

Session 2: Entering the Plan of the Ages

I. Time to Pursue God's Plan of the Ages

1. God's plan of the ages is for Christ to have a prepared bride as His eternal partner.

- a. As we stated in the first session, a central tenet of God's eternal purpose is to have a prepared bride for Christ as His eternal partner. This is one of the five key aspects of God's eternal purpose—for Christ to have a bride. I shared this quote from Paul Billheimer in the last session; even so, because it describes the bride in God's eternal purpose so effectively, I will present it again here. It reads,

It [the bride of Christ] is one thing and one alone: the eternal companion of Jesus Christ, wholly God and wholly man. The final and ultimate outcome and goal of events from eternity to eternity, the finished product of all the ages, is the spotless Bride of Christ, united with Him in wedded bliss at the marriage supper of the Lamb and seated with her heavenly Bridegroom upon the throne of the universe—ruling and reigning with Him over an ever increasing and expanding Kingdom. He entered the stream of human history for this one purpose, to claim His Beloved...Creation has no other aim. History has no other goal. From before the foundation of the world until the dawn of eternal ages God has been working toward one grand event, one supreme end---the glorious wedding of His Son, the marriage supper of the Lamb.¹

- b. The preparation of an equally yoked bride to be made ready as Christ's eternal partner is a primary objective of the church age. Because this is God's plan from before the foundation of the world, entering into it is of utmost importance.

2. We live in a day in which it is urgent that we enter God's plan so as to be prepared as a bride for Christ.

- a. I am writing these notes in early 2022. As I write, our small church currently has four young couples engaged and planning weddings for this year. We have weddings planned for this June, July, August, and September. For those not familiar with our local church, we are small in number. We have had many years when we did not have any weddings. In our 30 plus year history, we have never come close to having this many weddings. We believe that this is a confirmation to the word I will share as follows.
- b. During our time of worship at our church on Sunday, February 6, 2022, the Lord spoke to me these words: "This year [2022] is to be the year of a true betrothal to the Lord and all that is involved in it--the tena'im, katubah, dowry, putting on bridal garments, etc. [I will share about these topics in this message]. This year we must accept our betrothal to Christ and pursue bridal garments." He then quickened in my spirit the message to the church at Sardis in which some at that church were pursuing white bridal garments and some were not. Then on February 23rd the Lord spoke to me again about this word saying: "This year is a year to wake up to our betrothal; to take it seriously; and to begin or intensify a lifelong pursuit of making ourselves ready as a bride for Christ."

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- c. Another confirmation came to us about this word. One of our leadership team members, Trice Hill, who has a powerful prophetic seer anointing, heard a similar word: that it is time to pursue being made ready as a bride for Christ. In fact, she heard this on February 6th, the same day I received my word from the Lord.
- d. One more confirmation to the word I heard. Since the time I heard this word, a scripture verse has been strong in my spirit as a “now word” for the church. It is Revelation 16:15 which reads, “Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”
- e. With all of the above happening in our lives and church, we know that the Lord is speaking. But not only to us at our local church in Kennesaw, Georgia, but also to the global church. It is time to take very seriously our betrothal to Christ and to energetically and steadfastly pursue making ourselves ready. It is time and we must delay no longer.
- f. It is time for every believer to enter into the plan of the ages. To help us understand what is involved in pursuing making ourselves ready, we will look at the way a young Jewish couple were married in ancient times. The process in which they were married models the process that God uses to prepare a worthy bride for Christ. With that understanding, we will devote the remainder of the session to understanding an ancient Jewish wedding and how that illustrates God’s preparation process of making ready a bride for Christ.

II. Elements of a Jewish Wedding

- 1. Jewish marriage traditions used during biblical times establishes the foundation for understanding bridal theology.
 - a. I am always excited when I see how God so often uses common traditions from biblical times to illustrate deep biblical truths. One of those amazing parallels between ancient traditions and biblical truths are the steps involved in a Jewish wedding during the Old and New Testament eras.
 - b. In this session, we will dig into the details of a Jewish wedding during biblical times and apply these principles to a believer’s bridal relationship with Christ. If you are familiar with our Lifeschool materials, you will recognize that we have covered the steps in an ancient Jewish wedding in our classes, *Understanding the Bride of Christ* and *The Eternal Blueprint*. Even though we have covered this subject in other places, it is such an integral component to understanding the issues related to the bride making herself ready, we cover them again here. We will also dig a little deeper into these principles in this session to help us understand our pursuit of our Bridegroom King. So, let’s get started.

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2. Most Jewish weddings during the days Jesus walked the earth involved a seven-step process which parallels how the bride of Christ will be made ready for her Bridegroom King.

- a. In New Testament days, most Jewish marriages were arranged by their families. There was a detailed negotiation involved in selecting both the groom and bride. Once the selection was made, a betrothal ceremony took place at which time the couple were betrothed, and as a result were legally married but not yet living under the same roof or in a consummated relationship. Approximately a year later, the official marriage took place, a marriage feast was celebrated, the marriage was consummated, and the couple lived together as husband and wife.
- b. During the year-long period between the betrothal and the marriage, the groom prepared a place for the couple to live and the bride to be prepared herself and her wedding garments for her coming wedding day. Even though this is how the wedding took place in a general way, we have identified seven steps in this process. Each of these steps illustrate part of the process of a believer being made ready for Christ. The seven steps are: 1) the arrangement of the marriage, 2) the betrothal and betrothal ceremony, 3) the preparation period between the betrothal and the wedding, 4) the wedding processional, 5) the wedding ceremony, 6) the wedding feast, and 7) the couple living together as husband and wife. Each of these steps illustrate an important dimension in a believer's bridal relationship with Christ. In the remainder of this section, we will explore these seven steps as they apply to a traditional Jewish wedding. Please note that there are a lot of details in each step which we don't address in our discussions. Our goal is to highlight only those details relating to our bridal relationship with Christ. Following this discussion, we will look at how these seven steps parallel the marriage of Christ and His bride. In the final section of this session, we summarize briefly the topic of the Jewish bride.
- c. Let's now look at the seven steps in an ancient Jewish wedding.

3. The first step of a traditional Jewish wedding was the arrangement of the marriage.

- a. The arrangement of the marriage refers to the agreements that were made prior to the legal betrothal as well the bridegroom's pursuit or wooing of the bride to convince her to accept the marriage proposal. The arrangement was the time of matchmaking, often decided upon between the father of the groom and the father of the bride. Since the bride-to-be normally was required to approve the marriage before the families agreed to a betrothal ceremony, it was also a time when the groom-to-be would pursue his intended bride to demonstrate that he desired her and was fully able and willing to care for the young lady.
- b. The overall term for the matchmaking and the establishment of the arrangements was referred to as the *shiddukhin*. In a general sense, the *shiddukhin* incorporated three parts: the proposal of the groom to the bride and her family, the agreements reached based on the negotiated proposal, and the intermediary who helped negotiate the agreements. Incorporated into this step of the marriage process, the groom-to-be would pursue the bride and her family attempting to win her love and confidence and to demonstrate that he was fully able and willing to care for his bride.

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- c. Included in the negotiations was the *mohar* which is translated as the “dowry” and the *mattan* which is translated as “gifts”. The *mohar* was the price the groom had to pay before he could take the young lady as his bride.
- d. The *shiddukhin* negotiations resulted in two documents being signed by the appropriate parties at the appropriate times, the first being the prenuptial agreement called the *tena'im* and the second being the nuptial agreement called the *ketubah*. Let's first discuss the *tena'im*. This document described the conditions under which the two families agreed to the marriage of their children and in essence became an approval to proceed with the proposed marriage.²
- e. After the *tena'im* was completed, the nuptial agreement, the *ketubah* was prepared and signed. The *ketubah* defined in detail the mutual obligations and rights assumed by the bride and groom upon marriage.³ In biblical times, a significant part of the *ketubah* was the agreement by the groom to pay either an amount of cash or an in-kind payment, that is, a dowry. This was often called a “bridal price for her to be his wife”.⁴ The *ketubah* also spelled out expectations and rights of both parties. The expectations included the groom's responsibility to provide support for his wife and the wife's obligation to perform specified duties.⁵ The *ketubah* also included clauses committing both parties to be faithful to the other. In addition to agreeing to perform certain duties, the bride also agreed to bring cash and/or household goods from her father's house.⁶

4. The second step of a traditional Jewish wedding was the betrothal ceremony.

- a. Once the previous steps had been accomplished, it was now time for the betrothal ceremony, called the *eyrusin* ceremony. Before explaining what was involved in the betrothal ceremony, it is important to note a few points about the Hebrew words used to describe betrothal and the betrothal ceremony. In biblical times, *eyrusin* was the Hebrew word translated “betrothal”. However, in later years, the betrothal ceremony came to be referred to as the *kiddushin*. I am not trying to be too technical with these Hebrew words; yet, the word *kiddushin* adds rich meaning to the understanding of our betrothal to Christ.
- b. In biblical days, the idea of betrothal referred to a man “taking of a woman”.⁷ Thus, the betrothal was a ceremony for a man “to take” a woman to be his wife. In transitioning from using the word *eyrusin* to *kiddushin* to describe the betrothal, the idea of purchasing a woman for the purpose of marriage was conveyed in the meaning of the betrothal. As time passed, the term *mekudeshet* was also employed in the betrothal ceremony. As such, the groom would recite, “Behold, you are *mekudeshet* [consecrated] unto me”, signifying that the bride was being set apart for the groom.⁸ In essence, *eyrusin* merely conveys an intent to be married whereas *kiddushin* suggests that the bride was purchased by the groom and was now set apart for him and him alone. With that understanding, let's examine some of the components of the betrothal.
- c. The betrothal ceremony would normally take place at or near the home of the bride. The prospective groom would travel from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride and pay the dowry or purchase price.⁹ In addition, to prepare for the betrothal, both the groom and the bride would take part separately in a ritual immersion in water called the *mikvah* which symbolized a spiritual cleansing.¹⁰

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- d. The betrothal ceremony was a public ceremony with witnesses present and would take place under the marriage canopy, called a *huppah*. The ceremony would include the groom stating that with this ceremony the bride was to be consecrated to the groom from that day forward. A requirement of the betrothal ceremony was that the bride must willingly agree to the proposal, free of all duress.¹¹
- e. At the ceremony proper, the *ketubah* was read and agreed to and the ceremony was sealed with both bride and groom drinking a cup of wine. Also, included in the ceremony was the groom giving a gift of some type in addition to the dowry that had already been paid. In modern times, the giving of a ring was often the preferred gift; however, in biblical days, the gift was often something different but of value. Once the ceremony concluded, the couple, family, and those in attendance shared a meal to celebrate the festive occasion.
- f. After the betrothal ceremony was completed, the couple was considered to be fully entered into the agreement of *eyrusin*. The *eyrusin* period would last approximately one year even though the exact date of the wedding ceremony was determined by the father of the groom; therefore, neither the bride nor the groom knew the exact day of the wedding. Following the betrothal ceremony, the couple was considered to be legally married but not allowed to co-habit together or to have a sexual relationship. To sever the relationship following the betrothal even prior to the marriage ceremony required a bill of divorcement similar to that required of a fully married woman.¹²
- g. At the end of the betrothal ceremony, the woman was the legal bride of the groom, and was referred to as his bride.

5. The third step of a traditional Jewish wedding was the preparation period between the betrothal ceremony and the wedding ceremony.

- a. Once the betrothal ceremony was completed, the bride and groom entered the next phase of their marriage which we have labeled a time of preparation. This period normally lasted about one year even though as we stated earlier, neither the bride nor the groom knew exactly when the actual wedding ceremony would take place as it was determined by the father of the groom.
- b. During the betrothal period, several activities took place. The groom returned from the betrothal ceremony to his father's home and remained there to use the time as a time of preparation. As the *huppah* symbolized a new household, so the groom was to focus on preparing a new dwelling place for his bride and children to follow. This was normally done by adding a room to his father's house. While the groom was busy building a home in which they would live as husband and wife, the bride was preparing herself for the upcoming wedding. This usually involved three things.
 - First, the bride was observed for her purity. This custom required at least a full nine months to ensure that the bride was not pregnant and to attempt to assure that she was a virgin.¹³
 - Second, the bride consecrated herself. She examined everything in her life and changed whatever was necessary in order to be ready for the holy covenant of marriage.¹⁴ Like we said earlier, Jewish leaders began to use a Hebrew word meaning "consecrated" for the act of betrothal because of the objective of the bride being set apart for her groom to be. Therefore, during the preparation period, the bride made sure that she was totally set apart from all other relationships and entanglements so as to be completely separated for her groom.

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- Third, the bride made her own wedding garments. Jewish women in ancient times did not have the luxury of going to the nearest bridal shop and purchasing a pre-made dress. They had to spend hours making their wedding garments and adorning them with special touches to make them beautiful.¹⁵
- c. In summary, the betrothal period was to be a time of examining their lives to make themselves ready for the covenant of marriage. As the betrothal period came to a conclusion, both parties looked with great anticipation for the day of their wedding.
 - d. One final point about the betrothal period is important for our study. Also instrumental in a Jewish wedding in ancient times was the role of the friend of the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom was a loyal friend chosen by the bridegroom to prepare the bride for the wedding. He would accompany the bride throughout the betrothal period and help her get prepared for the upcoming marriage. Once the ceremony commenced and the friend heard the bridegroom's voice, he would know that he did his job in preparing the bride to receive the bridegroom.¹⁶ Referred to as the *shoshbin*, the friend of the bridegroom was responsible for all the preparations leading up to the wedding, almost like a wedding planner for the bridegroom.¹⁷ He helped arrange the marriage, acted as an intermediary between the betrothed couple before and after the wedding, arranged all the details of the wedding's week-long festivities, and even stood outside the wedding chamber as the marriage was consummated.¹⁸

6. The fourth step of a traditional Jewish wedding was the wedding processional.

- a. As the approximately year-long betrothal period came to an end, the bride would wait with great expectation for the coming of her bridegroom. Since the actual wedding day and hour was a surprise to the bride, the bride and her attendants would anxiously wait for the groom's arrival. The bridal party would keep their lamps burning just in case the wedding would take place that day or evening.
- b. When the wedding day finally arrived, the bridegroom would dress himself in festive garments, wearing a crown of gold, silver, or flowers. He along with the friend of the bridegroom and other members of the groom's wedding party would travel to the bride's home to take her to the house he had prepared for her for the marriage ceremony.¹⁹
- c. So that the bride would know that the day of her wedding had arrived, the virgins in the village would be outside waiting along the way in the evening with their oil lamps lit, until the loud cry, "Behold the bridegroom comes, go out to meet him," and they would meet him and proceed with him to the entrance to the family home of the bride.²⁰
- d. The procession would begin at the bride's house and proceed to the house of the bridegroom. It began with great celebration. The bridegroom, the bride, the friend of the bridegroom, the virgins, musicians, and many other friends and relatives would walk and dance, and toss flowers, and sing songs, with "every demonstration of joy and gladness." The bride was crowned and carried by the crowd on a piece of furniture through the streets to the bridegroom's house.²¹

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7. The fifth step of a traditional Jewish wedding was the wedding ceremony.

- a. Once the couple reached the groom's home at which the *huppah* awaited, the actual wedding ceremony, referred to as the *nissuin*, took place. The word *nissuin* comes from the Hebrew word *nasa* which means "to carry". The symbolism is rich as the bride would have been waiting for her groom to carry her away to the groom's home for the consummation of their long-awaited marriage.
- b. The couple would once again say a blessing over a cup of wine and the commitments made during the betrothal ceremony were finalized in the marriage ceremony. After the ceremony, the couple would then proceed to a private room where the bride would remove her veil, and they would physically become one in their marriage covenant with God. Afterward they would place the bloodstained garment out the window of the room, for all to see that she had been a faithful virgin. From that point onward, they lived together as husband and wife.

8. The sixth step of a traditional Jewish wedding was the wedding feast.

- a. The wedding feast was the highlight of the wedding ceremony. It was much more extensive than what westerners are accustomed to today. As the celebration began, the doors were shut and the feast began with great dancing and celebration. Taking place at the bridegroom's home, the wedding feast normally lasted seven days. All the guests were given special beautiful festive garments. The bridegroom and bride were treated as king and queen; they wore beautiful garments of celebration; and they did no work for the entire duration of the feast. They would watch the festivities, drink wine, and join in the dancing and celebration.²²
- b. Unlike a typical western marriage reception which typically focuses more on the bride, the primary purpose of the Jewish wedding feast was to honor the groom. All of the guests were expected to compose poems or sing songs to the groom. Now that the blessed bridegroom had received a wife, he was supposed to display her beauty and grace to all who were present. To honor the groom, the bride would put on her beautiful wedding garments that she made during her year of preparation and would display her beauty to the bridegroom. In response, friends and attendees would show her respect and admiration.²³

9. The final step in the Jewish wedding was the couple living together to accomplish God's purpose in their new life together.

- a. Following the wedding feast, the groom and the bride would live together as husband and wife for the remainder of their lives. Referring once again to the marriage ceremony, after the reading of the *ketubah*, a cup of wine was handed to the officiating rabbi who offered a benediction over the taking of the wine. This benediction later expanded to six benedictions instituted by Jewish sages.²⁴
- b. The six-point benediction highlighted six purposes God intended for their marriage union. Summarizing the six blessings, they were: 1) God was honored and glorified in the marriage of the young Jewish couple, 2) the marriage was an accomplishment of God's purpose for the couple, 3) the marriage provided the groom with a helper suitable for him, 4) the marriage was God's plan for procreation so as to produce the fruit of children, 5) the marriage provided companionship and

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friendship for the couple, and 6) the marriage was to become a source of jubilant rejoicing, happiness, and joy for the couple and family and friends.

- c. Now that we have explored the many facets of a Jewish wedding during biblical times, let's now examine how these practices illustrate our bridal relationship with Christ and how they were fulfilled in Christ.

III. The Jewish Wedding and the Bride of Christ

- a. In this section, we will now apply the seven steps of a Jewish wedding to a believer's bridal relationship with Christ. The parallels are truly amazing and will give us great insight into the overall process of what is involved in a believer's ultimate marriage to Christ Jesus. To refresh our memory, the seven steps are: 1) the arrangement of the marriage, 2) the betrothal and betrothal ceremony, 3) the preparation period between the betrothal and the wedding, 4) the wedding processional, 5) the wedding ceremony, 6) the wedding feast, and 7) the couple living together as husband and wife. As noted previously, each of these steps illustrate an important dimension in a believer's bridal relationship with Christ.

1. Before the foundation of the world, God arranged a marriage for the eternal Son with His creation.

- a. In an ancient Jewish wedding, the first step in the process was for the parents of the bride and groom to enter into arrangements that would ultimately result in the couple getting married. As you recall, the first step was for the parents of the bride and groom to negotiate a pre-nuptial agreement called a *tena'im* which served as the approval by the parents to move forward with the marriage. In a similar way, before the foundation of the world the Godhead meeting in an eternal council decreed God's eternal purpose for Himself and His creation. Just like in a traditional Jewish wedding, the heavenly Father along with the other members of the Trinity established a heavenly *tena'im* arranging in God's eternal thought and plan for Christ to have a bride thus setting in motion all the necessary events for Christ to betroth a bride for Himself.
- b. The idea of a council before the foundation of the world may be a new idea to you. We address this concept in detail in our Lifeschool Class, *The Eternal Blueprint*. In that class, we identify five components of God's original intention for Himself and His creation. They are: 1) the Son will be at the center of everything in heaven and on earth, 2) the Father will have a family of Christ-like sons, 3) the Son will have an equally yoked bride, 4) the Holy Spirit will have a temple, house, and body that He fully possesses and fills, and 5) believers have been invited into eternal intimacy, eternal authority, and eternal glory. Note point three! As that class explains, in an eternal council conducted before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), the Godhead decided in God's original plan and thought that Christ would have a prepared bride as His eternal partner.
- c. Comparing this to the traditions of an ancient Jewish wedding, the result of this eternal council was to establish a *tena'im* or pre-nuptial agreement with God's creation—for the purpose of Christ being married to His creation. In this council, the Godhead decided that the eternal Christ would be exalted, pre-eminent, and the center and fullness of all things (Col. 1:15-19; 2:9; Eph. 1:4-10). This same council determined that in God's eternal purpose, Christ would have an eternal partner—a

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bride—to partner with Him as His suitable helper for all of eternity. As a result, all of God’s creation from the beginning of time until Christ returns is invited into a bridal relationship with the Man Christ Jesus.

2. In the fullness of time Christ came to earth to pursue and betroth His bride.

- a. Once the tena’im was agreed to, the two families would proceed to the betrothal phase. Similarly, in God’s perfect timing with love for the world and a bride on His mind, Christ came to earth to pursue His bride and to betroth her to Himself. Christ’s coming to earth illustrates Christ performing His responsibilities in order to betroth His bride. We will deal with the bride’s role in the betrothal in a moment. The four aspects of the groom’s responsibilities in a Jewish betrothal that we address here are: 1) the groom pursuing a bride, 2) the groom presenting the *ketubah* contract of terms and conditions to the proposed bride, 3) the groom’s paying of the dowry, and 4) the groom’s participation in the betrothal ceremony. Let’s discuss each.

Pursuing His Bride

- b. As you will recall, in an ancient Jewish wedding the betrothal ceremony was conducted at the home of the bride. In order for Christ to betroth His beloved bride, He had to come to earth. He left the glory of heaven freely and willingly to take on the form of man so that He could take a wife as His eternal partner.
- c. While He walked the earth, He pursued His bride with a radical passion to attract her to himself so that she would desire Him as her husband. He demonstrated His great compassion as He spent three-and-one-half years healing the sick, delivering the oppressed, performing many acts of miraculous provision, and demonstrating His strength and devotion to His bride. From the moment He began His ministry on earth, He demonstrated His power, love, and devotion to convince His bride to desire Him and say “yes” to His bridal invitation.

Presenting the Ketubah

- d. Another important aspect of an ancient Jewish wedding was the establishment of the nuptial agreement called the *ketubah*. It was agreed to and signed by both parties and read at the betrothal ceremony as the agreed to terms of the upcoming marriage.
- e. During His time on earth, Jesus presented His *ketubah*, that is, the terms of the marriage contract to all who would consider being His bride. As He walked the earth, He not only romanced His bride by demonstrating His power and compassion for His bride, He also described what was expected and required from her in order to become His wife. His teachings such as the Sermon on the Mount, the call to intimacy, the expectations of discipleship including the mandate to take up one’s own cross daily, and other teachings laid out what was expected of His bride to be. He made it very clear that coming into a relationship with Christ required a surrender of one’s life. As mentioned earlier, the betrothed bride was referred to as being consecrated to her groom. With Christ laying out His expectations of discipleship, He, in fact, presented to those who would desire to be His wife a heavenly *ketubah*. In the *ketubah* Christ presented, He was saying to all who desire to become His bride that they must abandon completely all other loves and lovers and set themselves apart for Him and Him alone.

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Paying the Dowry

- f. As stated previously, in biblical times a dowry was required for a Jewish man to take a wife. The dowry was to be paid by the groom to the bridal family at the time of the betrothal ceremony. Again, we see a wonderful picture of the dowry paid by Jesus to purchase His bride. Christ paid the ultimate dowry by the shedding of His blood and the giving His life on the cross. With the payment of His life as a dowry, Christ purchased His bride paying the price to transfer her from the domain of darkness to the domain of His kingdom. The scriptures refer to this as an act of redemption (Col. 1:13-14). The Greek word translated redemption in this passage means “to release by payment of a ransom”.²⁵ With His life as the price, Christ paid the ultimate dowry price to purchase a bride for Himself.
- g. In addition, the shedding of Christ’s blood also paid the price to set apart the bride unto Him. Remember that in the Jewish wedding procedures, the betrothed bride was now the groom’s consecrated one and referred to as this. When Christ shed His blood on the cross, He not only redeemed His bride from the slave market, He also consecrated her—or set her apart unto Himself as the book of Hebrews notes, “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (Heb. 13:12).

Betrothing a Bride

- h. Christ fulfilled three other important features of a Jewish betrothal ceremony. Once again, you will recall that as part of the betrothal both the groom and the bride had to undergo a ritual immersion to symbolize a spiritual cleansing to prepare for their upcoming betrothal. When Christ began His ministry, He had John the Baptist baptize Him. Even though John didn’t think he was worthy to do so, Jesus indicated that it was necessary. In being baptized, Jesus fulfilled another important part of His role in betrothing His bride.
- i. Another activity that took place in a Jewish betrothal ceremony was the drinking of a cup of wine by the bride and groom. As you would imagine, the betrothed bride drinks of the cup every time a believer takes communion. As the groom betrothing His bride, Christ partook of the cup at the last supper, the Passover meal before He went to the cross.
- j. Christ fulfilled one other important facet of the betrothal ceremony. You will remember that in an ancient Jewish betrothal ceremony, the groom would also give the bride a gift in addition to the dowry he paid to take her as His wife. Later in history the traditional gift was a ring; however, during biblical days, it was often something else. To fulfill this tradition, as His betrothal gift, Christ gave believers the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be our Helper (Jn. 16:7) and Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit was given as a pledge of our inheritance of Christ [as His bride] (Eph. 1:13-14). As the scriptures so clearly tell us, the Holy Spirit has been given to us at our betrothal to provide us with the grace for ongoing sanctification so as the bride cooperates with God’s sanctifying work she will be made ready for her Bridegroom.
- k. Thus, as Christ came to earth to the home of the bride He longed to marry, He pursued His bride with great fervency; He paid the ultimate dowry by willingly offering His life; He presented the *ketubah* agreement explaining the expectations of the one who would say “yes” to his invitation;

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and He gave the precious gift of the Holy Spirit as a pledge of His faithfulness to His betrothed and to help in preparing the bride for her wedding day.

- l. *In doing these things, He performed the groom's responsibilities to betroth His bride.* Next, let's look at the bride's response to Christ's proposed betrothal.

3. Believers are betrothed to Christ when they accept Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.

- a. Whether you realized it or not [and most don't], your salvation experience is actually you entering into an arranged marriage with the eternal Son. Throughout your life, the heavenly matchmaker—the Holy Spirit—pursued you, wooing you to say “yes” to your Bridegroom King, the Lord Jesus Christ. For all who have responded positively to Christ's invitation to salvation, a betrothal ceremony has taken place. Paul said, “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 Cor. 11:2).
- b. As you made your vow to follow Christ all the days of your life, you accepted the heavenly *ketubah*—the terms and conditions of your coming marriage. When you were baptized in water, you partook of a ritual bath similar to an ancient Jewish bride, symbolizing your spiritual cleansing. When you said “yes” to Christ, you were making your decision to separate your life unto your betrothed and to fulfill your vow to be prepared for your future wedding.
- c. As you entered into your relationship with Christ, you accepted His dowry as sufficient price to purchase you from the slave market of sin so as to redeem you as His bride. In addition, just as the groom in an ancient Jewish wedding would give his betrothed bride a gift to seal the betrothal, you were given the gift of the Holy Spirit as a seal of your marriage to come (Eph. 1:13-14).
- d. Just like in a Jewish wedding, each time you partake of the communion elements, you are celebrating your betrothal to your Bridegroom King and at the same time looking forward to your coming marriage to Christ.
- e. In an ancient Jewish wedding, the betrothal ceremony resulted in a legal agreement which resulted in the betrothed bride legally becoming the bride of her groom. In the same way, when you accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, as His betrothed bride you have become His bride. Thus, you as a truly born-again believer are Christ's bride. Even now in the period between accepting Christ and the wedding which will take place at His second coming, you are Christ's bride! *An important note is that even though every born-again believer is the bride of Christ, those who make themselves ready will become the eternal wife of the Lamb.* We will explore this idea thoroughly in later sessions because forerunners need to understand this key principle of bridal theology.

4. Believers now live in the preparation period between the betrothal ceremony and the actual marriage.

- a. As believers in Christ, we now live in the preparation period. Jesus has gone back to his Father's house to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:1-3). As you will recall, in an ancient Jewish wedding, the betrothal ceremony took place at the bride's home and the wedding at the groom's. In between

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these two ceremonies, the groom went back to the Father's house to prepare a place for the couple to live while the bride made herself ready for the coming marriage.

- b. One very important note: The King James Version of John 14:2 reads, "In my Father's house are many *mansions*: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (KJV). We have all heard many times at funerals that the person who has died now has a heavenly mansion in which to live. This is not a correct interpretation of the scriptures. It should be translated as *a dwelling place*. The point is that the eternal wife of the Lamb will dwell not in a separate mansion apart from Christ but in the new Jerusalem in intimacy with Him (Rev. 21:2).
- c. While Christ is in heaven awaiting the marriage to His bride which will take place at His second coming, the betrothed bride is making herself ready. The entire church age has this as its primary purpose, that is, for the bride to make herself ready (Rev. 19:7). When the corporate bride has been made ready in sufficient numbers that only God knows, the Lord will return and take His bride to the heavenly wedding ceremony. No matter what transpires on the earth, Christ will not come back until the bride has made herself ready.
- d. Even though the entire church age has as its purpose the bride making herself ready, individual believers are given their life from the moment they are born again until they die to make themselves ready to be forever married to the Lamb. As we stated earlier, in an ancient Jewish wedding, during the preparation period the bride was observed for her purity; she was to consecrate herself to her bridegroom; and she was to make changes in her life as necessary in order to be ready for her coming marriage. During her betrothal period, she was to totally set herself apart from all other relationships and entanglements so as to be completely separated unto her groom to be; and she was to make her own beautiful wedding garments.
- e. As Christ's betrothed bride, believers must do these same things. The Lord is observing each of us for the duration of our life for our purity as we prepare to stand before the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ to be evaluated for our love, purity, and consecration. We must progressively set ourselves apart unto the Lord and His eternal purpose. As we do these things with great fervor and steadfastness, we will prepare our wedding garments so as to make ourselves ready for our Bridegroom King.

5. Christ will return at a time appointed by the Father to take His bride to the heavenly wedding ceremony.

- a. For the Jewish couple, the year-long betrothal would finally come to an end, the wedding day would finally arrive, and the young bridegroom would dress himself in festive garments, wearing a crown of gold, silver, or flowers. He would travel in a processional to the bride's home to take His bride to his father's house for the marriage ceremony. In a similar way, Christ will come again wearing His festive garments of glory along with myriads of his holy ones to gather His bride from the four corners of the earth and take her to heaven for the wedding ceremony and the marriage supper of the Lamb, fulfilling this verse, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and *will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*" (Jn. 14:3, ESV).²⁶
- b. In the concluding days of the year-long betrothal period, the Jewish bride would wait with great expectation for the coming of her bridegroom and the wedding processional to the groom's home

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that would follow. The bride did not know the exact day or time; therefore, she had to be alert awaiting with great expectancy. The same is true of us. We do not know when the Lord will come for His bride or when we will be called home. We must remain alert and not be like the foolish virgins who let their lamps grow dim. We must keep our lamps burning brightly awaiting the coming of our Bridegroom. We must live with the attitude Jesus spoke of,

Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes (Lk. 12:35-37).

6. Once in heaven, the bride will be joined in full union with her Bridegroom and be blessed to celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb.

- a. The bride who has paid the price of preparation during her life on earth will finally be joined with her Bridegroom thus living in the reality of this passage,

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

- b. Remembering that in the Jewish wedding ceremony the bride and groom drank a glass of wine to seal their marriage vows, the prepared bride will finally be able to drink the fruit of the vine in heaven with Christ to seal their marriage relationship, thus fulfilling this verse, "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Mt. 26:29).
- c. As stated before, the wedding feast was the highlight of a Jewish wedding ceremony. It was a festive and elaborate celebration often lasting seven days. The event was characterized by great joy, celebration, dancing, food, and wine. As part of the bride's marriage to the Lamb, there will be a great celebration at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The bride will have made herself ready by adorning herself with wedding garments referred to as the righteous acts of the saints (Rev. 19:7). As a result, her garments will cause her to radiate with glory to her Bridegroom and to all in attendance. She will garner great respect for how she lived her life on earth.
- d. But the marriage supper of the Lamb is primarily about the Bridegroom. Unlike a typical western marriage reception which typically focuses more on the bride, the primary purpose of the Jewish wedding feast was to honor the groom. In a similar way, the marriage supper of the Lamb will focus on Christ. Just like in a Jewish wedding in which the marriage celebration was to honor the groom, this will be the case at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Christ will be the One who is honored and exalted. Just like Jesus said in the parable of the marriage feast, the wedding feast was given to bless the son (Mt. 22:2). As in a Jewish wedding, attendees honored the groom with poems and words of acclamation, attendees will honor Christ with words similar to those spoken of Christ in Revelation 4-5,

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And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped (Rev. 5:13-14).

7. From that point forward, the eternal wife of the Lamb will dwell in great intimacy with her Bridegroom King and will partner with Him forever as He expands His kingdom throughout His creation.
 - a. As we spoke earlier, following the wedding feast the Jewish couple would live together in intimacy as husband and wife for the remainder of their lives and raise a family thus fulfilling the purposes God intended for their marriage. The same will be true of Christ and His prepared bride. The bride will dwell eternally in intimacy in the new Jerusalem with Christ (Rev. 21:1-8). As Christ forever expands His kingdom throughout the vastness of His creation (Isa. 9:7), the bride will be at His side. She will have been made ready as a suitable helper for Him and will be His eternal helpmate partnering with Him throughout the eternal ages as His intimate wife.

IV. The Jewish Bride

Before concluding this session, let's briefly discuss Christ's betrothal to Israel and the Jewish people.

1. Israel was betrothed to Christ at Mount Sinai.

- a. The idea of being married to Christ is not solely a New Testament idea initiated at Christ's first coming. As we stated earlier and in other materials, the eternal plan of Christ having a prepared bride to partner with Him throughout eternity has been on the heart of God before the foundation of the world. Because this is an eternal plan initiated before creation, it begs the question of what about the Old Testament saints and the Jews in general. We will only be able to touch briefly on it here. But the answer is that Christ will have a bride from every tongue, tribe, and nation and that includes Old Testament saints and Jews from the New Testament era forward who have accepted Christ.
- b. Joel Richardson, in his book *Sinai to Zion*, makes a convincing argument that Israel was betrothed to the Lord at Mount Sinai as they journeyed through the wilderness toward the promised land. Even hundreds of years prior to this, the Lord invited Israel through Abraham to enter a marriage covenant with Him. Throughout Israel's history from Abraham to Moses and beyond, God presented to Israel His ketubah requirements to become His bride. He had Israel consecrate themselves in a *mikveh* ceremony; and He performed a betrothal ceremony under a *huppah* formed by a cloud covering.²⁷
- c. From this moment forward until the time of Christ and His covenantal death on the cross, Jewish saints were made ready for their marriage to Christ by their faithfulness to the *ketubah* initiated at Mount Sinai. Through their circumcision, keeping of the law, and faithfulness to the sacrificial system, they were made ready for Christ their Bridegroom.

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2. With the coming of Christ, Israel was incorporated into the New Covenant in Christ.

- a. Bryan Kessler wrote this in our Forerunner School class, *Understanding the End Times*,

Let me quickly summarize Romans 11:17-24, where Paul spoke of the rich root of the olive tree, the natural branches, and the wild branches. As previously stated, Jesus Christ and the covenant promises made to Him are the rich root of the olive tree. These covenant promises are scattered throughout the Law and the Prophets. The natural branches who are grafted into the olive tree are the Jewish people who believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah. The natural branches who were broken off are the Jewish people who rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah. And finally, the wild branches who are grafted into the rich root of the olive tree are born-again Gentiles, who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. These have been shown mercy due to the unbelief of many Jewish people.²⁸

- b. With the coming of Christ, Israel—the natural branch—was grafted into Christ. But not all of Israel. Only the Jewish people who believed that Christ was their Messiah and accepted Him as that in the fullness of all that it represents. The same is true today.
- c. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Colossians. He wrote that with Christ's coming, circumcision is now a circumcision made without hands; the law has been nailed to the cross; and issues like food or drink, festivals or Sabbaths are merely shadows of the real which is Christ (Col. 2:11-17). Therefore, with the coming of Christ, there is no longer Jew nor Greek (Gal. 3:28), but Jew and Gentile have become one new man in Christ (Eph. 2:14-15).
- d. To summarize, there are two groups of Jewish people who have been betrothed to Christ and await the coming marriage ceremony and marriage supper of the Lamb. The first group are faithful Jews who pursued keeping the law and the feasts and honored the sacrificial system before Christ died on the cross. The second group are messianic Jews who from the time of the cross forward even until now who truly accepted Christ as their personal Messiah.
- e. To conclude this session, the Jewish wedding procedures lay out a beautiful picture of the believer's invitation into the bridal paradigm and their current status of being a bride betrothed to Jesus making themselves ready and awaiting their wedding day at the second coming of Christ.
- f. Now that we have an understanding of the overall Jewish wedding system and its application to our marriage to Christ, in the next session we will dig much deeper into the betrothal period of preparation by examining the book of Esther.

¹ Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975, pp. 25-26.

² Mendell Lewittes, *Jewish Marriage: Rabbinic Law, Legend, and Custom*, Jason Aronson, Inc.:Northvale, New Jersey, 1994, p. 45.

³ Lewittes, p. 54.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 53.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 54.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 66.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 66-67.

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⁹<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/revelation/related-topics/the-jewish-wedding-analogy.html#:~:text=Jewish%20marriage%20included%20a%20number%20of%20steps%3A%20first%2C,bride%20remained%20closeted%20in%20her%20bridal%20chamber%29.%201>

¹⁰ Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, Lederer Books, Baltimore, MD., 1996, p. 49.

¹¹ Lewittes, p. 70.

¹² Ibid, p. 76.

¹³ Ariel Ministries, www.ariel.org/ffruit.htm#top, *The Jewish Wedding System and the Bride of Christ*, referenced May 12, 2009.

¹⁴ Kasdan, p. 51.

¹⁵ Lewittes, pp. 83-84

¹⁶ [https://www.bible-](https://www.bible-history.com/biblestudy/marriage.html#:~:text=In%20ancient%20Israel%20a%20woman%20who%20was%20betrot)

[history.com/biblestudy/marriage.html#:~:text=In%20ancient%20Israel%20a%20woman%20who%20was%20betrot](https://www.bible-history.com/biblestudy/marriage.html#:~:text=In%20ancient%20Israel%20a%20woman%20who%20was%20betrot)
[hed,promise%20between%20the%20bridegroom%20and%20bride%20to%20marry](https://www.bible-history.com/biblestudy/marriage.html#:~:text=In%20ancient%20Israel%20a%20woman%20who%20was%20betrot)

¹⁷ <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/ids/v49n2/10.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://catholicstand.com/imitate-john-baptist-friend-bridegroom/>

¹⁹ Kasdan, pp. 51-52.

²⁰ [https://www.bible-](https://www.bible-history.com/biblestudy/marriage.html#:~:text=In%20ancient%20Israel%20a%20woman%20who%20was%20betrot)

[history.com/biblestudy/marriage.html#:~:text=In%20ancient%20Israel%20a%20woman%20who%20was%20betrot](https://www.bible-history.com/biblestudy/marriage.html#:~:text=In%20ancient%20Israel%20a%20woman%20who%20was%20betrot)
[hed,promise%20between%20the%20bridegroom%20and%20bride%20to%20marry](https://www.bible-history.com/biblestudy/marriage.html#:~:text=In%20ancient%20Israel%20a%20woman%20who%20was%20betrot).

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ John Hagee, *The final Dawn Over Jerusalem* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), p. 186.

²⁴ Lewittes, p. 92.

²⁵ Redemption, *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, PC Study Bible formatted Electronic Database. Copyright © 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

²⁶ The Greek word *paralambano* in this verse is translated "take" and is a word used for a bridegroom coming to take his bride.²⁶ Footnote for John 14:3, *The Passion Translation* (Broad Street Publishers, 2018), p. 284.

²⁷ Joel Richardson, *Sinai to Zion* (Leawood, Kansas: Winepress Media, 2020), pp. 27-38.

²⁸ https://thectp.s3.amazonaws.com/forerunner/Notes/EndTimes/EndTimes_05.pdf, p. 4.