

Will You Marry Me? (Part Two)

by Staff

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Do we realize to what we have been called? We may glibly answer with the standard phrases about the Kingdom of God, His Family, and eternal life, but do we really understand what this means? For those of us who are changed to spirit at our Savior's return, it means marriage to the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. We have been called to become His Bride.

Not only will we attend the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, we will live and reign with Christ, not just for a thousand years, but for all eternity. We will be His constant companion, His confidante, and His helpmeet. We will have been fully prepared for this endless, joyous responsibility by our lives in the flesh, in which we patterned our lives after Him. We will be just like Him, a fitting Bride!

Boaz and Ruth

Last time, we saw several biblical parallels of Christ's marriage to the church. The marriage of Boaz and Ruth the Moabitess is also a picture of the scheduled wedding of the King of kings. The story takes place just after Passover, as the barley harvest is beginning, after the wavesheaf offering. This is a type of God calling the church first, in the smaller barley harvest (Ruth 1:22). The book of Ruth is traditionally read during the Feast of Pentecost, so its themes are "meat in due season."

Ruth converts to the true religion after the death of her husband (verses 16-17). Spiritually, she is considered of the seed of Abraham through this act, as are all who are of God's spiritual household. In Ruth's case, she is also related by marriage to the wealthy landowner, Boaz. Recall that Rebekah and the Bride of Christ are also of the same household or kin of the bridegroom.

Boaz, a righteous man in an unrighteous time, obeys God's rules of generosity (Deuteronomy 24:19-21) and leaves the corners of his field unharvested. He even commands his reapers to drop sheaves for Ruth and other poor gleaners. Ruth in turn is looking for a field owner in whose eyes she may find grace (Ruth 2:1-3), just as the Bride of Christ finds grace. Boaz notices her hard work, and no doubt her beauty, and commands his men to be even more generous with her. He urges her to glean in *his* field, and not another—more obvious lessons (verse 8). He graciously invites this poor woman to eat and drink from his table, to eat his bread, and to dip it in the wine vinegar (verse 14). This should bring to mind what Paul says to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 10:16-17, 21).

Through the laws of levirate marriage, Boaz buys the rights to marry Ruth, redeeming her from a closer kinsman (Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 4:1-12). Boaz, much older than Ruth, loves her dearly, as Jesus, who has been since the beginning, loves His new Bride dearly. Just as Boaz becomes Ruth's redeemer, we too have a Redeemer. Jesus bought us with the price of His own blood—and now He is our Master and Bridegroom. As such, we become co-heirs of everything promised to Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16-17).

At the end of the barley and early wheat harvest, Boaz marries Ruth, right about the time of Pentecost (Ruth 4:13). Their marriage unites Israelite and Gentile into one, just as Jesus "is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us" (Ephesians 2:14). In the same way, at the end of the small, spiritual barley harvest and the early wheat harvest, which

pictures this small, total number that comprise the elect of God, Christ will marry His church. Boaz and Ruth were King David's great-grandparents and ancestors of Christ (Ruth 4:18-21).

The Proposal

In the New Covenant, the Father still selects the Bride for Jesus (John 6:44). In the days of the apostles, once the bride was selected and the bride-price agreed upon, the man seeking a bride would go to the young lady in mind and present her with his cup of wine. He would tell her his cup represents his life and proposes marriage by offering his cup to her. He would then voice his desire to have them share their lives together. If she takes his cup and drinks of it, she accepts his marriage proposal and agrees to live by the terms of the new covenant they are making with each other. Sound familiar?

"Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matthew 26:27-28). When Jesus uttered this, the disciples were probably taken aback, wondering why He was using words similar to what a young man would say in proposing to a woman.

Every year we drink of the Master's cup, we remind ourselves of the time we accepted our Fiancé's cup and formed a new covenant with Him. We look forward to that time when the King puts on a wedding for His Son (Matthew 22:1-14), when we will be the Bride at that wedding! We will sit at the King's table and participate with our new Husband as He raises His cup again, for the first time since that night in Jerusalem.

Jesus and His Father go a step further and give us a *guarantee* of His promise to marry us. On the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2), fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, God sent a "deposit," the "earnest" of the Holy Spirit—the guarantee of the full payment to come later (Ephesians 1:13-14), when we are changed from flesh to spirit. There may be more here than some realize.

The Greek word for "earnest" is *arrabon*. When taken in the context of our understanding of a glorious wedding coming, it is a word packed with meaning. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* comments:

Originally, "earnest-money" deposited by the purchaser and forfeited if the purchase was not completed, [*arrabon*] was probably a Phoenician word, introduced into Greece. In general usage it came to denote "a pledge" or "earnest" of any sort; in the NT it is used only of that which is assured by God to believers; it is said of the Holy Spirit as the divine "pledge" of all their future blessedness, . . . particularly of their eternal inheritance.

Then comes this final sentence: "In modern Greek *arrabona* is an 'engagement ring.'" Of course! It makes so much sense. When Jesus asks us to drink of His cup—and we do—He follows by giving us a sign of His pledge: a kind of engagement ring, an earnest of His Holy Spirit! All this happened on the very likely anniversary of God's proposal to Israel, the Day of Pentecost, about the time Boaz and Ruth pledged their troth.

The Wedding

Who will perform the wedding? Matthew 22:2 gives us a huge clue! "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king, who arranged a wedding for his son." Who is this king? God the Father, of course!

Who else would be qualified? Jesus' parable in Matthew 22 goes on to say the King (God the Father) is in attendance, meeting the guests (verse 11). These are clues.

Where will the wedding take place? Psalm 45, called the "song of loves," appears to be describing the same event:

The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors; the virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You. With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought; they shall enter the King's palace. (verses 13-15)

There has been extensive speculation on this point, and we cannot be completely definite about the answer. Some speculate it will take place on the earth, but it seems God the Father performs the wedding. The Father, however, does not come to the earth until the Millennium is over (see Revelation 20 and 21).

We are given another clue in the way weddings were conducted in ancient times. Recall that Rebekah had to leave her home in Nahor and go to where Isaac—who took her into Sarah's tent—lived. Sarah is a type of heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:22-26), and "Jerusalem above . . . is the mother of us all." If Isaac, a type of Jesus Christ, took Rebekah, a type of the church, into Sarah's tent, we may deduce that the wedding will take place in heaven.

Also, remember that in Jesus' day, only the father of the bridegroom knew for sure when the wedding was ready, hence Jesus' words, "But of that day and hour no one knows . . . but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36). When the father gives the word to begin the wedding, the bridegroom goes to get the bride and takes her back to his father's house for the actual wedding.

In addition, the wedding chamber itself was usually in or near the bridegroom's father's house. No wonder Jesus says in John 14:2-3 that His Father's house has many rooms, mansions, abodes! He says, "I go to prepare a place for you. And . . . I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

Notice that in several places in Revelation, after the seventh—or last—angel has sounded in Revelation 11:15, we find the 144,000, the "firstfruits," standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb, Christ (Revelation 14:1, 3-4). This cannot be earthly Mount Zion, as Christ does not finally return to earth as conquering King until Revelation 19. This may be a vision of Christ and His Bride after their marriage, and they are standing on a heavenly Mount Zion (see Hebrews 12:22).

In Revelation 14:3, the 144,000 are described as being "redeemed from the earth." Who are the "redeemed"? God's church is redeemed. Remember Boaz was the redeemer of Ruth, who was a type of the church. The real Redeemer is Christ (Isaiah 44:6). Thus, the 144,000 are clearly those redeemed by Christ, the Lamb. They follow Him wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4; John 12:26).

Though heaven is clearly not the final reward of the saved, it is exciting to contemplate the distinct possibility that the wedding of Christ and His Bride could take place in the heavenly Temple of God, with God the Father Himself officiating! We cannot be dogmatic about this, but it is exciting to think about. Jesus was able to endure His severe test on the stake by looking to "the joy that was set before Him" (Hebrews 12:1-2). We can—we must—do the same. Looking forward to such a close union with our Savior can help us have a joy that sees us through the many rough spots of daily life.

We pick up the story in Revelation 19:5. The setting is still heaven, with the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures before God:

Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

After this, we see heaven opened once more (Revelation 19:11-13), revealing a white horse and the Word of God riding it. The armies in heaven follow Him, at which time the assembled enemy forces surrounding Jerusalem and other areas of modern-day Israel are destroyed by the Word and His forces (verses 14-21). Jesus and His Bride land on the Mount of Olives, which splits in two, and they conquer and settle in earthly Jerusalem to reign for a thousand years (Zechariah 13; Revelation 20).

Commitment

Jesus warns in Matthew 20 that many who are invited to the wedding take their calling lightly and spurn this momentous union. They will miss out. Time is short. The Bride of Christ is not yet ready, and we may be caught by surprise when He comes for us. Five of the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are commanded to repent, to wake up, to answer the knock at the door, to be ready for Jesus' coming. Like a loving Husband, He wants us to respond so that we will sit on His throne with Him.

With Pentecost over and the long summer months stretching out ahead of us, we need to remember the marriage proposal from our Master and Fiancé. Jesus asks: "Will you marry Me?" If we raised the Master's cup to our lips at Passover, we recommitted ourselves to our betrothal.

Our actions since we accepted the engagement ring of His Spirit show if we are serious about the wedding—or not. We have been called to change, to overcome, to put off carnality and put on righteousness—to put on Christ Himself. If we are committed to this union, we are growing, bearing fruit, and becoming more compatible with our Fiancé. We should be walking as He walked, living as He lived, and we can do this because Christ Himself dwells in us by His Spirit (John 17:23; Romans 8:9-11; II Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 4:19; etc.).

We should be fulfilling what Paul prays for us in Ephesians 3:14-21:

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

When the Bride enters the Palace, we will be presented incorruptible to our King, Jesus Christ; we will be without spot or wrinkle, without fault (Psalm 45:13-15; I Corinthians 15:49-54; Ephesians 5:27; Jude 24). We will be like Him, not just in spirit body, but also in mind and attitude. We will comprise the Wife of the King of Kings, His holy companion, His helper—one body, mind, and Spirit with Him. His Wife will sit on His throne with Him and remain with Him wherever He goes forever. God speed the day!