

The Marriage of the Lamb

What is the marriage of the Lamb? The marriage is the presentation of the church to Christ (Ephesians 5.27). “On the occasion of the marriage of the Lamb, Christ shall present the church to Himself in unsullied array, without one spot of defilement or wrinkle of age, sacred, pure, without any stain of blame – a beautiful bride. This the church will be eternally,” (Albert Leckie). In this age, the church is espoused to Christ, and, like Rebekah (Genesis 24), is travelling through the wilderness to meet a Person whom “not having seen we love,” (1 Peter 1.8).

When will the marriage take place? After the rapture, in the Father’s House, the bride will be united with Christ as His “meet” companion. By 19.7, the marriage ceremony is already complete, and the bride is called the Lamb’s “wife”. She is already regaled in a wedding garment that is comprised of the “acts of the saints that have been declared righteousness,” (19.8). The marriage therefore takes place at some point between the *bema* and the manifestation (19.11).

Where will the marriage take place? Isaac’s marriage to Rebekah took place *after* he received her into his mother’s tent. Our union to Christ will be perfected after He has received us into His Father’s house. See The Jewish Wedding System (below). Mark Sweetnam says, “It will be a heavenly ceremony and an intimate one, and in its love and joy, will stand in stark contrast to the dreadful tribulation events that will be unfolding on earth.”

Who is the Lamb’s wife? Is she restored Israel, or all the redeemed? No, she is the **church**. Jim Allen notes, “While the Lamb has been expected from the dawn of history (Genesis 22.7-8), Christ Himself bears this character only from His incarnation and, thus His bride can hardly predate the incarnation.” John the Baptist, the greatest and last of the OT prophets did not consider himself to be part of the bride of Christ (John 3.29).

- The church is described as the bride in Ephesians 5.32. The language (and context) teaches that the relationship that existed between Adam and Eve as husband and wife finds a parallel in the relationship between Christ and the Church.
- The local assembly at Corinth is described as a “chaste virgin” espoused to Christ (2 Corinthians 11.2). Israel, in contrast, can never be presented as a chaste virgin again. She has played the harlot (Jeremiah 3.1, 6, 8)!
- The only resurrected body in heaven at the time of the ceremony is the church. She has already been purified at the *bema* and is joined to Christ *before* the manifestation. No other body, such as tribulation martyrs or OT saints, has been raised or reviewed to be able to wear such wedding finery! See Daniel 12.1-2.
- In the OT, Israel is the **wife of Jehovah**. The marriage took place when Israel entered a formal covenant with Jehovah at Sinai. Sadly, she is an apostate (erring) wife who will be restored to Jehovah when the remnant nation is converted at the manifestation of Christ (cf. Isaiah 54.5-8; Jeremiah 3.14; 31.32). This restoration will certainly have the *joy* of a wedding about it but will not be a *second* marriage (Isaiah 62.4-5)!

The Jewish Wedding System. The marriage of the Lamb closely follows the custom of traditional Jewish weddings:

- **Arrangement.** The father of the groom arranged a match with the father of the bride and paid the bride price (Ephesians 1.4). This stage could occur when the bride and groom were yet children, and often the betrothed would not even meet each other until the day of the wedding. The bride price was the blood of Christ (cf. Ephesians 5.25).
- The bride’s family would also transfer a gift (dowry) to the groom or his family (cf. 1 Corinthians 6.20; 7.23). Also, the groom gave a gift to the bride, called the ‘bridegroom’s gift’, often jewelry or clothes (cf. Genesis 24.22). Christ has given us the Spirit of God from the Father (John 15.26; 16.7; Ephesians 1.13-14).
- **Preparation.** This was the period of the betrothal (cf. Matthew 1.18). It lasted for at least one year but could last much longer if the arrangement was made when the bride and groom were children. During the period of the preparation, the bride was prepared to be a fitting wife. It was also the period in which she was observed for her purity, which is why the betrothal always lasted for a minimum of one year – to allow at least a full nine months to pass.
- After the betrothal, the couple was considered married (only dissolved by a formal divorce or death), even though it was not yet physically consummated, and the couple did not yet live together (cf. 2 Samuel 3.14). If the husband died during the betrothal, the bride was considered a widow.
- **Fetching the Bride.** The father of the groom determined the date of the wedding day. At an appointed time, he told his son, “Go, son, and get your bride, and bring her home!” Prior to leaving to fetch the bride, the groom must already have a place prepared for her as their abode.
- The bride was escorted to the groom’s house in bridal *procession*, which traditionally took place at night (cf. Matthew 25.1-13). Friends would join the procession parading through the streets loudly saluting the couple and praising the virtues of the bride. Lamps or torches were used by the wedding party to light the way.

- This is a clear picture of the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18). Christ will come from Heaven into the earth's atmosphere – entering the realm of the home of the bride – and lead her back to the Father's House (John 14).
- **Ceremony.** The Jewish ceremony was conducted in the home of the groom. Only a few – usually the immediate family and two witnesses – were invited to come in and observe the wedding ceremony (19.6-8). Prior to the wedding ceremony, the bride underwent a ritual immersion for ritual cleansing. This parallels the judgment seat of Christ, the final point of cleansing and sanctification of the bride. When all was ready, the hand of the groom would be placed into the hand of the bride, at which point the marriage would be fully ratified.
- **Marriage Feast.** Only a few were invited to the Jewish wedding ceremony, but many more were invited to the marriage feast – to celebrate the marriage of the son. The divine invitation to the wedding feast is sent out as the Tribulation comes to an end (19.9; Matthew 22.1-14). Then, the Second Coming is described (19.11-16), followed by a 75-day interval (Daniel 12.11-13) during which both the Old Testament and Tribulation saints will be resurrected to partake of the wedding feast. The believing Gentile “sheep” will also be present (Matthew 25.34) as well as the saved remnant of Israel (Romans 11.26). The length and cost of the supper was determined by the wealth and resources of the groom's father. When His beloved Son is married, the Father of all grace (whose wealth is unlimited) will give His Son and the bride a celebration that will last for 1000 years!

Mark Sweetnam superbly describes the “marriage supper” (feast):

- The custom of Jewish marriages at the time of Christ was for the marriage ceremony to be followed by a marriage feast that would last for days, and to which a great number of friends would be invited. It was a feast of this sort that the Lord Jesus attended in Cana of Galilee (John 2) and that was the subject of the parable in Matthew 22.
- In contrast to the heavenly intimacy of the marriage ceremony, this feast is earthly and public. The whole millennial reign of Christ with its blessing and its bounty will be the feast at which this marriage is celebrated.
- The parables of Matthew 22 and 25 furnish part of the guest list. Those who have heeded the gospel of the kingdom, who have prepared for the arrival of the Bridegroom, and who will enter the Millennium will enjoy the great feast. In addition, saints of past dispensations, now in resurrection bodies, will gather at the feast, as friends of the bridegroom.
- It is God's intention ‘that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus,’ (Ephesians 2.7). As she appears with Him in all the glory of her bridal garments, the wonder of what His grace has done in calling, and cleansing, and perfecting the ruined wrecks of sin will be evident to all.
- As she sits with Him in the place of honour at the marriage feast, all creation will learn afresh of the astounding accomplishment of divine grace. And amidst it all, we will enjoy a perfect closeness, intimacy, and communion that will grow yet more perfect as the ages of eternity roll.

Introductory Notes to Revelation 19

- Revelation 19.1-10 continues a parenthesis (17.1-19.10) which describes the divine judgment of Babylon.
- These first ten verses of the chapter describe heaven's joyous response to the destruction of Babylon in response to the command of 18.20, “Rejoice over her, *thou* heaven.”
- There is a contrast between the “great whore” (17.1) and the pure, resplendent fine linen of the wife of the Lamb. With the removal in judgment of Satan's counterfeit bride, the time has come for the manifestation of Christ's bride.
- The chapter divides into two main sections. vv.1-10 describe events in Heaven prior to the return of Christ to earth (composed of three elements). vv.11-21 describe the Second Coming and its subsequent events.

1. The Hallelujah Chorus [vv.1-8]

v.1. The *first* hallelujah (vv.1-2) is for the fall of *religious* New Babylon. **After these things** repeats the expression from 18.1 and marks the third part (vision) of the Babylon parenthesis (17.1-19.10). The first part concerned the judgment of *religious* New Babylon (17.1-18), the second part concerned the judgment of *commercial* New Babylon (18.1-24). This third and final part (19.1-10) describes heaven rejoicing in what the judgment of Babylon has accomplished. John hears the **great voice of much people** (crowd) **in heaven**, or “I heard what sounded like the loud voice of a vast throng in heaven,” [NET]. This crowd likely includes the host of all the redeemed in heaven, including the martyred dead (15.2-4) and the apostles and prophets (18.20). It is possible that angels join the chorus too, thus involving the whole of heaven's host. It would make a ‘great sound’ indeed! The first word to fall from their lips is **Alleluia**, a word which only occurs four times in the NT, all in this chapter. The Greek word is a transliteration of a Hebrew phrase comprised of the verb *hallel* (to praise) and *Jah* (Jehovah). The word is used often in the Psalms, especially in the “Hallel of Egypt” (Psalms 113-118) which celebrates Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The first mention of the word in the Psalms (104.35) expresses praise for God's judgment of the wicked. A far greater deliverance (salvation) and judgment (v.2) are in view here. The heavenly multitude praise God by stating and acknowledging various perfections He owns. **Salvation** – the whole programme of eternal redemption that will be realised and manifested in the kingdom – has been achieved by God's almighty **power**, resulting

in His eternal **glory** (the revealed excellence deity displayed). All these qualities belong inherently to **God**. [Note. “honour” (worthiness to receive praise) is omitted in RV & JND].

v.2. Two reasons are given for the praise ascribed to God. First, His **judgments** are **true and righteous**. That is, the sentences God passes are always in accordance with His word and what is factual (true) and just (righteous). All of God’s actions are grounded in His perfect nature (cf. 16.7). Second, God has **judged the great whore** (Babylon). This is a specific example of God’s justice, in fact, His justice would be called into question if He had not judged Babylon – such was the universal extent of her fornication. The saints can now rejoice because they see that God “has put everything right” (Schreiner). The “great whore” specifically refers to religious New Babylon (17.1) which did **corrupt** (pervert morally) **the earth with her fornication** by seducing the world into unfaithfulness to the true God by paganism, false religion and idolatry (with its associated immorality). This system has been responsible for the **blood** of many of God’s **servants** through the ages – which blood has now been **avenged** by her destruction (cf. 6.9-11). The word “avenged” does not describe an indiscriminate, unrestrained wrath – but punishment arising out of justice [*ekdikeō*]. Jim Allen says, “God has now called Babylon to account for the way she treated His servants. From its beginning Babylon has hated testimony for God with an implacable hatred and has tried to destroy the saints. God has now acted to settle the account; the ‘day of vengeance of our God’ (Isaiah 61.2) has arrived.”

v.3. The *second* hallelujah is for the destruction of the city of Babylon, the commercial and political capital of the world. The heavenly multitude of v.1 adds a second **Alleluia** to the first which has the effect of heightening the emphasis on the praise due to Jehovah. The reference to **her smoke** obviously refers to the destruction of Babylon (18.9, 18) in similar language to that of Sodom & Gomorrah (Genesis 19.28) and Edom (Isaiah 34.10). That the smoke **rose up for ever and ever** is testament to her final, complete and irreversible judgment. The verb ‘rose up’ is vividly portrayed by the present tense – smoke ‘keeps on ascending’. The phrase “for ever and ever” suggests permanence but may also indicate that a column of smoke from the charred remains of Babylon will ascend throughout the millennial reign of Christ as a testament to the righteous judgment of God. Perhaps there is also a hint of the eternal fate of those associated with Babylon.

v.4. The *third* hallelujah (vv.4-5) is in the form of worshipful praise to God from those around His throne. The **four and twenty elders** and the **four beasts** (living creatures) join the hallelujah chorus. This is the last reference to the elders and living creatures which were first mentioned in chapter four in association with the throne room of God (4.4, 6). If the elders represent the church in priestly ministry before the throne of God, this last mention is significant because the church is about to be seen as the bride of Christ. The indication is that the priestly representation of the church is no longer needed. The **four beasts** are leaders of the heavenly court and represent the highest order of celestial beings. They are symbolic of the living creation, which displays the character and attributes of God Himself, and they execute and participate in the administration of divine justice (cf. 6.1). Both the elders and the living creatures **fell down and worshipped God**, prostrating themselves before Him. Their **Amen; Alleluia** is a solemn affirmation of the hallelujah chorus already sounded in the previous verses. They are in full agreement, “So be it, praise Jehovah!” The whole phrase comes from Psalm 106.48 where it follows a prayer for deliverance from the nations. Here that deliverance has already occurred, and this is thanksgiving for God’s mighty act (Osborne).

v.5. It is quite possible that this third refrain comes from the saints on earth – they are described as “small and great” which generally relates to social distinctions that pertain upon earth. The **voice** which **came out of the throne** is unidentified. Like the voices in 9.13 and 16.17, this voice has heavenly authority but is unlikely to be that of God or the Lamb because it speaks of “our God” (not ‘my God’, cf. 3.2 NET). The voice comes, literally, ‘out from’ [*ek*] the throne as to its direction. The throne symbolises divine administration and authority. It could therefore be the voice of one of the living creatures. The call is for the hearers to immediately and continually **praise our God** (cf. Psalm 135.1, 20). The company on earth are described as **servants** of God, *even* those that **fear Him**. The omission of “and” [see JND] shows that only one company is addressed. As servants, they are the special possession and bondslaves of God. As those that fear God, they give honour and reverence to Him. The final phrase, **both small and great**, refers to people of every social and economic status. All stand equally before God, and all are called upon to praise Him!

v.6. The *fourth* hallelujah (vv.6-8) is for the imminent establishment of God’s kingdom on earth (v.6), and the marriage of the Lamb (v.7). The word **and** [*kai*] could be translated “then” to indicate an implied sequence of events. The **voice of a great multitude** raised the *first* hallelujah in v.1, and a similar company raises the *final* hallelujah here. It is quite possible that each company is joining together to create one, unified and magnificent company – all the redeemed and every angelic voice in heaven, as well as the voices of the saints on earth. Every voice is swelling to join the chorus of praise to God – **Alleluia** is the cry. The sound is compared to the voice of a large crowd of people, the roar of a mighty waterfall (cf. 1.15), and deafening peals of thunder. The scene is fittingly dramatic because of “the enormous significance of its pronouncement: God has finally established His universal reign over all the earth,” (R L Thomas). The **Lord God**

omnipotent [*pantokratōr*, almighty] **reigneth** signals the climax of history. The rule of Babylon has been destroyed, now the earth is about to receive her rightful King alongside His bride (v.11). The kingdom of God will now replace the universal rule and influence of Babylon, and that forever. Direct divine rule will be manifested on earth during the millennium, before being exercised eternally from New Jerusalem. It is in this context that the marriage of the Lamb is introduced. Why? “At His enthronement (Psalm 2.6), the Lamb will display His bride in all her purity and beauty. She will be perfectly fitted for display to the world over which He will be the everlasting King,” (John Riddle).

v.7. The people of God are exhorted to be **glad** [*chairō*] and **rejoice** [*agalliaō*] and **give honour** (glory) to God in light of the beginning of God’s eternal reign, and the incredibly joyous event that initiates that reign – the **marriage of the Lamb**. This wedding ceremony is the moment anticipated in Ephesians 5.27 when the church is presented to Christ as His blood-bought bride. The church will be placed alongside Christ without one spot of defilement or wrinkle of age, sacred and pure – a beautiful bride. That Israel is not in view should be evident as this is not the marriage of Jehovah (cf. Jeremiah 3.14; 31.31-32). Israel, as an erring wife, will be restored but not until the remnant nation is converted at the manifestation of Christ. The marriage of the Lamb is, or ‘has’ **come** (aorist). This describes the *arrival*, rather than the *anticipation*, of an event. The bride has made herself ready and is *already* dressed in wedding apparel which will be displayed at the manifestation of Christ (cp. 19.8, 14). This bride is the **wife** [*gynē*] of the Lamb. The same word has been used of a *woman* representing Israel (12.1), and the *great harlot* representing Babylon (17.3-4). That she has **made herself ready** shows that the process of preparation is complete – her bridal attire is fine linen, clean and white (v.8). Though her attire comes from God (v.8), she is described here as having made “herself” ready. This is a reference to the judgment seat of Christ (*bema*). The bride’s own actions and accomplishments on earth (by divine grace) have been reviewed by Christ and tried by fire. Walter Scott says, “Our lives must be reviewed at the bema of Christ. The light of the throne will be cast over and upon every moment of our lives, discovering the hidden, and bringing out the true character of act, word and service.” What remains will weave this glorious bridal attire.

v.8. To **her was** (divinely) **granted** refers to the *bema* – all testimony through the ages has been divinely evaluated. What remains (to be worn) is that which is pleasing to Christ and fitting to adorn His bride. Thus she is **arrayed in fine linen**, an expensive and beautiful cloth like that worn by Joseph (Genesis 41.42), David (1 Chronicles 15.27) and Mordecai (Esther 8.15). Her dress is in sharp contrast to the gaudy, seductive dress of Satan’s counterfeit bride – the great harlot (17.4). This fine linen is **clean** (spotless) and **white** (radiant) – the sober dress of a woman of dignity. The fine linen represents the **righteousness of saints**, which, being in the plural, is better translated as “the righteous acts of saints” [RV]. This is not a reference to positional (legal) righteousness, so much as the practical deeds of the saints that have been declared righteous following the review of the *bema*. These deeds were all of grace, being the outcome of the presence of the Spirit, and the result of His activities in the saints.

2. The Call to the Marriage Supper [v.9]

v.9. With the fourfold hallelujah concluded, invitations are sent out to the marriage supper of the Lamb – equivalent to the festivities of the Kingdom on earth. **He saith unto me** probably refers to the conducting angel who began speaking in 17.1 (cf. 17.15). This occasion calls for a special command to John to **write** and record the fourth beatitude of the book. Hence, “**Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb**”. There is a clear distinction to be made between the marriage *ceremony* and marriage *supper* of the Lamb – they were different events, at different times and in different places (see introductory notes). The marriage ceremony, to which a few close relatives were invited, took place in the intimate surroundings of the father’s house. The marriage feast (wedding supper) began on the evening of the wedding day and lasted for many days. It was a much larger celebration attended by many invited guests. The Lord Jesus frequently compared His millennial reign to a wedding feast (Matthew 8.11; 22.1-14; 25.1-13; Luke 14.16-24). Many guests, including resurrected OT saints and Tribulation saints, will be invited to the messianic banquet. Those who are **called** are those who respond to the gospel preached throughout the tribulation and are “blessed” as they enter into the enjoyment of the kingdom festivities. There will be other guests too including John the Baptist (John 3.29) and all the OT saints (Luke 13.28). Given the significance of these events, John is reassured with the statement, “**These are the true sayings [logos] of God.**” This is a similar statement to the ‘faithful sayings’ of the Pastoral Epistles (e.g. 1 Timothy 1.15) and declares the truth of the prophecies and revelations since 17.1, including the destruction of Babylon.

3. The Spirit of Prophecy [v.10]

v.10. Overwhelmed and overawed, John **fell** (threw himself) at the **feet** of the angel to **worship him**. Jim Allen says, “Homage to a superior is in order but John’s spirit is so moved, either by the excitement of the moment or by the feeling that the angel represented God, that he is in danger of giving to the angel the worship which belongs to God alone.” The response of the angel is somewhat clearer in the NET, “but he said, ‘Do not do this! I am only a fellow servant with you and your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony about Jesus.’” Both saints and angels are simply servants of God. The interest in angel worship was rife in Asia Minor, and a risk to assembly testimony (cf. Colossians 2.18). Thus the angel

strongly rebukes John (cf. 22.8). The word **fellowservant** [*syndoulos*] merely describes John and all believers in like terms to the angels – all are fellow slaves of God. The word does not abase angels but rather exalts John and his brethren! These servants of God **have the testimony of Jesus**, a phrase which first appeared in 1.2 and signifies either the ‘testimony which Jesus *bore*’ (and has now committed to His servants), or “the testimony *about* Jesus,” [NET] as an official witness to the world. Perhaps tribulation saints are particularly in view as many “false Christs” and “false prophets” will arise at that time (Matthew 24.24). These believers will be intent on proclaiming the true identity of Jesus as God manifest in flesh (cf. 1 John 2.22; 4.1-3). Therefore, whether an angel or John, or another saint – *all* are engaged in the same work, that of bearing testimony to Jesus. In this respect, all are on a level playing field. We should not, therefore, worship one another, but all should unite in the common **worship of God**. Finally, this testimony to the Lord Jesus is described as the **spirit of prophecy**. This is a difficult phrase capable of several interpretations. It *could* refer to the Holy Spirit in which case it would mean that “the testimony given by Jesus is the substance of what the Spirit inspires Christian prophets to speak,” (R L Thomas). Alternatively, the word “spirit” could refer to the essence of prophecy. Thus, the design and theme of all prophecy (the word of God) is Jesus. The study of prophecy is of no value apart from Him!