

1. Introduction

1.1 First, I want to preview the differences between marriage today and the institution of marriage which existed at the time of Christ and the early church.

1.1.1 Most of you know about marriage today. You find your right man or right woman, go down to the court house, get a license, find a preacher or a J.P. and have them say a few words over the deal and bingo you are married.

1.2 It was quite different in antiquity. Marriages were arranged. Often the groom would find a girl to his liking, enlist the help of a friend and then a negotiation took place with the father of the bride.

1.3 The bridegroom's friend would act as the bridegroom's agent. The agent would go to the home of the young lady, speak with the parents and a deal would be struck.

1.4 The dowry in most cases would be exchanged or promised and thus a marriage contract was recognized.

1.5 As part of the marriage contract the groom agreed at some undetermined time to come for his bride. The groom would first acquire a house and all that was needed for a secure home.

2. The bride, in our metaphor, is the universal church of the Church Age and the Bridegroom is Christ. Christ is at this moment building a home in heaven for us as His future bride.

2.1 Our agent is the Holy Spirit and the undetermined period is the length of the Church Age.

2.2 As was the marriage custom of Christ's day, we too as the bride now wait until our Bridegroom the Lord Jesus Christ, is ready to take us to His home in Heaven.

2.3 The shout of our Lord and the blast from the trumpet of God will signal the Bridegroom's readiness. We, as the bride, are set-apart for special service in time as we wait for the call of our Bridegroom.

1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

1Th 4:17 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 so shall we ever be with the Lord.

2.4 Now let's look further at how the Bible uses the analogy of Christ the Bridegroom, and the bride the church.

2.5 The metaphor is first used by John the Baptist in Joh 3:26-29.

2.5.1 John is the agent of the Messiah Jesus, the Bridegroom, and Israel is the potential bride. Unfortunately, Israel will not accept the proposal made by John and thus there is [at this point] no marriage. There was an offer but no acceptance.

Joh 3:26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

Joh 3:27 To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.

Joh 3:28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'

Joh 3:29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

2.5.2 Wycliffe in his Bible Encyclopedia has the following to say about Joh 3:26-29. I will first quote and then comment:

"John makes clear early on that he is not the Bridegroom destined to take Israel to himself as his bride. Rather, he makes clear he is a friend of the Bridegroom. It was the function of such a man to act as go-between in making the marriage arrangements. This is the way it is still done in many Muslim nations. A friend, an agent, will contact the family of the prospective bride and discussions will ensue and then in many cases a meeting is set up under a most controlled situation. Usually the meeting is short and casual. After that first meeting many marriages are then arranged. John was such an agent for Israel. He introduced them to their Messiah."

2.6 Our agent, who arranges our marriage, is not John the Baptist but the Holy Spirit of God. We, as believers of the Church Age, unlike Israel accepted the proposal of marriage communicated by the Holy Spirit and we, as the Bride of Christ, are now waiting for our Bridegroom to come and take us to His home.

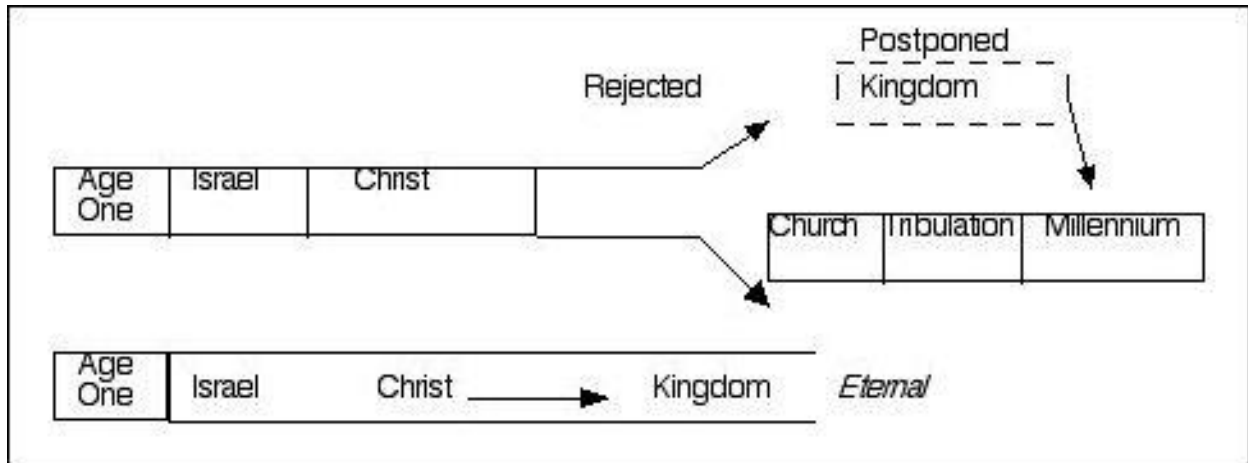
3. Let's look at a few points about John as the forerunner of Christ who declared I am not the Bridegroom, only his friend.

3.1 John's ministry had to fade as the ministry of Jesus increased.

Joh 3:30 He must become greater; I must become less.

3.2 John was a man of mystery. According to our Lord and Savior, John would have been the reincarnation of Elijah, had there been a national repentance on the part of Israel.

3.2.1 Let's take a look at our kingdom dispensation chart so we better understand the offer, rejection and the result of that rejection.



3.3 John began his ministry in the wilderness of Judea. In approximately A.D. 27, he attempted to introduce Israel to their Bridegroom, the Messiah Jesus.

Luk 1:80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

Luk 3:4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

3.4 The nature of his role is made evident by his early charter and the prophecy of the angel to Zacharias his father. John could only introduce Israel to Jesus; he could not force them to accept their Bridegroom.

Luk 1:17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

3.5 To understand fully these prophecies of John as the forerunner, we must analyze and compare several Scriptures.

3.5.1 Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament in about 400 B.C., tells of the need for Elijah to come first before the Messiah "could come to His Temple."

Mal 3:1 "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will **come to his Temple**; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD.

Mal 4:5 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

Mal 4:6 He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

3.5.2 Christ explained to the multitudes the potential of John being the reincarnated Elijah. "And if ye will receive it, this is Elijah, which was for to come."

Mat 11:12 "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

Mat 11:13 "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."

Mat 11:14 "And if ye will receive it, this is Elijah, which was for to come."

3.5.3 The Scribes of our Lord's day knew the law and its promise of Elijah as a condition precedent for the coming of the Messiah.

3.5.4 Both Mark and Matthew tell of the consternation of the disciples regarding questions concerning Elijah's coming.

Mar 9:11 And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

Mar 9:12 Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things ...

Mar 9:13 "But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

Mat 17:10 The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

Mat 17:11 Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things."

Mat 17:12 "But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."

Mat 17:13 Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

3.5.5 John the Baptist, therefore, would have been Elijah had Israel nationally repented, but since such repentance was not forthcoming, John was not Elijah.

3.6 Before the Second Advent, in fulfillment of the law, Elijah will return as one of the two witnesses who will effectively function during the early part of the Tribulation.

Rev 11:3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days..."

Rev 11:5 If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.

Rev 11:6 These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

Rev 11:7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

Rev 11:8 Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

Rev 11:9 For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial.

Rev 11:10 The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

Rev 11:11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them.

Rev 11:12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

Rev 11:13 At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

3.7 Now let's return to John in his role as the unsuccessful forerunner and friend of the Bridegroom.

3.7.1 Great numbers of Jews from Judea and neighboring regions flocked out to the wilderness to listen to John.

3.7.2 Many of them received his baptism of repentance in the Jordan River.

3.8 John's attitude to the Jewish "religionists" of the day was one of radical condemnation.

3.9 The existing order could not be reformed; the axe was already being swung to cut down the Jewish religion tree at the root.

3.9.1 If the Messiah was to be accepted, His new platform of grace and forgiveness had to replace their zealous self-righteousness.

Mat 3:5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

Mat 3:6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

Mat 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

3.9.2 John gave some hard demands concerning the nature of our Lord's Kingdom.

3.9.3 The religion of the Pharisees and Sadducees was no longer acceptable; there had to be a supernatural spiritual change.

Zec 4:6 ... This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel ... Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of the armies.

3.10 The Jews were expected to walk by faith and not by sight; not unlike that commanded for us today.

Pro 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not unto your own understanding.

Pro 3:6 In all thy way acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths.

2Co 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

3.11 A walk by faith would have resulted in a national repentance on the part of Israel, and a kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Thus, the prayer of our Lord:

Mat 6:10 "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

3.12 John denounced the Pharisees and other religious leaders of the nation as a brood of vipers, trying to escape the flame of divine judgment.

3.12.1 He sternly warned Israel not to rest on their Jewish lineage. God, said John, was quite capable of raising-up a people unrelated to Israel. A prophecy made not only by John, but by several Old Testament prophets and our Lord Himself.

3.12.2 This is exactly what has happened in this the Age of the Church--we are the "new people."

3.13 John the Baptist denied any value in natural descent from Abraham; he called for a new beginning ... "And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham."

3.14 As an agent for the Messiah and prospective Groom, John came to call out a loyal and repentant remnant. That remnant was to accept the advent of the greater than John and thus experience the long awaited Messianic Kingdom.

3.15 To the New Testament writers, John's significance lies in his being Christ's forerunner, an agent who introduced Israel to their potential Bridegroom. The negotiations have for now failed and the believers of the Church Age have become the Bride-in-waiting. Do not misunderstand me. Israel is out only for the duration of the Church Age.

3.16 The nature and relationship of John's ministry to God's time clock was best summarized by our Lord Himself.

Luk 16:16 "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it."

Mat 11:13 "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John."

3.17 While unsurpassed in personal stature, John was inferior in privilege to the least in the kingdom of Heaven.

Mat 11:11 "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

3.18 Like Moses's viewing of the promised-land from Pisgah, John could only stand on the threshold of the new age as its herald.

3.19 John like many of his Jewish friends is in heaven today waiting for the command "fall in and cover down." For those of you who have been in the military you know the command. After forming up they will await the proper command and then spiritual Israel will return to planet earth with Christ, all dressed up and a special place to go.

3.20 So much with reference to John as the friend of Israel. Now let's take a look at the marriage procedure of Jesus' day. As you will see there will be certain lessons we can draw from the metaphor of Christ the Bridegroom and the universal church, the bride.

4. No restrictions are stated in the Bible relative to the proper age for marriage. Also, there are many little ones who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ--the age of accountability varies with the child.

5. The young man who marries is termed in the Hebrew a **Bahur**, a choice, stalwart in the prime of his strength. He was to be economically secure. This requisite would indicate the male would be older and well established and thus capable of caring graciously for his younger bride. So also our Bridegroom, Christ, is more than able to take care of us.

6. His bride is said to be a virgin, a **Betula**, a young maiden attractive and ready for marriage.

7. The father considered it his duty to secure wives for his sons. God also is not willing that any should perish. Even hell itself was not created for man but for Satan and his fallen angels.

Mat 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

8. Very often in countries surrounding ancient Israel, the prospective bride and bridegroom would simply acquiesce to the arrangements made in the interests of their families.

9. On the other hand, there was opportunity in Israel for marriages based on courtship.

10. A young man could state his preference and open discussions with her family, through his agent. Jacob wanting Rachel is an example, thus he opened negotiations with Laban.

11. Jewish women were not kept secluded as in most Muslim lands.

12. Women tended sheep and some even carried water, gleaned fields and ran family businesses. Thus, young men could themselves look for prospective brides.

13. The selection of the bride was followed by a betrothal.

14. It was a formal proceeding and far more binding than our engagement.

15. In fact the men who were betrothed were already considered to be sons-in-law and the lady was a bride in all respects except intimacy.

16. A betrothed man was deferred from military service so he could go get his bride consummate the marriage and live with her for a year. During that time, they were to learn how to appreciate and love each other.

17. Sex before marriage and adultery were serious crimes in Israel. So also in the case for those betrothed to Christ who go "a whoring." The Lord Himself disciplines His own.

Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

18. The betrothal was ordinarily facilitated by a friend or legal representative on the part of the bridegroom. The agent would negotiate the amount of the dowry and the method of payment. The amount of the "gift" or dowry was usually paid at once to her family. The dowry for us is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, a payment totally acceptable to God.

19. Marriage, in both ancient Mesopotamia and Israel, was purely a civil contract and not formalized by any religious ceremony.

19.1. While the Bible does not specifically mention a written marriage contract, such contracts were stipulated in the Code of Hammurabi. Several marriage contracts have been discovered among the papyri at a 5th century B.C. Jewish colony.

19.2. The Mishnah (a part of the Talmud) describes such a contract and there it gives minute directions as to the handling of the dowry.

20. The essence of the marriage ceremony or festivities was the taking of the bride from her father's house and bringing her to the home of the bridegroom or his father. Thus, there was literal truth in the Hebrew expression "to take" a wife.

20.1 We as church age believers will meet Christ in the air and from there Christ will escort us to His home in Heaven just as the bridegroom of Christ's day escorted his bride home.

21. Very often considerable time elapsed between the contract of marriage and the consummation of the marriage. The time stipulated for the consummation was not specified in the agreement. Thus, also the indeterminate period of the Church Age; the mystery of the timing of the Rapture has been reserved only to the Father.

22. In formal attire, the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends or attendants, was led by a band in a festive route to the bride's house. The bride was beautifully dressed and adorned with jewels. The angels of heaven (at the Rapture) will escort our Lord to that point in the heavens where amidst the galaxies every believer will receive a uniform of glory for our resurrection bodies and together with Christ we will fly away to our heavenly abode.

23. The book of the Revelation speaks of our future glory in fine linen, bright and clean when in heaven we become the bride of Christ.

Rev 19:7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

Rev 19:8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

24. In antiquity the bridegroom, his bride and their wedding guests would be guests of honor at a "marriage supper." After our wedding in heaven to our Bridegroom, we too shall attend a great wedding supper, above the millennial earth. Our presence will be celebrated when Christ proudly introduces us as His bride.

25. In closing our analogy let's look to the epistles for further perspective of our metaphor: Christ the Bridegroom and the church the bride.

2Co 11:2 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.

2Co 11:3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

26. As we await our beloved Savior at the Rapture we must avoid being led astray. We can only avoid being led astray by the consistent intake of the Word under the filling of the Spirit.

27. Your relationship with Christ is like a marriage in the sense it must get better every day; and it will get better to the extent we learn more of Christ and His will for our lives.

Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

28. The specifics of the renewing are best summarized in the 5th chapter of the book of Ephesians.

Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

Eph 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

Eph 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Eph 5:28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

Eph 5:29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

Eph 5:30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

Eph 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Eph 5:33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

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