



The Bride
of
Christ

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Although the terminology the *Bride of Christ* is not a biblical term, it very definitely is drawn out of the Scriptures through different words, as we see here in the book of Revelation.

“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.’” (Revelations 19:7–9)

This Scripture is talking about the marriage of the Lamb and His Bride—and we know that the Lamb is Christ. So we see this idea that the Bride makes herself ready, which I think is significant. She finds herself in “fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” This idea of preparation will become more important as we talk about the significance of the Bride. So in this study we will consider, “Is it valid to talk about there being a bride of Christ?” Once we find that this is an important concept, we will consider, “What does this idea of a bride refer to and does it apply to us today?”



New Jerusalem the Holy City

As we begin our study, let us read Revelation 21 about the new Jerusalem:

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.” (Revelation 21:2–3)

Here we see a different concept about this Bride coming down out of heaven, and it is referring to Jerusalem. This can get a little confusing but let us keep reading.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. (Revelation 21:9–10)

So now we have a second Scripture in Revelation that mentions this Bride of the Lamb coming down out of heaven, again referring to Jerusalem. You may wonder, “Well, I thought the Church was the Bride of Christ. So what’s going on here? This is Jerusalem.” But do not despair. The concept of Jerusalem here is actually talking about the Church. Let us turn to *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, a well-known dictionary, which gives a commentary on the Bride of Christ.

Although the specific phrase “bride of Christ” does not appear in the NT, the concept is found in several NT works as a description of the Church. Paul describes the Corinthian believers as having been betrothed to Christ and presented as a bride to her husband (2 Cor 11:2; cf. Rom 7:1–6). In Eph 5:21–33 the relationship between husband and wife is explained in terms of the relationship that exists between Christ and the Church. The author of Revelation applies the metaphor of the bride of the Lamb (Christ), not only to the Church (19:7), but also to the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city, which is the eschatological manifestation of the people of God (21:2, 9). The source for this imagery is found in the OT where the relationship between Israel and God is often spoken of in marital terms (Isa 54:1–6; Jer 31:32; Ezek 16:8; Hos 2).¹

When we hear the term *Bride of Christ*, it is a valid concept to think of the Church—and more specifically to think of God’s people, which is broader to me and more the reality of what we are talking about. So we have this idea that the Bride, the wife of the Lamb, is the new Jerusalem.



1. Mitchell G. Reddish, “Bride of Christ,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary, A-C: Volume 1*, ed. David N. Freedman and Gary A. Herion (Herion, GA: Yale University Press, 1992), 782.



God's Relationship as a Husband to Israel

This concept of the Bride of Christ should be significant to us because God is looking for a relationship. We find some examples in Isaiah where this terminology of a husband-and-wife relationship is used between God and His people Israel to express the relationship God is looking for. Although the human example of marriage we see today is not exactly what God had in mind, there is something very deep in the relationship of a husband and wife that the Father is trying to portray in these Scriptures and what He wants to see happen in His relationship with His people.

Let us go to Isaiah the fifty-fourth chapter:

“For the LORD has called you,
Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
Even like a wife of one’s youth when she is rejected,”
Says your God.
“For a brief moment I forsook you,
But with great compassion I will gather you.
In an outburst of anger
I hid My face from you for a moment,
But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you,”
Says the LORD your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:6–8)

This idea of a wife is clear and cannot be disputed. The Lord has called us like a wife, and we see this relationship all through the Hebrew Scriptures where God calls Israel as a wife to Himself. That is the love God is looking for in the closeness and intimacy He desires to have with His people. Although it was a stormy relationship with Israel and God got upset with them, He promises His beloved, “I’m going to call you back with great compassion. I’m going to gather you together into this husband-wife relationship with Me, and it will be with everlasting

lovingkindness” (see Isaiah 54:5–8). God will have everlasting compassion in the redemption that He brings to His people. That is a beautiful picture.

Jeremiah also likens the new covenant to this relationship of a marriage.

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “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 the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:31–32)

Without question God is looking for a marital relationship with His people and with Israel as a nation in this idea of the new covenant. The idea of God as a Husband to them in a covenant relationship is a powerful thought and not just something insignificant.



“I Have Put My Cloak Over You”

Ezekiel 16 gives another amazing image that is picturesque of a baby being born and lying in her blood. God is actually recounting this idea of Israel as a nation from the moment of her birth and through the phases of her life, until we see Israel as a young woman. The Lord comes and covers her with His garment, which is a beautiful symbolic picture of the wedding (Ezekiel 16:4–8). That happened in the story of Ruth when Boaz covered her with his cloak, symbolizing that he was going to marry her (Ruth 3:9). So that love commitment is being conveyed here. It is a beautiful picture that no matter what Israel has gone through in being born, thrown out into the field, and neglected, God loves her and says, “I have put My cloak over you.” He is looking for a marriage relationship.

Hosea has another great Scripture about this marriage relationship: “It will come about in that day,’ declares the LORD, ‘that you will call Me Ishi and will no longer call me Baali” (Hosea 2:16). The Hebrew word *ish* means “man, husband.” When you add an *i* to say “Ishi,” it means “my husband.” Since the Bible translators saw Ishi as a proper name, they left it there in the Hebrew. So it means “you will call Me ‘my Husband.’” What a day of fulfillment! That backs up this idea about us being the Bride of Christ if we are going to call Him “my Husband.” Hosea continues, “And will no longer call Me Baali.” The Hebrew word *baal* means “lord” because Baal lords over people. By worshipping Baal, people make him their lord. But you are not going to have God lording over you. Now He is going to become “my Husband.” I love that!



The Bride in the New Testament

Now we will see how this idea of a husband-and-wife relationship with God carries directly into the New Testament. Most of the writing about this relationship comes from Paul, but we understand that Paul was a Pharisee trained in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the thinking of that day. So this teaching was very deep with Paul. After his experience with the Lord on the road to Damascus, Paul realized that the Gentiles were included as part of God’s people and part of this vision that God is going to marry His people. In Paul’s mind it included both Israel and the *ekklesia* or Church assembly. He saw them both as something important.

In Matthew 25, Yeshua (Jesus) tells the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, which helps us recognize that somehow there are groups involved, representing individuals or churches or groups of faith. Remember, there is more than one virgin. So this idea of multiple fulfillments is very real. But we also understand in the allusion of the ten virgins that more is going on. We cannot say it is the Church because in this parable the Lord Himself was not saying the Church as one entity but as something multifaceted and experiencing different levels of faithfulness to the Lord. So keep that in mind as it will be helpful in this whole idea of the Bride.

In Romans 7, Paul states,

Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. (Romans 7:1–4)

So this marriage relationship is seen directly with Yeshua. When Yeshua died, you also died to the Law through the body of Christ. Therefore, you are free to remarry. All the bonds that you made in your previous life with people or relationships or anything else are all broken in the death of Christ through His body. Then you are joined to another, to Yeshua who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. So this is another beautiful picture.



The Purification and Sanctification of the Bride

Paul is saying, “You are going to be married. Christ broke your bonds. He freed you from everything else. But now you will be joined to Him in this marriage relationship.” It just brings alive to us what God is looking to see happen. Paul adds, “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin” (2 Corinthians 11:2). This was Paul’s whole concept in ministering as an apostle to the Church. All his energy had this one goal that he was betrothing the Church to Christ.

Paul wanted to present you to Yeshua at the great marriage supper of the Lamb. That was Paul's drive, his destiny, and his ministry. As Christians we talk about the marriage supper of the Lamb, and we wait for this experience. We tie the marriage of the Lamb to end-time events with the return of Christ and this marriage experience, so we should be getting ready.

The marriage allusion is also very plain in Ephesians the fifth chapter,

And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 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. (Ephesians 5:21–27)

Paul is talking about husbands and wives and then says that Christ is working within us to present us to Himself in this same type of relationship. Notice that the Scriptures in the New Testament always include this idea of cleansing and washing. Remember, it is the pure virgin that Paul was looking to present to Christ: “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.”

God is working in us so that we can be presented to Him. You may wonder, “Why are all these dealings in my life?” It is because this marriage only happens with a virgin who is without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The Bride must be purified and sanctified. The five foolish virgins missed it because they were not prepared. Suddenly, we go from this wonderful picture of the Bride of Christ and this tremendous marriage ceremony only to realize that the Husband has a few qualifications: He must choose and accept you.





How Does This Revelation of the Bride Apply to Us?

As we read in Revelation, the Bride makes herself ready. We must allow the purification and sanctification process to take place in our lives until we are blameless before the Lord. If the Church is saying, “We are the Bride,” then the qualification is that we be without spot or blemish or any such thing. And we must recognize that according to the Bridegroom, the division among us is a sin. Further, if we believe that this marriage happens at the return of Christ or is surrounding His return, then we may have one of the great reasons why Yeshua’s return is being delayed. That is why *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* talked about it being an eschatological revelation, which means it is concerning “last things” or end-time events.

The return of Christ to the earth is the marriage of the Lamb. He comes for His Bride who lives here. But let us not fool ourselves; the wedding must be put off until the preparations are finalized. This Bride must be a virgin without blemish. But when you look at the landscape of the Church today in all its division, schism, and hatred of one another, you realize that Yeshua cannot come for that. The Bride must make herself ready for this event. That is why God is speaking to us now. There must be a love and oneness in the Body of Christ. It does not mean that we homogenize ourselves and all become one big organization. But one thing is for sure, the root of the schism, which is hatred and disagreement, must go. God’s love must take over for us. Yeshua makes this very clear.

The book of Revelation talks about the judgment that comes on the great whore Babylon. Of course, every church has concluded who Babylon the great whore is, and it is always someone else’s religion. But God is pointing His finger at each of us and saying, “It could be you unless things change, so stop pointing to others. Get the mote out of your own eye” (see Matthew 7:3–5). We all have some homework to do if we are talking about a pure Bride. This marriage that we see in Revelation was triggered first by the judgment on all that was impure. Yeshua was speaking directly to this concept of the foolish virgins who were unprepared. There will be many groups of believers who begin to come together at His coming, but there will also be those who miss it and are eliminated. When we talk about oneness, we are talking about the oneness of those who are seeking the Lord to really have a walk with God. They are making themselves ready by crying out for purity and sanctification and getting rid of every defilement.



God's Glory Will Make Us One

In 2 Thessalonians Paul writes, “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14). God has chosen you in faith and in truth that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We often hear this word *glory* being used, but Christ said, “I have given them My glory so that they may be one” (see John 17:22). There is a key here with God’s glory resting upon the Body that allows us to move into this oneness. But Paul puts the preparation back on us: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

It is the glory that makes us one. We need to see the release of the glory of Christ that was given to the Bride until she is one. Yeshua said, “I in them, You in Me, that they may be perfected into one.” The Greek does not say “unity”; it says “one.” That we may be perfected into one, “so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (John 17:23). God loves you just the same as He loves Yeshua, and Yeshua is sending you in the same way that God sent Him. The Father will make it happen and the glory that Christ proclaimed will make us one.



We Have a Tremendous Destiny

As we look at the landscape of the Church today, we see divisions and separations that are brought about by the deeds of the flesh; the enmity, strife, jealousy, and disputes among us must be ended. “Those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21). So this defines for us the unwise virgins in Yeshua’s parable. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:22–23). We are either going to be one of the wise virgins or one of the foolish virgins. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh. They belong to Him. Do you feel that wedding anointing in those words? Yeshua is talking to His Bride, “Those who belong to Me, those who marry Me are those who have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

If we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit. We are called to be the Bride of Christ and marry Him at His return. What a beautiful goal. What a fantastic door God has opened for us. It is a tremendous destiny. Just confess it out of your mouth, “I want to marry You Ishi, my Husband.” That is a good way to start praying; it will change your entire positioning with Him.

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All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible 1995 (NASB1995).

ABOUT GARY HARGRAVE



GARY HARGRAVE has a passion for leading people into spiritual maturity. Gary effectively ministers the life-changing truth of God's Word through Bible teaching and prophetic revelation that emphasizes the Lordship of Christ.

Gary embraces the teachings and insights of the Hebrew Scriptures as the essential foundation of God's Kingdom and the roots of Christian faith.

By cultivating spiritual maturity in Christians, Gary is deeply committed to teaching and inspiring unity in the Body of Christ and between Christians and the Jewish people.

Throughout decades of ministry, Gary has worked closely with leaders in the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant communities to build relationships based on commonality and understanding. He frequently leads study tours to Israel in the land of the Bible.

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ABOUT HARGRAVE MINISTRIES

The calling of the Lord upon this ministry is to lead people into spiritual maturity by revealing biblical truth. **Our passion is to see the Kingdom of God manifest on earth** as the Body of Christ grows in unity, power, and love.

Everything we do flows from the revelation of the Jewish foundations of our Christian faith. It is our desire and privilege to bless the land and people of Israel. Our Israel outreach includes our ability to:

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