

The Return of Jesus Christ—Part 2: The Prophetic Pattern of the Ancient Jewish Wedding

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. (John 3:29)

In Part 1 of the Essentials teaching, *The Return of Jesus Christ*, I laid the necessary foundation for understanding the coming kingdom of God in the context of the Gospels. Here in Part 2, we will examine how the events of the coming return of Jesus Christ are patterned after the ancient Jewish wedding. There are several New Testament passages that allude to this corresponding relationship. Understanding it will enrich our time in the Bible.

Understanding the Jewish Wedding

I want to start by acknowledging that my understanding of the ancient Jewish wedding was greatly aided by Dr. Arnold Fructenbaum's teaching: *The Jewish Wedding System and the Bride of the Messiah*.

The pattern of the ancient Jewish wedding included the following key components:

1. **Arrangement** - the father of the groom arranged the marriage with the father of the bride and paid the father of the bride the bride-price. The following Bible verses reference the bride-price:

"If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, **he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife.** If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the **bride-price** of virgins." (Exodus 22:16-17)

Then David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, **for whom I paid the bridal price** of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." (2 Samuel 3:14; ESV)

2. **Betrothal** - a period of time of at least one year after the Arrangement to give the bride time to prepare for marriage, to ensure the purity of the bride (virgin), and to allow for the groom to prepare a home for them in his father's house. The Betrothal can be observed in the following Bible verses:

'And what man is there who is **betrothed** to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.'
(Deuteronomy 20:7)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: **After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph**, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. The Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ... Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought fourth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS. (Matthew 1:18-20, 24-25)

3. **Taking the Bride** - with no forewarning, the groom would typically come at night to take his expecting bride to come and live with him. They would be accompanied by a bridal procession. In *Pattern is Prologue: The Rapture, Part 2: The Wedding Model*, Dr. Chuck Missler described this event as follows:

At the end of the period of separation, the bridegroom came—usually at night—to take his bride to live with him. The groom, the best man, and other male escorts left the father's house and conducted a torch-light procession to the home of the bride. Although the bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the time of his coming. As a result, the groom's arrival was preceded by a shout, which announced her imminent departure to be gathered with him.

The Taking the Bride can be observed in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins:

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>> "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.
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>> "***And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!***' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy,*** the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding***; and the door was shut.
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>> "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'
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>> "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." (Matthew 25:1-13)
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Note that this parable only appears in Matthew, *the gospel written to the Jews*, because the cultural context was applicable to them.

1. **Wedding Ceremony** - small ceremony held at the home of the groom amongst the immediate family and typically only a few guests.
2. **Wedding Feast** - many more people are invited to the wedding feast. Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding feast (John 2:1-11) and He also alluded to such a feast in the Parable of

the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14).

Prophetic Implications

The components of the ancient Jewish wedding provide a pattern or outline that foreshadows God's prophetic timeline for the church. Here are the implications of each of these components:

1. **Arrangement and Betrothal** - God the Father arranged the plan for His Son to take the church as His bride. The Son paid the bride-price on the cross. The following verses explain God's motivation through this Arrangement:

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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

The church is now betrothed to Jesus Christ, as the apostle Paul referenced in his second letter to the Corinthian church:

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. (2 Corinthians 11:2)

John the Baptist referred to this Betrothal when he declared:

"A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' **He who has the bride is the bridegroom**; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled." (John 3:27-29)

Writing to the Ephesians, Paul compared the relationship of Jesus Christ and His bride, the church, to God's design for marriage:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just **as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 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.** So husbands out to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. **“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.** Nevertheless let each one of your particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

Most notably, Paul referred to the aspect of Christ leaving His Father to be joined to His bride—becoming one with her through spiritual union—as a *great mystery*. This is a great mystery because it was hidden in the Old Testament, which is why Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 in this passage.

God is love (1 John 4:16) and His Arrangement is the agency through which He chose to reveal His immeasurable love. It is the ultimate love story. Consider what the apostle John wrote:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. **In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has seen God at any time. **If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. **God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.** (1 John 4:7-16)

John's last statement here is critical to seeing the spiritual unity that is the supreme focus of God's love. Moreover, this unity reveals the power of what comes next in God's prophetic timeline: the taking of the bride.

1. Taking the Bride

Jesus once declared:

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 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. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:36-44)

Jesus was speaking to His disciples concerning the Rapture of the church, which is when He will take His bride, the church, to the wedding ceremony in heaven.

Notice Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows ... but My Father only" and "Watch therefore for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." This corresponds to the bride in the Jewish wedding not knowing when her groom would come get her. Not coincidentally, Jesus taught the previously referenced Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins shortly after this, concluding with, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:1-13).

It is important to understand that the Rapture of the church is *imminent*. It can happen at anytime. It is the next event in God's prophetic timeline. Having said that, and respecting the prophetic pattern before us, we must realize that the considerate Groom will allow time for His bride to prepare herself.

The English word Rapture does not appear in the Bible. The Greek word, *harpazo*, which means "to snatch" or "catch away" is the predominant Biblical term for this event. *Harpazo* appears thirteen times in the New Testament. Its usage in the following passage is a direct reference to the Rapture of the church:

For this we say to you **by the word of the Lord**, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 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. 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. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18)

In case there was any doubt about the validity of the Rapture, Paul emphasized that this was "the word of the Lord."

The use of *harpazo* in the following verse is a *possible* reference to the Rapture since the church is in Christ:

She [Israel] bore a male Child [Jesus Christ] who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was **caught up** to God and His throne. (Revelation 12:5)

Paul also referred to the Rapture in the following verses without using *harpazo*:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him ... Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the **falling away** comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is **taken out of the way**. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-7)

The key to understanding the powerful mechanics of the Rapture can be gleaned from the following points contained within these verses:

- A trumpet blast, which may be heard around the world, ignites this event.
- This event will affect those believers *in Christ*—both dead (physically) and alive—and no one else. We will all instantly receive our eternal, immortal bodies.
- Jesus Christ in His church—the “body of Christ”—is presently restraining the unveiling of Satan’s antichrist. The Rapture will eliminate this restraint.

John wrote that, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” and that, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:3-4). As I examined in the Essentials teaching, *Creation in Christ*, God created the light of life in Christ and the foundational aspects of physics on day one of Creation. Notably, John specified here that, “all things were made through Him.” It is my own conjecture that because all church era believers

have been put “in Christ” and “all things were made *through* Him,” that the underlying mechanism to instantly transform the church saints into immortality has already been prepared. The trumpet blast ignites the transformation and the beautiful bride is then ready for her wedding.

God already demonstrated such “Rapture power” when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul prayed for the Ephesian church that they would know “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places ...” (1:19-20). The same power that God demonstrated in the Groom He is going to demonstrate in the bride which is already spiritually united with Him in Christ. It is necessary here to reiterate the following verse which I quoted earlier:

God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:7-16)

The church will see and know the totality of God’s resurrection power in Christ at the Rapture.

1. Wedding Ceremony

After Jesus Christ snatches His bride, the church, she puts on immortality “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” (Ephesians 5:27). The bride puts on her heavenly garment of clean and bright, pure white, fine linen in preparation for the wedding ceremony at the home of the Groom’s Father in heaven (Revelation 3:5; 19:8,14).

The symbolism of the wedding ceremony for this event should not be missed. The bride loves her groom, is devoted to Him, and keeps herself pure. She longs for the day when she will see Him face to face and be with Him forever. She knows Him partially now, but after the wedding, she will come to know Him completely. We find this endearing love and its longing anticipation, revealed in the following verses:

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

Jesus Christ will keep His bride from the seven years of tribulation detailed in chapters six through nineteen of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ (hereafter, "Revelation"). Notably, Jesus promised the churches:

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (Revelation 3:10)

The faithful bride is one who perseveres in faith until the Groom takes her to the wedding.

1. **Wedding Feast**

Near the end of the tribulation period, immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ to earth, an angelic call goes out announcing the marriage supper of the Lamb:

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! 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.**" 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.

Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." (Revelation 19:6-9)

Here we see that the bride of Christ is now His *wife*.

The wedding feast will take place on the earth after Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom. As I explained in the Essentials teaching, *Death & Resurrection*, the Old Testament period saints

and the deceased tribulation period saints will be resurrected at this time. This resurrection will enable them to attend the wedding feast. What a glorious celebration it will be!