



Terms and Definitions

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Bride of Christ

The bride of Christ is a concept that describes Gods relationship to His people. It is a synonym that is used for the term “church” as it is applied in its prophetic sense (see church definition). God has chosen to reveal an aspect of his relationship with his followers by using Jewish marriage practices between a bridegroom and his bride. When we understand how Jewish wedding customs were conducted we gain a lot more insight as to why God has chosen to call his followers as a collective whole “His bride”. Here is a brief overview of a Jewish wedding process and the steps that lead to the wedding and how they relate to God and His bride (church).

1. The arrangement

The Father of the groom makes an arrangement with the father of the bride and pays the father of the bride something called “the bride price” It is a gift paid by the groom to the bride’s family, but ultimately belongs to the bride. It changes her status and sets her free from her parent’s household. (Gen 24:53, 29:20, 27)

The spiritual application of this first step is that God the Father, the Father of the Groom, made the arrangement and then paid the bride price. The bride price was the blood of His son.

John 3:16 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.

1 Peter 1:18-19 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹ **but with the precious blood of Christ**, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

1 Corinthians 6:20 For you were **bought at a price**; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

2. The preparation

The second step in the Jewish wedding process is the betrothal and it can last for a year or up to many years. This is a time of preparation where the bride is being trained to take on the role of being a wife. It is a period of time when she is observed to make sure that she remains pure and chaste. This is why it usually lasts up to a year so that nine months can pass to make sure that, at the time of the betrothal she was a virgin. This period is also called in Hebrew "kiddushin" meaning "sanctification" (See sanctification definition). It is a time in which the bridegroom and bride are set aside to prepare themselves to enter into the covenant of marriage. The Jewish understanding of betrothal is taken much more seriously than our modern understanding of betrothal (engagement). The betrothal was so binding that the couple would need a religious divorce in order to annul the contract. The two individuals were also considered to be husband and wife in all legal religious aspects, except of actual cohabitation. (2 sam 3:14) the couple would undergo a separate ritual water immersion and was done just prior to entering into the betrothal period and was symbolic of spiritual cleansing. They would then meet together under a canopy and in public they would express their intention of becoming betrothed to one another. Often some items of value were exchanged such as rings, and the couple would share a cup of wine to seal the betrothal vows. At the end of the Betrothal ceremony the groom would give his wife to be a gift or pledge of his love and it was a symbol that he would return for her and receive her as his bride.

The application to the Church in this second stage is that the Church is to be considered betrothed to God and is being set apart or sanctified from sin so that one day it can dwell with Him in His kingdom.

2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have **betrothed you to one husband**, that I may present *you* as a chaste **virgin** to Christ.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, **we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age**, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed **and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.**

As the Jewish custom of immersion before the betrothal was done, so God has instituted water baptism as a part of the process whereby one responds to the Gospel in faith and becomes part of the Church and His bride.

Ephesians 5:25-27 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.

Most people teach that this passage in Ephesians 5:26 means that God is going to cleanse the church by the washing her in some sort of spiritual way with the Scriptures. In order to have that interpretation one must spiritualize Paul's use of washing and his applying water to that washing. The literal meaning of the word for washing in the Greek is "loutron" which means to bath or the act of bathing. The phrase "by the word" is a prepositional phrase and "by the word" is thought to apply to the Scriptures. The Greek for "word" is "rhema" which always means something spoken, such as a saying or command and is often used of the sayings of Jesus or the Gospel message. Here it is being applied to the great commission were Jesus commanded to make disciples by baptizing them. (Matt 28:19-10) Therefore a more literal translation should read "*that he might sanctify and cleanse her by the bath of water [contained] in the message*"

The Jewish wedding custom was also to share a cup of wine when they exchanged wedding vows. Christ shared a cup of wine with his disciples during the last supper.

Mark 14:23-25 **Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it.** ²⁴ And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. ²⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

The groom gave the bride a gift as a symbol of his love that he would return for her, so did Christ promised to give the gift of the Holy Spirit to His disciples when He left.

John 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, **the Spirit of truth** who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.

Since this betrothal period was a time for the bride to stay pure and prepare for her Groom to return so to should the Church and its members strive for purity and holiness as we wait for the Lord to return and set up His kingdom. (Heb 12:14) In the Old Testament the nation of Israel was viewed as being married to God through the Old Covenant and considered to be His wife. (Isa 54:1, Jer 3) When Israel started to disobey God and mix themselves in amongst the heathen practices by serving other false Gods, the LORD viewed it as spiritual adultery. The LORD would declare that "Israel is playing the harlot". God's fierce anger that He had towards the Israelites harlotry is the same anger He has towards Christians betrothed to Christ under the New Covenant that

decide to mix themselves in with the sins of the world. James gives a staunch warning to believers about this very issue in his epistle.

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore **wants to be a friend of the world** makes himself an **enemy of God**.

In the first verse that we cited for the spiritual significance of the betrothal period Paul said. “that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”. Under the Old Covenant if a bride was not found to be a Virgin on her wedding day it was a very serious issue.

Deuteronomy 22:13-21 “If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, ¹⁴ and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, ‘I took this woman, and **when I came to her I found she was not a virgin**,’ ¹⁵ then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out **the evidence of the young woman’s virginity** to the elders of the city at the gate. ¹⁶ And the young woman’s father shall say to the elders, ‘I gave my daughter to this man as wife, and he detests her. ¹⁷ Now he has charged her with shameful conduct, saying, “I found your daughter was not a virgin,” and yet these *are the evidences of my daughter’s virginity.*’ And **they shall spread the cloth** before the elders of the city. ¹⁸ Then the elders of that city shall take that man and punish him; ¹⁹ and they shall fine him one hundred *shekels* of silver and give *them* to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days. ²⁰ **“But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman,** ²¹ then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city **shall stone her to death with stones**, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father’s house. So you shall put away the evil from among you.

Christians should be striving for holiness and purity so that we can present ourselves as a virgin before the Lord when he returns, and not be found as some of His servants on that day.

Luke 12: 42-47 And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season? ⁴³ Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴ Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. ⁴⁵ **But if that servant says in his heart**, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶ the master **of that servant** will come on a day when he is not looking for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will **cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers**. ⁴⁷ And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did **not prepare himself** or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.

3. The retrieval of the Bride

The third stage of the Jewish wedding process is the when the Groom departs to retrieve his Bride and brings her to his home. The bride and bridal party were to be ready for this and it was customary for one of the groom's party to go ahead of the bridegroom, leading the way to the bride's house and shout "Behold, the bridegroom comes". This would be followed by the sounding of the shofar. The entire wedding processional would then go through the streets of the city to the bride's house.

This is symbolic of the day when Christ returns to the earth and the resurrection of the Just takes place proceeded immediately by the rapture.(see rapture) Looking at the state of the Church today with all the division and disobedience it is hard to imagine her as a pure and spotless bride. This problem will be resolved by three and half years of extreme persecution (see great tribulation) before Jesus retrieves His bride. The great tribulation will resolve divisions, correct disobedience, and humble the proudful. It will assure that Christ will indeed have a chaste virgin presented to Him upon His arrival. Daniel describes this purification process for God's people during the tribulation.

Daniel 11:35 And *some* of those of understanding shall fall, **to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end**; because *it is* still for the appointed time.

As the groom would send out a portion of his wedding party to go ahead and announce his coming for the bride, so too will Jesus send His angels forth with the great sound of a trumpet. The angels will gather together all living believers to meet Christ as He makes His way from the heavens to Jerusalem.

Zec 9:14 Then the LORD **will be seen over them**,
And His arrow will go forth like lightning.
The Lord GOD **will blow the trumpet**,
And go with whirlwinds from the south.

Joel 2:15-16 **Blow the trumpet in Zion**,
Consecrate a fast,
Call a sacred assembly;
¹⁶ **Gather the people**,
Sanctify the congregation,
Assemble the elders,
Gather the children and nursing babes;
Let **the bridegroom go out from his chamber**,
And **the bride from her dressing room**.

1 Thess 4:16-18 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. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Matt 24:29-31 “Immediately **after** the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And **He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

After the Groom would fetch the bride he would take her to the place where they would reside. When Christ returns in power and glory from the heavens all believers who have been resurrected and those still living once transformed incorruptible will meet Him in the air as He is descends upon Jerusalem.

Where will the Lord take his bride to have the wedding ceremony? To a city in the Middle East called Jerusalem.

Isaiah 24:23 Then the moon will be disgraced
And the sun ashamed; (Matt 24)
For the LORD of hosts will reign
On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
And before His elders, gloriously.

Psalms 132:13-14 For the LORD has chosen **Zion**;
He has desired *it* for His dwelling place:
¹⁴ “**This is My resting place forever**;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

4. The wedding ceremony and the celebration feast

After the wedding ceremony the bride and the groom would consummate the marriage and proceed to the celebration feast which included a large supper with music and dancing. After the festivities the husband and wife were considered to have entered into the full covenant of marriage.

Jesus will return and meet His bride in the clouds to be fully joined with her for eternity. The Bride will then descend to Jerusalem as the LORD pours out His wrath. (See Day

of the LORD) Upon reaching Jerusalem and the earth being cleansed of wickedness the marriage supper of the Lamb will commence. The Kingdom of God will then be established upon the earth. The marriage supper of the Lamb will consist of the Passover meal which Christ promised to His disciples at the last supper.

Luke 22:14-18 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. ¹⁵ Then He said to them, “With *fervent* desire I have desired **to eat this Passover** with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I say to you, **I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.**”

¹⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I say to you, **I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.**”

Jesus promised His disciples that when He returned they would celebrate the Passover meal with Him in His kingdom. The Passover meal consisted of a slain lamb and wine. This requires physical things that are on this earth and cannot be spiritualized to mean something else. The marriage supper of the lamb will not take place in some cosmic celestial dwelling place. It will be right here on the earth in Jerusalem. Isaiah prophesied of this celebration.

Isaiah 25:6-9 And **in this mountain** (Jerusalem)

The LORD of hosts will make for all people

A feast of choice pieces,

A feast of wines on the lees,

Of fat things full of marrow,

Of well-refined wines on the lees.

⁷ And He will destroy on this mountain

The surface of the covering cast over all people,

And the veil that is spread over all nations.

⁸ He **will swallow up death forever,**

And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces;

The rebuke of His people

He will take away from all the earth;

For the LORD has spoken.

⁹ And it will be said in that day:

Revelation tells us that at the end of the Great Tribulation the marriage supper of the Lamb is ready to commence. It has not already taken place seven years prior!

Revelation 19:6-9 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! ⁷ Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, **for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.**" ⁸ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.
⁹ Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'"

The bride of Christ (Christians) should be waiting for the glorious day when they will be joined with the Lord to dwell with Him in His kingdom forever.