

Jehovah as Husband and Jesus as Bridegroom

The designation of God as Husband indicates His heart of love toward His people and His desire to have them match Him as His counterpart, being the same as He is in life and nature. This is a necessary prerequisite to the return of the Lord Jesus, the ending of this age, and the bringing in of the kingdom. The marriage relationship between God and His people is directly related to the kingdom, which is seen clearly in the New Testament. As Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. points out, “The vision of God as the husband of his people, with all that such a relationship entails for them...[was] formerly a more prominent theme in theological discourse and pastoral ministry than it is today” (8).¹ Neglecting and obscuring (e.g., in translation) the truth of God being the Husband perhaps has been a factor in delaying the Lord’s return and bringing in the kingdom. However, this vision is indicated or implied throughout the Bible, specifically in the creation of Adam and Eve, in Jehovah’s relationship with His people Israel in terms of their engagement, marriage, divorce in the old covenant, and in His promise of and enacting of the new covenant in the New Testament with the vision of Jesus as the Bridegroom and the church as His bride. The failure of the Old Testament people of God to live the marriage life with Jehovah indicates the need for an intrinsic dispositional transformation in His people so that they may become His bride. In order to carry this out, it was necessary for the Triune God Himself to go through a process to become a man, pass through death and resurrection, and be consummated as the life-giving Spirit to enter into His people and transform them to become the same as He is in life and nature to be a proper counterpart, or match, for Him. The fact that the Hebrew and Greek words or terms that are used in the context of marriage are also employed in the relationship of God and His people confirms the importance of this theme in the Bible.

Words Indicating the Marriage Relationship between God and His People

While terms such as *bridegroom*, *husband*, *bride*, and *wife* are not used that often in the Bible to refer to God and to His people, their occurrence warrants our attention. God is referred to as a Husband at least four times in the Bible. Jehovah is referred to as *’ish* “man” or “husband” (cf. Gen. 3:6) but never as the noun *ba’al* “husband” or “lord” in order to avoid addressing Jehovah with the same

appellative as the name of the Canaanite deity Ba’al (Hosea 2:16-17; cf. Exo. 21:3). Three times the verb *ba’al* “to be a husband” is used in referring to Jehovah (Jer. 3:14; 31:32; Isa. 54:5; cf. Deut. 21:13).² In a few places in the Old Testament, God and His people are compared to a bridegroom (*hatan*) and a bride (*kallah*) (Psa. 19:5; Isa. 62:5; Joel 2:16; Jer. 2:32), or a husband (*’ish* or *re’a*, “companion,” Jer. 3:20) and a wife (*’ishshah*, vv. 1, 20; Hosea 2:2, 7; Isa. 54:6). Also in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus and His believers are compared to or referred to as a bridegroom (νυμφίος) and a bride (νύμφη, Matt. 9:15; 25:1; John 3:29; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17), or a husband (άνήρ, “man” or “husband”) and a wife (γυνή, “woman” or “wife,” 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-33; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9; cf. Rom. 7:4).

Other words used in the marriage process are used quite frequently to refer to the relationship between God and man, such as love (*’ahab*, Deut. 7:8; Mal. 1:2), choose (*bahar*, Deut. 10:15; cf. Gen. 6:2), take a wife (*laqah*, Exo. 6:7; cf. Gen. 4:19), cling to or join (*dabaq*, Deut. 4:4; Josh. 22:5; 23:8; κολλάω, 1 Cor. 6:17; cf. Gen. 2:24), engage or betroth (*’aras*, Hosea 2:19-20; ἀρμύζομαι, 2 Cor. 11:2; cf. Deut. 20:7), know (*yada’*, Jer. 31:34; Hosea 2:20; γινώσκω, Phil. 3:10; οἶδα, Matt. 25:12; cf. Gen. 4:1) (see Sohn 5-22). This confirms the importance of the theme of God as Husband in the Bible.

God as Husband in the Creation of Humankind

Soon after God created man in His own image, He stated that it was not good for man to be alone and that He would make him a helper as his counterpart (*kenegdo*, “his opposite”). So He proceeded to bring the animals to Adam to see what he would name them. In this naming process Adam determined that none of the animals corresponded to him. This sets up a principle of marriage: that the two parties must match or correspond to each other. God then caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam, and He took a rib from his side and proceeded to build a woman. When she was brought to the man, he stated that she was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, and he called her woman (*’ishshah*) because out of man (*’ish*) she was taken. Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother (his human source) and cleaves (or joins, *dabaq*) to his wife, with the ultimate issue that the two become

one flesh (2:18-24). These actions are very illustrative, especially from the point of view of their typological significance in God's economy. Man, created in the image of God but also being alone, reflects God's desire and longing to have a counterpart that matches and corresponds to Him among His created beings. The deep sleep and the extraction of the rib point to God Himself as a man in the person of Jesus Christ dying on the cross with blood and water issuing from His pierced side (signifying the redeeming and life-imparting aspects of His death, John 19:34). The building of the rib into a woman signifies the building of the church with the resurrection life of Christ to be His corporate counterpart, the bride of Christ. The woman's being brought back to the man to be one flesh with him signifies the church being brought into a spiritual union with Christ (Eph. 5:27; Rev. 19:7; 1 Cor. 6:17).

Selection, Engagement, and the Marriage Covenant

After the creation of mankind, the fall, and God's giving up the created race, there was the selection and calling of the descendants of Abraham. This selection was a result of God's love, as Deuteronomy 4:37 states, "Because He loved your fathers, He chose their seed after them and brought you out by His presence, by His great power, from Egypt."

Jehovah also set His affection to love them and to choose their seed after them (10:15). He chose them to be a holy people to Jehovah their God for His personal treasure (7:6; 14:2; Psa. 135:4). He chose them to dwell among them in the place that He chose, where He would cause His name to dwell—Jerusalem (Deut. 12:5, 11; Zech. 1:17).³

Due to His choosing of Israel, He took (*laqah*) them to Himself out of Egypt (Exo. 6:7; Deut. 4:34). The time of the children of Israel in the wilderness was considered the time of betrothal or engagement, as Jeremiah says, "The love of your bridal days (*kelulot*), / When you followed after Me in the wilderness" (2:2).⁴ They followed after Him, and He, being their Husband (*ba'alti*), took them by their hand to bring them out of Egypt and led them to Mount Sinai to make a marriage covenant with them (31:32). Ezekiel 16 also indicates that the covenant was a marriage covenant (vv. 8, 60).

In the initially pleasant atmosphere at Mount Sinai, Jehovah related how He bore the people on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself to be His personal treasure,

or possession, from among all the peoples so that they would be a kingdom of priests living in His presence (Exo. 19:4-6).⁵ However, when the people responded according to their natural religious concept, "All that Jehovah has spoken we will do" (v. 8), knowing neither their true condition (that they could not match God in themselves) nor God's heart in giving the law, the atmosphere suddenly changed to become threatening. God then gave them the Ten Commandments, or ten words, which, in their positive function, are a revelation and testimony of God (20:1-17; 16:34; 25:21; 27:21). They can also be considered a marriage covenant between God and His people.⁶

The Ten Commandments begin with a prologue: "I am Jehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the slave house" (20:2). The prologue "makes absolutely clear that the commands which follow are integrally connected to God's act of self-revelation" (Childs 401). He is the I AM, the self-existing and ever-existing One, and the blank check, I AM ___ (whatever is needed). That He is, implying we are not, also indicates that He wants to constitute us with Himself to make us the same as He is to match Him as His counterpart.⁷ He is also the Redeemer God, the One who brought the children of Israel out of

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The commandments that follow reflect God's being: "You shall have no other gods before [or besides] Me" (v. 3), indicates that God does not share our allegiance or love to Him with any other gods. They are incompatible. As Jehovah, He is incomparable, and there is no one else, no God besides Him (Isa. 45:5-6). "In the first commandment the prohibition describes the relation of Yahweh to Israel by categorically eliminating other gods as far as Israel is concerned" (Childs 403). It is not acceptable to have Jehovah along with other gods. The children of Israel had to decide whether to choose Jehovah or other gods (Josh. 24:15; Judg. 5:8).

He also does not tolerate the making of images (Exo. 20:4). As Childs states,

God did not reveal himself in a form, but only in a voice [Deut. 4:12]...Images are prohibited because they are an incorrect response to God's manner of making himself

known which was by means of his word...God has chosen to make himself known, not in a 'static' image, but in the ambiguity of dynamic history...The issue turns on Yahweh's testimony to himself set over against man's. The prohibition of images is grounded in the self-introductory formula, 'I am Yahweh', which summarizes God's own testimony to himself...An image is a rival human witness, and therefore false. (407-409)

He is a jealous God (Exo. 20:5), like a husband is over his wife. Even Jehovah's name is Jealous (34:14), which "is indicative of the fact that this jealousy is inherent in God's nature:...a covert, but nonetheless clear case of the latent marriage metaphor" (Stienstra 227). Jealousy is not "to be seen as intolerance but exclusiveness, and it springs both from the uniqueness of God (who is not one among many) and the uniqueness of His relationship to Israel" (Cole 156). He shows lovingkindness to those who love Him (20:6).⁸

He does not want the children of Israel to take (lit., lift up) the name of Jehovah in vain. They are called by His name (lit., His name is called over them, Deut. 28:10; 2 Chron. 7:14; Jer. 14:9). They bear His name (like a wife bearing the name of her husband), they call upon His name (Gen. 4:26; cf. Ps. 79:6), and they should love the name of Jehovah (Isa. 56:6). He also put His name and causes His name to dwell in Jerusalem (Deut. 12:5, 11), and the house and the city are called by His name (1 Kings 8:43; Jer. 7:10; 25:29; Dan. 9:18).

They need to remember the Sabbath, which is a unique sign that they belong to Him. *Sabbath* comes from the Hebrew verb *shabat* meaning "to stop (oneself), to cease (from activity or doing)." It also recognizes that Jehovah is and implies that we are not. This particular sign of Jehovah's people is that they willingly cease from their doing (on at least one day of the week).

The fifth commandment deals with honoring parents (as our human source), and the last five commandments relate to humankind in general. Yet they are still related to a relationship with Jehovah; for example, adultery is not only a crime against persons but also a crime against God (Gen. 20:6; 39:9; Jer. 3:1). "Each of the commandments five through ten describes deeds breeching human relationship [sic] and therefore compromising the relationship with Yahweh that is the purpose of the entire Decalogue" (Durham 295). And when considered all together, "the intent of the commandments is to engender love of God and love of neighbor" (Childs 439).

The goal of the exodus from Egypt and His bringing them into the good land was that Jehovah would dwell (as a Husband) in the midst of His people Israel (Exo. 25:8; 29:46; Ezek. 43:7).

"Divorce" and the Renewing of the Marriage Covenant

The children of Israel almost immediately broke the marriage covenant between themselves and Jehovah in the making of the golden calf (Exo. 32:4, 8). In spite of repeated warnings not to join themselves to the gods of the nations, the history of the children of Israel is full of accounts of their turning away from Jehovah to serve other gods, which was considered harlotry (Judg. 2:12, 17; 1 Sam. 8:8; 2 Kings 22:17). The people and their leaders had neither the view nor the heart to live the marriage life with Jehovah. Jehovah raised up prophets, in particular Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, to protest, to raise up the people's consciousness of Jehovah as their Husband, and to warn them that they would be sent away (divorced) into captivity if they did not turn from their ways and come back to Jehovah as their unique Husband.

However, in the prophesying of these prophets there was usually some indication that after the sending away there was promise of reconciliation and that a new (even eternal) marriage covenant would be made between God and His people.

Hosea

Hosea (both directly in the book of Hosea and in his own marriage as a sign) indicates that Jehovah is the Husband of Israel, His unfaithful wife, who has made alliances with other nations and their gods. A number of verses indicate Jehovah's rejection (divorce) of Israel. He indicates symbolically that Israel is not His people, and He will not belong to them (1:9-10), also saying, "She is not my wife, / And I am not her husband" (2:2).

Yet Jehovah allows for and encourages Israel's return and remarriage. He predicts that after her desolation she will say, "I will go / And return to my first husband, / For it was better for me than now" (v. 7), and respond to Him "as in the days of her youth...as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (v. 15), when she will call Him "My Husband / And will no longer call [Him] Baali" (v. 16). Ultimately, He will betroth (promise in marriage) her to Himself forever, in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and compassions, and in faithfulness, and she will know Jehovah (vv. 19-20). Then He will say, "You are My people; / And they will say, My God" (v. 23).

Isaiah

Jehovah asked where the bill of divorce is, implying that God has divorced or put away His people (Isa. 50:1). Yet the fact that it was not found mitigates the force of the sending away. It was not as serious as a divorce but merely a sending away for a short time. He then encouraged Israel by saying that she will forget the shame of her

youth (with her wandering from Jehovah) and the reproach of her widowhood (indicating that in her abandoned state she is just like a widow without a husband) with the following words:

Your Maker is your Husband; / Jehovah of hosts is His name. / And the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; / He is called the God of all the earth. / For Jehovah has called you, / Like a wife who has been forsaken and is grieved in spirit, / Even like a wife of one's youth when she has been rejected, / Says your God. / For a short moment I forsook you, / But with great compassion I will gather you. / In a flood of wrath I hid / My face from you for a moment, / But with eternal lovingkindness I will have mercy on you, / Says Jehovah your Redeemer. (54:5-8)

Jehovah her Maker (plural) is her Husband (plural), perhaps looking back to the plurality of the verb *make* in the expression *let Us make man in Our image*, when mankind was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Isaiah 54:5 hints that the whole Triune God is involved in the process of gaining mankind as His counterpart (which is developed in the New Testament).⁹

Jehovah also indicates that the sending away of His people as His wife was only for a short moment but that their relationship is eternal. Isaiah further promises that in their final state, the people will be adorned with a crown of beauty and a royal turban. They will be no longer forsaken and desolate but called "My delight is in her" and "Married" (*Beulah*). God will rejoice over her with the joy of the bridegroom over the bride (62:3-5).

Jeremiah

In the book of Jeremiah Jehovah tries to bring the people (as Jerusalem) back to Himself as He remembers the kindness of their youth, the love of their bridal days, when they followed after Him in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown (2:2). However, as a virgin and as a bride, they have forgotten Him (v. 32; 3:21) and forsaken Jehovah, the fountain of living waters (2:13), exchanging Him for "no gods" and vanity (vv. 11, 5, 23, 28). Jehovah equates Israel to a divorced woman who joins herself to others and then returns to her first husband (3:1, 8, 20). This is problematic according to the law, and it defiles the land (Deut. 24:1-4). Yet Jehovah encourages His apostate people to return to Him as a Husband, who will take them and bring

them to Zion in Jerusalem, where His throne is and His name dwells (Jer. 3:12, 14, 17; 4:1). He also encourages them with the promise of a new (marriage) covenant:

Indeed, days are coming, declares Jehovah, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was their Husband, declares Jehovah. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Jehovah: I will put My law in their inward parts and write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And they will no longer teach, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for all of them will know Me, from the little one among them even to the great one among them, declares Jehovah, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. (31:31-34)

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The new covenant affects their inward parts, with Jehovah's law, or testimony, being written on their hearts, so that they correspond to Him intrinsically. He will be their God, and they will be His people, and all of them will know Him.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel mentions the origin and birth of Israel as from the land of Canaan, from an Amorite father and a Hittite mother (16:3). Israel was thrown into an open field and abandoned. However, at her time of love Jehovah saw her and spread His skirt over her and covered her nakedness; indeed He swore unto her and entered into a covenant with her, and she became His (vv. 5, 8). He clothed and adorned her (vv. 10-14), but she became unfaithful to Him, like an adulterous wife, entering into alliances with the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians and their gods (vv. 26-32). These nations ended up turning against her and executing His judgment on her to stop her from being a harlot (v. 41).¹⁰ They took her into captivity since she broke the (marriage) covenant (v. 59). Nevertheless, He will remember His covenant with her in the days of her youth, He will establish an eternal covenant for and with her, she will know that He is Jehovah, and He will make propitiation for all that she has done (vv. 60, 62-63). He also tells the parable of the two sisters who married Him, Oholah (meaning "her own tent," signifying

Samaria) and Oholibah (meaning “My tent is in her,” signifying Judah), and their unfaithfulness to Him, which resulted in their captivity (ch. 23). These names indicate Jehovah’s desire to dwell among and with His people.

The message of these four prophets is consistent. Jehovah courted Israel, bringing her out of Egypt into the wilderness to make a marriage covenant with Him. She responded to Him initially, yet became unfaithful to Him like a harlot, pursuing other gods. He sent her away (divorce) into captivity, but He left a way for her to return to Him. He also promised an eternal marriage covenant in which her heart and inward parts would be written on with His law, reconstituted to correspond to His being.

In addition to the testimony of the prophets, there are two other sections of the Old Testament, Song of Songs and Psalm 45, that dwell on the notion of marriage, at least typologically. They also imply the kingdom, since they deal with the marriage of the king with his wife. Both emphasize the notion of transformation and adornment in the preparation of the bride as a wife.

Song of Songs portrays the romance between Solomon and Shulammitte, which points to the divine romance between God and His chosen people. The romance passes through a number of stages of development until the couple fully correspond to each other. She becomes Shulammitte, the feminine counterpart of Solomon (6:13).

In Song of Songs, however, we see the genuine marriage life. What is the secret of such a romance? The secret is that the wife must take her husband not only as her life and her living, but as her person.

Several figures of speech...characterize [the] seeker in Song of Songs as she passed through the various stages in the growth of life. The first figure...used was of a company of horses (S. S. 1:9). Horses are strong, energetic, full of personality, and seek a definite goal of their own. Gradually, by the working of love, this seeker was changed from a company of horses to a lily that was fragrant, beautiful, and blossoming (S. S. 2:2). The seeker became a lily without will, emotion, or person. Eventually, she became a pillar. Although the word pillar denotes something strong, the seeker was likened to a pillar of smoke (S. S. 3:6), not a pillar of marble. She was a pillar of smoke that stood erect and steadfast in the universe; yet she was very flexible...A pillar of smoke has no person of its own; it has no mind, emotion, and will.

The seeking one in Song of Songs eventually becomes a palanquin to carry her beloved (S. S. 3:9). She no longer has a person of her own; her beloved, Christ the Lord, is now the Person within her. She herself is a palanquin bearing the Person of Christ. Later, this seeker becomes a

garden growing something to satisfy her beloved (S. S. 4:12-13). Finally, she becomes the city (S. S. 6:4), the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2), without any person of her own, but with the strong Person of Christ within her. Praise the Lord! This is the holy romance. (Lee, *Romans* 4-5)

Psalm 45 is a song of love praising the King (title), typifying Christ, and the queen (v. 9), typifying the church. She has two garments, one a woven work inwrought with gold and the other, embroidered clothing (vv. 13-14).

The first garment, “the gold of Ophir” (v. 9), the woven work inwrought with gold (v. 13), corresponds to Christ as our objective righteousness, which is for our justification. The second garment, the embroidered clothing, corresponds to Christ “embroidered” into us by the transforming work of the Spirit and lived out of us as our subjective righteousnesses, which are for our victory. The first garment is put upon us that we may stand in the presence of God (Luke 15:22), whereas the second garment is woven into our character, embroidered into our being, that we may stand before the King...clothed with the righteousnesses of the saints to meet the requirement of Christ for their marriage (Rev. 19:8 and note 2; Matt. 22:11-12 and note 11¹). (Recovery Version, Psa. 45:14, note 1)

The Fulfillment of the New Covenant, with the Coming of Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom Producing the Church as the Bride

The New Testament begins with the gospel of the kingdom and indicates that Jehovah has come as the Bridegroom in the person of Jesus Christ to woo and gain His corporate bride. In Matthew 9 the Lord Jesus indicated that He came as the Bridegroom. He was taken away from the sons of the bridechamber (the disciples) in death to redeem them, and they fast in the church age, being without His physical presence (v. 15). John the Baptist also testified that the Lord Jesus was the Bridegroom who has the bride (the church as His increase) and that He must increase, while John as the friend of the bridegroom must decrease (John 3:29-30).

The Lord told two parables concerning the kingdom that relate to this marriage. The first parable concerns the kingdom of the heavens becoming like a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son (Matt. 22:2). This parable signifies God the Father preparing the wedding feast of the kingdom for His Son with His bride. Initially, the Jews (especially in the Old Testament times but also at the beginning of the New Testament) were invited to the feast, but they rejected the invitation and treated His slaves shamefully (vv. 3-6). Their city Jerusalem was destroyed (by the Romans under Titus in A.D. 70, v. 7). Then others were invited (mainly Gentiles in the church age, vv. 9-10). However, the invitation comes with a requirement. The

invited guests need to be clothed properly with the wedding garment in order to be able to participate in the wedding feast (vv. 11-14). “This wedding garment is typified by the embroidered garment in Psa. 45:14 and is signified by the fine linen in Rev. 19:8...This is the surpassing righteousness of the overcoming believers, mentioned in [Matthew] 5:20” (Recovery Version, 22:11, note 1).

The second parable concerns the kingdom of the heavens being likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth out of the world to meet their bridegroom (25:1). The word *meet* (ὕπαντησις) implies a secret meeting (with the prefix ὑπο-, meaning “under”), a rendezvous of the bridegroom with the bride. When the Lord comes back, the believers as the virgins go to meet Him as the Bridegroom in an official way, openly according to plan and ceremony (v. 6, a different word for *meet* than in verse 1—ἀπάντησις with the prefix ἀπο-, meaning “from”). Attending this official wedding meeting also has a requirement—the virgins need not only oil in their lamps but a reserve supply of oil in their vessels (vv. 3-4). The five prudent virgins have this reserve supply, whereas the five foolish virgins have oil only in their lamps. They have to go away to buy oil, and as a result, they miss out on the wedding feast (vv. 9-10). The lamp refers to the human spirit (Prov. 20:27), and the vessel refers to the faculty of the soul (mind, emotion, will). The oil refers to the Holy Spirit (Isa. 61:1; Heb. 1:9). The way to obtain the reserve supply of the Spirit in the soul is hinted at in Matthew 25:12. The Lord tells the foolish ones that He never knew (οἶδα) them, οἶδα being a perfect form of the verb *to see*, with the sense of resultant state: “I have not seen you; therefore, I do not know you.” We gain the reserve supply of the Holy Spirit by spending adequate time with the Lord, beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord, being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). We also need to look away from all things in our environment unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him (of producing the church, His bride) endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2). As Witness Lee states,

The wonderful Jesus, who is enthroned in heaven and crowned with glory and honor (2:9), is the greatest attraction in the universe. He is like an immense magnet,

drawing all His seekers to Him. It is by being attracted by His charming beauty that we look away from all things other than Him. Without such a charming object, how could we look away from so many distracting things on this earth? (Recovery Version, 12:2, note 2)

At the end of His human life the Lord established a new covenant through the shedding of His blood, which He poured out for the forgiveness of our sins to redeem us back to God (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25-26). His blood is symbolized in the Lord’s table meeting by the cup of wine, which is our redeeming portion. The bread signifies the Lord’s generating life, which was processed through death and resurrection. We partake of both elements, and this points to the constituting of the believers as grains of the one loaf and members of His Body. The Lord’s table is a feast of love divine, indicating the Lord’s cherishing love toward us in His giving Himself to purchase us. It

also indicates His nourishing us with the elements of His life, the redeeming and generating life. Similarly, the blood and water from His pierced side (John 19:34) indicate these two aspects of His life as well as fulfilling the type of the rib from Adam’s side being built into Eve (Gen. 2:21-22). Whereas the old covenant exposes the fallen condition of man-

kind and our lack of qualification to become Christ’s bride, the new covenant supplies the necessary elements to qualify us intrinsically to become that bride. The book of Hebrews contrasts the two covenants by quoting Jeremiah, indicating that the law (of life) imparts the life of God testified by the law of letters into our inward parts, making us the same as He is in life and nature (Heb. 8:6-13; Jer. 31:31-34). The Lord’s table looks forward to the kingdom and the Lord’s return, when He will drink of the product of the vine again with the believers at the wedding feast (Matt. 26:29).

In a few places Paul speaks about the marriage relationship between Christ and the church. In Romans 7 he presents the marriage relationship with Christ in terms of being freed from our former husband who was bound to the law (our independent old man who has been crucified with Christ—6:6). We have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that we might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God (7:4). Paul indicates that the union with Christ is not a physical union but a spiritual

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INTRINSICALLY TO BECOME THAT BRIDE.

one, since he who is joined (κολλάω) to the Lord is one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). He also states that he is jealous over the believers with a jealousy of God, for he betrothed them (ἀρμόζομαι, to promise or give in marriage) to one husband to present them as a pure virgin to Christ. He fears lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, that their thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ (2 Cor. 11:2-3).

In speaking about human marriage, Paul says that this is a great mystery but that his burden is to speak concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). Although Paul speaks about subjection and love in the marriage relationship, he puts them in the context of the church as the Body of Christ being subject to Christ as the Head, and of the love of Christ for the church in giving Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish (vv. 21-27). This echoes Paul's prior utterance that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love (1:4). Paul also connects the revelation of the church as the bride of Christ with that of the Body of Christ, connecting "the first Adam's love for his wife as *one flesh* with himself [to] the last Adam's love for his own bride, *his body*" (Ortlund 156). Christ also nourishes and cherishes the church as the members of His own Body (5:28-31; cf. Gen. 2:24). These verses indicate that there is a process involved in the preparation of the church as the bride of Christ. She needs to be sanctified, made holy, in her nature (as He is holy, 1 Pet. 1:16) and beautified, cleansed from every spot and wrinkle, without blemish, to stand before Him in love.¹¹

The Eternal Consummation of the Marriage, the New Jerusalem, the Spirit and the Bride

In Revelation John indicates the consummation of the marriage between God and His chosen people. John says, "The marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints. And he said to me, Write, Blessed are they who are called to the marriage dinner of the Lamb" (19:7-9).

The reign of God, the kingdom, is related to the marriage of the Lamb, and the marriage of the Lamb is the issue of the completion of God's New Testament economy. God's economy in the New Testament is to obtain for Christ a bride, the church, through His redemption and divine life. By the continual working of the Holy Spirit through all the centuries, this goal will be attained at the end of this age. Then the bride, the overcoming believers, will be ready, and the kingdom of God will come. This corresponds with

the Lord's prophecy in Matt. 26:29. (Recovery Version, Rev. 19:7, note 1)

Immediately following the marriage dinner of the Lamb, the Lord comes as the King with His (bridal) army to execute His judgment on the Antichrist and his armies and bring in His kingdom (vv. 11-21; 17:14; 11:15).

The holy city, New Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (21:2, 9). In the three places where Revelation mentions the bride or wife of the Lamb, it also mentions her adornment, indicating transformation and preparation to match her Husband. The final reference to the bride associates her with the Spirit. The Spirit and the bride speak together, saying, "Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely" (22:17). The cry invites people to drink the water of life, implying the life of God, which is available to be partaken of in order to constitute the bride.

The fact that, in addition to the Lamb, the Spirit also is matched with the bride indicates that this marriage is an operation of the entire Divine Trinity. This is a further confirmation of the plurality indicated in the terms *Maker* and *Husband* in Isaiah 54:5. The Father chooses a wife for His Son. The Son comes to redeem and marry her, but as the Spirit, He comes to woo and prepare her to become His bride. At the end of Revelation, it is the Spirit and the bride, the church, speaking together as one. This indicates that the church's experience of the Spirit has improved to the extent that she has become one with the Spirit, who is the ultimate consummation of the Triune God.

The entire revelation of the Bible shows us the love story of a universal couple. That is, the sovereign Lord, who created the universe and all things, the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—who went through the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, and who ultimately became the life-giving Spirit, is joined in marriage to the created, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite man—composed of spirit, soul, and body—who ultimately constitutes the church, the expression of God. In the eternity that is without end, by the divine, eternal, and surpassingly glorious life, they will live a life that is the mingling of God and man as one spirit, a life that is superexcellent and that overflows with blessings and joy. (Recovery Version, 22:17, note 1)

Conclusion

The Triune God created mankind in a particular way with the goal that He as the Husband would be united with His wife eternally as His corporate counterpart. He chose the

people of Israel and took them out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, where He enacted His marriage covenant, giving them the law as a testimony of what He is like and what they should be to match Him. However, because they did not realize their own condition before Him (being unable to match Him) and because of their unfaithfulness to Him, He was forced to send them away into captivity, with a promise of their return and the enacting of a new covenant, in which He would have the ability to change them intrinsically. In the New Testament era, God became a man, was crucified on the cross to terminate the old creation with its problems, and was resurrected and became the life-giving Spirit so that He could impart Himself as the redeeming and generating life into His people and thus have the way to transform their intrinsic being. The church as the bride of Christ needs to live the marriage life joined as one spirit to the Lord, being transformed into the same image to match Him in life and nature. She needs to be clothed with Him as her subjective righteousness, washed from spots and wrinkles, nourished and cherished to grow to maturity. When this has been accomplished, the cry will come: "Behold the Bridegroom!" And He will say, "This time, corporate humanity matches Me in life and nature; the bride has made herself ready!" Since the wedding feast is a precursor to the initiation of the manifestation of the kingdom, may we all endeavor to make ourselves ready and to be prepared as His bride to bring in His kingdom.

by Roger Good

Notes

¹More recently, however, three monographs by Stienstra, Ortlund, and Sohn have focused on this subject.

²It is quite striking that the verb *ba'al* is translated "I am your master" in Jeremiah 3:14 by some English versions such as the NAB, NJB, NRSV, NASB, and ESV and in Jeremiah 31:32 by the NAB and NJB even though the context strongly suggests the notions of marriage. A few English versions such as KJV, ASV, TNK, and NASB transliterate the Hebrew word *Ishi* in Hosea 2:16 rather than translate it "Husband," potentially further obscuring the notion of God being our Husband.

³For the connection between the notions of "election" and "covenant" and their further connection to the notions of "engagement" and "marriage" respectively, see Sohn 142.

⁴The Hebrew word *kehulot* refers to a betrothal or engagement.

⁵This is the first mention in the Bible of *kingdom* in relation to God's people. However, the notion of the kingdom is mostly developed in the New Testament (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

⁶While recognizing that the Ten Commandments are a covenant between God and the children of Israel, many commentators of Exodus omit mentioning that the Ten Commandments are a marriage covenant, in spite of the view presented by Jeremiah and Ezekiel as well as other indicators in the context of the book of Exodus (e.g., making a covenant with

the inhabitants of the land was associated with going as a harlot after their gods, 34:15).

⁷On the significance of the name of Jehovah in His economy to dispense Himself into us and reconstitute us with Himself see "The Purpose of God in the Name of Jehovah" in *Affirmation & Critique* XII.I (April 2007): 59-67.

⁸While the explicit mention of a marriage relationship between Jehovah and the children of Israel is rare in the Pentateuch and the books following, the negative concepts of jealousy and harlotry (indicating problems in the marriage) are mentioned more frequently and imply that the relationship between God and His people is one of marriage. Deuteronomy 31:16 also ties the notion of the people going as harlots after strange gods with the breaking of the (marriage) covenant. The prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah develop the notion of the marriage relationship between Jehovah and His people in a fuller, more explicit way.

⁹Both nouns in the first part of this verse are actually plural participles (lit., the Ones who are married to you are the Ones who made you) and are followed by the clause *Jehovah of hosts is His name*, another indicator of unity yet plurality associated with the God of Israel. See "Plurality yet Unity in God" in *Affirmation & Critique* XI.I (April 2006): 50-57.

¹⁰The Hebrew verb for *stop* comes from *shabat* and literally means "to cause her to cease, stop, or desist," and is from the same root as *Sabbath*. Her unfaithful being needs to be terminated or stopped, and she needs to be replaced in her intrinsic being by Jehovah, the One who is.

¹¹The love with which we love the Lord is actually God Himself as love (1 John 4:8, 16). He is the source of our love, and He constitutes us with Himself as love (v. 10). We become the same as He is not only in life and nature to match Him but also in the essence of love to respond to Him and reflect His love toward us.

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