

Jewish Marriage Analogy

As a Messianic ministry, how can you be post-tribulationists? Certainly you have heard about the Jewish Marriage Analogy where Believers as the Bride of Messiah are to be raptured up to Heaven prior to the Tribulation to experience the wedding feast.

The idea that the Body of Believers is the Bride of Messiah is usually based on the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 11:2: "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Messiah I might present you as a pure virgin" (NASU). This one verse of Scripture has been responsible for innumerable teachings in evangelical circles on how we as Believers are to be virtuous in our faith and devotion for God and live as though we were virgins awaiting our future husband. Unfortunately, such teachings have also been a strong cause of passivity. Many in the faith have been taught to view themselves in a very pacifistic way, and simply wait for Yeshua to whisk them away on some random day. Somehow, for many, the admonitions to fight the good fight of faith are ignored (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7).

It is important to note that when Paul tells the Corinthians that he hopes to present them as a virtuous bride prepared for her husband, that he says in 2 Corinthians 11:1, "I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness" (NASU). The NLT has, "I hope you will be patient with me as I keep on talking like a fool. Please bear with me." What is this to mean? To what extent are we to interpret Paul's comments about us being as a "bride"? How literal did Paul intend his words to be interpreted?

The Prophet Isaiah also saw what we might consider "the Bride," and he gives a somewhat different description than the Apostle Paul:

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will designate. You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. It will no longer be said to you, 'Forsaken,' nor to your land will it any longer be said, 'Desolate'; but you will be called, 'My delight is in her,' and your land, 'Married'; for the LORD delights in you, and to Him your land will be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:1-5, NASU).

If you read this prophecy closely, the city of Jerusalem is described as being "the Bride" as well. The text is quite clear that the sons of Israel will "marry" this Bride. But just like Paul emphasizing being a "betrothed virgin" in passing, so the Hebrew in Isaiah reveals that this is to be taken metaphorically. The verb *baal* (בָּעַל) does mean "to get married" (HALOT),¹ but it appears in the Nifal stem, implying a passive action. Whenever these terms are used, important spiritual concepts are being communicated using the imagery of a human marriage.

Some may interpret this passage in the sense of Believers in Yeshua being "the city" and that the Messiah will marry them. But the Hebrew *bachur* (בָּחֹרִית) clearly means "young man" (BDB)² and the Scripture says "a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you" (NIV). Others may try to say that this text speaks of "the Father's bride," and Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 speaks of "the Son's bride." But Yeshua and the Father are One (John 10:30), and They will have only *one bride*. God is not divided and He cannot be a polygamist.

In both 2 Corinthians 11 and Isaiah 62 we see allegorical statements made by both the Apostle Paul and Prophet Isaiah detailing important spiritual truths. Paul speaks of Believers living as virgins, awaiting their coming

¹ HALOT, 1:142.

² BDB, 104.

husband and admonishes us to be pure—set-apart from the world and holy unto God. Isaiah speaks of the future state of Jerusalem where we as the Body of Messiah under Yeshua’s authority, will “marry her.” Interestingly enough, this imagery is confirmed by Paul in Galatians 4:26 where he says “the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.” God, who is one, will marry this bride.

The importance of Jerusalem being the *ultimate Bride of Messiah* is emphasized in Revelation 21. Yeshua shows the Apostle John the city of New Jerusalem coming down to the Earth as a “bride”:

“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel” (Revelation 21:9-12, NASU).

Is the Bride of Messiah the Body of Messiah? To this, we must answer: **yes and no**. In one respect, we as Believers are to be “as a bride” in preparation for our coming husband. We are to be spiritual virgins and not adulterating ourselves with the world. We are certainly to seek a husband-wife intimacy with our Redeemer. Ultimately, however, the true Bride of the Messiah is the Heavenly city of New Jerusalem. As members of the *ekklēsia*—or the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12; cf. Galatians 6:16)—we as “the children of Israel,” so to speak, will marry this bride. In this respect, we as Believers are not the Bride of Messiah. In the final equation, we as Believers are part of the Body of Messiah—but are not the “Bride of Messiah.”

Using some of these themes, many pre-tribulationists believe in what is commonly called the “Jewish Marriage Analogy.” In his book *The Great Escape* Jack Van Impe says, “According to Oriental marriage customs, we are now in the *betrothal* stage—promised to Jesus Christ...[I] believe we are about to be called into the heavenlies for that great marriage ceremony...”³ Van Impe, and many other pre-tribulationists like him, do not consider the study of the Hebraic Roots of our faith important for spiritual growth and maturation. They do not embrace the foundational elements of the Messianic lifestyle such as keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, celebrating the appointed times of Leviticus 23, or eating kosher. Yet, they will accept what is purported to be a “Jewish teaching” on marriage that seems to support their pre-tribulationist beliefs.

It is very important to us to note that this “Jewish Marriage Analogy” is not readily attested to anywhere in the Bible. Post-tribulationist scholar Robert H. Gundry offers the following remarks in his book *First the Antichrist*:

“[I]f a purported pretrib coming to fetch the church to heaven is supposed to reflect the ancient Semitic custom of a groom’s fetching the bride to his home, what is Jesus’ taking the church with Him back to earth right after the marriage supper, and for a thousand years, supposed to reflect? An ancient Semitic custom of the groom’s taking his bride back to *her* home to live with her for a long time? The pretrib reasoning here gets itself into a pickle by injecting a marriage custom that isn’t even mentioned in the biblical text at hand, and then giving that custom argumentative weight of an allegorical sort but not carrying out the allegory consistently. In fact, our ignorance of ancient Semitic marriage customs exceeds our knowledge. **And what knowledge we do have shows considerable variation in these customs.**”⁴

These statements should signify that the so-called “Jewish Marriage Analogy” may have a shaky Scriptural basis. Is it attested anywhere in the Gospels by Yeshua?

A common Scripture often quoted in reference to this “marriage analogy” is John 14:2-3: “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also” (NASU). By quoting this, pre-tribulationists tell us that Yeshua is presently in Heaven preparing a marriage residence for us, and one day the Father will tell Him to gather the saints to “consummate the marriage” prior to the Tribulation period. But is this really what He is saying?

First of all, Yeshua tells us that in His “Father’s house *are* many dwelling places” or “many mansions” (KJV) or “rooms” (RSV, ESV; Grk. sing. *monē*, μονή). The verb *eisin* (εἰσιν) appears in the present active indicative tense in John’s Greek, indicating that these dwelling places presently are in Heaven. This implies that if any of us die in the faith, we have some kind of a dwelling waiting for us in Heaven. Yeshua does not need to go and “create them.”

³ Jack Van Impe, *The Great Escape* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 69.

⁴ Bob Gundry, *First the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), pp 94-95.

Secondly, can we assume that the Father's house is *exclusively Heaven*? The Messiah referred to His "Father's house" as the Temple in John 2:15-17. Throughout the Hebrew Tanach there are passages that refer to this house, which is "the house of the LORD" or *beit ADONAI* (בֵּית יְהוָה). It includes the Tabernacle in the wilderness (1 Samuel 1:24), Solomon's Temple (2 Chronicles 2:1; 7:16), and the future Millennial Temple (Isaiah 2:2-4; Joel 3:18). Furthermore, the *ekklēsia* or assembly of called out ones is allegorically understood to be "the Temple" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

But what of the "place" that we are told the Messiah is "preparing" for us? If it is not a "marriage residence," then what is it?

The Greek word translated "place" in this passage is *topos* (τόπος). While generally used in the Apostolic Scriptures to refer to a physical location, it nevertheless has a variety of additional usages. In usages outside of the Bible "*tópos* sometimes means 'sanctuary' (the holy place)...Another use is for 'someone's place,' e.g., a senator's seat, a place at school, one's place in the world" (*TDNT*).⁵ Is the place Yeshua is preparing for us a "marriage chamber"? Or, is the Messiah **preparing a place of authority for us in His Father's Kingdom**? After all, are we not told that "we will be *cohanim* [priests] of God and of the Messiah, and...will rule with him for the thousand years" (Revelation 20:6, CJB)? What is the "place" that Yeshua is preparing for us?

It is important that we make the correlation between Yeshua's preparing a place or position of authority for us in the Kingdom and His Father's house, the Temple. In Yeshua's day there were many apartments designed for the priests as part of the Temple complex (1 Kings 6:5-10; 1 Chronicles 9:26-27). This complex, no doubt, symbolizes the positions that we as Believers will have when we reign with Messiah from Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40-44).

The Messiah is presently not in Heaven preparing a marriage residence for us as pre-tribulationists commonly tell us. He is, however, in Heaven readying our stations or places of authority for His coming Earthly Kingdom. The Scriptures are replete with admonitions how we are to be responsible Believers here in this world so that the Lord can reward us in His future Kingdom in the world to come.

(This entry includes adapted quotations from the author's book *When Will the Messiah Return?*)

⁵ H. Köster, "*tópos*," in *TDNT*, 1184.