: the signing of the legal document called, the "ketubbah"

Bridegroom in Hebrew is "Hatan" meaning: "One who enters a covenant" The ketubah or covenant was a legally binding document whose primary purpose was to protect the bride, even though she did not even sign it. The

father of the bride would use his wisdom to look out for the best interests of his daughter.

The contract would be negotiated and would include the "Dowry" - money to be paid to the father by the groom.

Jacob negotiated for Rachel, "Ask me ever so much bridal payment and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; but give me the girl in marriage." (Genesis 34:12)

- Our heavenly Father negotiated with Himself and paid the best price He possibly could!

Since Jewish marriages were sealed when the father of the bride and the groom signed the "ketubah", with or without the consent or knowledge of the bride, the "dating" (get to know you stage) began after they were "married".

- Mary and Joseph were betrothed, they had never had sex, even though they were 100% legally married.
- Although called betrothal, it was not equivalent to our modern engagement today, which is nothing more than "monogamous promise dating" with no legal consequences if broken.

The Bible gives examples of the bride giving consent!

Genesis 24:58 (NKJV) Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go."

We are not forced to enter the covenant relationship with Jesus – We have to choose Jesus willingly!

Stage two: "chuppah" (sexual consummation):

1. Once the ketubah was signed, the couple did not have sex until the groom fulfilled his financial obligations to the father of the bride.

- The wait may have lasted years, In Genesis 29, we read of Jacob, who had to work 7 years for Laban, before he could sleep with his wife Rachel. That night Laban tricked Jacob by giving him Leah instead of Rachel. Jacob had already made a legal contract with Laban for Rachel and was married to her for 7 years, but not permitted to have sex with her. When he was tricked, he made a second legal contract that at the end of the wedding week, he would be allowed to have sex with Rachel, but would have to work another 7 years afterwards.
- It was customary for the Groom to come when unexpected. Even the groom didn't know the time, only his father did! Jesus referred to this in the parable of the virgins: **Matthew 25:5-6** But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. 6 "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'

2. Part of the consummation ceremony was the presentation of the blood-stained virginity cloth.

- The "virginity cloth" lay under the bride when she consummated the marriage blood on the cloth would have been the bride's "proof of virginity".
- Both the groom's parents and the parents of the bride would assign several formal witnesses to the event and would wait outside or in an adjoining room while the couple consummated the marriage in the wedding bed.
- The groom would then hand the "proof of virginity cloth" cloth to the witnesses and the cloth would be witnessed and kept by the father of the bride as proof of her virginity.
- The bride could have been stoned if after consummation, there was no blood on the cloth – in other words, she was found to not be a virgin!

Stage three: the wedding feast:

Jesus performed his first miracle at such a feast.

John 2:1–2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.

- The wedding feast happened in the home of the groom or in a family member of the groom, like the parents of the groom.

THREE STAGES OF THE CHURCH'S MARRIAGE TO CHRIST (THE 3 "C's")

STAGE 1: The ketubah or legal covenant. When we became Christians by faith (being born-again), it includes confession, repentance and water baptism. This covenant or contract seals the relationship.

1 Corinthians 11:25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood (*remember the blood stained cloth*). This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

2 Corinthians 11:2 For I (Paul) am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I **betrothed [stage 1: married when born again]** you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a **pure virgin [stage 2: second coming]**.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet **sinners [spiritual harlots who have lost their virginity]**, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood **[stage 1: initial salvation]**, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Ephesians 5:25–27 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, **having**

cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, **having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.**"

STAGE 2: The consummation is the second coming when we, the bride waits to **hear the shout of Jesus** and his companions. At this time, the faithful will be found to be "pure virgins".

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with **a shout**, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

No one knows when Jesus will come!

Matthew 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Matthew 24:43-44 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

What about the blood-stained virginity cloth?

Jesus presents before the Father and the witnesses the covenant signed in His own righteous blood, having made us who were defiled and not virgins, beautiful and pure and without spot or blemish!

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV) For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NKJV) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

STAGE 3: The Wedding feast

Revelation 19:7-9 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the **marriage supper of the Lamb.**'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

- The bride has made herself ready! She has put on her beautiful white robes of righteousness!

- Not by works, but by being the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.
- She will attend a great celebration – The marriage supper of the Lamb!

CONCLUSION

Are we ready to attend the marriage supper of the lamb?

Will we be found with oil in our lamps when the shout goes out, "The Bridegroom is coming?"

Are we wearing our white robes of righteousness?

Matthew 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Matthew 24:43-44 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

I conclude with the final words on the Bible: **Revelation 22: 20** He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.