

# The Wedding Model

by Chuck Missler

## The Wedding Model

In this second article in our series on the Rapture, we will explore another reason why we favor a "pre-tribulation" view of the *Harz*, the "snatching up" of the Church.

All through the Gospels, Jesus relied on the ancient Jewish wedding pattern for many of His parables,<sup>1</sup> climaxing in His promise in the Upper Room in John 14 (as reviewed in our previous article). Many of us miss the full import of these allusions if we aren't familiar with the model of ancient Jewish wedding practices.

## Jewish Wedding

The first step, the Ketubah, or Betrothal,<sup>2</sup> was the establishment of the marriage covenant, usually when the prospective bridegroom took the initiative<sup>3</sup> and negotiated the price (mohair) he must pay to purchase her.<sup>4</sup>

Once the bridegroom paid the purchase price, the marriage covenant was established, and the young man and woman were regarded as husband and wife.<sup>5</sup> From that moment on, the bride was declared to be consecrated or sanctified - set apart - exclusively for her bridegroom.<sup>6</sup> As a symbol of the covenant relationship that had been established, the groom and bride drank from a cup of wine over which the betrothal had been pronounced.<sup>7</sup>

After the marriage covenant was established, the groom left his bride at her home and returned to his father's house, where he remained separated from his bride for approximately 12 months.<sup>8</sup> This afforded the bride time to gather her trousseau and prepare for married life.<sup>9</sup> During this period of separation, the groom prepared a dwelling place in his father's house to which he would later bring his bride. At the end of the period of separation, the bridegroom came - usually at night - to take his bride to live with him. The groom, the best man, and other male escorts left the father's house and conducted a torch-light procession to the home of the bride.<sup>10</sup> Although the bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the time of his coming.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the groom's arrival was preceded by a shout,<sup>12</sup> which announced her imminent departure to be gathered with him.

After the groom received his bride, together with her female attendants, the enlarged wedding party returned from the bride's home to the groom's father's house,<sup>13</sup> where the wedding guests had assembled.

Shortly after their arrival, the bride and groom were escorted by the other members of the wedding party to the bridal chamber (*huppah*). Prior to entering the chamber, the bride remained veiled so that no one could see her face.<sup>14</sup> While the groomsmen and bridesmaids waited outside, the bride and groom entered the bridal chamber alone. There, in the privacy of that place, they entered into physical union for the first time, thereby consummating the marriage that had been covenanted approximately one year earlier.<sup>15</sup>

After the marriage was consummated, the groom came out of the bridal chamber and announced the consummation of the marriage to the members of the wedding party waiting outside.<sup>16</sup> Then, as the groom went back to his bride in the chamber, the members of the wedding party returned to the wedding guests and announced the consummation of the marriage.<sup>17</sup>

Upon receiving the good news, the wedding guests remained in the groom's father's house for the next seven days, celebrating with a great wedding feast.<sup>18</sup>

During the seven days of the wedding feast, the bride and groom remained hidden in the bridal chamber<sup>19</sup> (Cf. Genesis 29:21-23, 27-28) for the seven days of the huppah.<sup>20</sup> Afterwards, the groom came out of hiding, bringing his bride with him, but with her veil removed so that everyone could see her.

## The Ultimate Bride

The New Testament portrays the Church as the Bride of Christ in Ephesians 5:22-33 (Paul even quotes Genesis 2:24 as the union at the Parousia of the Bridegroom in v.31!); cf. Romans 7:4; 2 Corinthians 11:2; James 4:4. In the opening verses of John 14, the marriage covenant is confirmed.<sup>21</sup> Paul continually reminds us of the purchase price<sup>22</sup> and the covenant<sup>23</sup> by which we, the Bride, are set apart, or sanctified.<sup>24</sup>

## Ecclesiology vs. Eschatology

It is this distinctive nature of the Church that is often overlooked by students of prophecy: it is more a matter of ecclesiology than eschatology.

One thing that seems to highlight this distinctiveness is the strange remark Jesus made regarding John the Baptist:

*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.*  
-Matthew 11:11

What does that mean? Jesus goes on to explain,

*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.* - Matthew 11:13

It is John the Baptist that closes the Old Testament, not Malachi.<sup>25</sup> A profound distinction appears to be drawn between the saints of the Old Testament and those of the New.

One of the challenges in fully appreciating Paul's epistles is the need to understand the staggering and distinctive advantages afforded the Church, in contrast to those of the Old Testament saints.<sup>26</sup> And it is this role as the Bride of the Bridegroom that is emphasized in the parables and in the Book of Revelation.

## The Departure of the Bridegroom

<sup>27</sup> The Bridegroom has departed, and His return to gather His Bride is imminent.<sup>28</sup> He has gone to prepare a place for you and me. (He has been at it for 2,000 years! It must be a spectacular abode!)

This very doctrine of "imminence" is taught throughout the New Testament and is a cornerstone of the "pre-tribulational" view: there is no event which is a prerequisite condition for His gathering of His Bride.

## The Great Tribulation

There are those who believe the Church will go through the Great Tribulation. In exploring this issue, it is essential to distinguish between persecution, which clearly has been the lot of the Church for 19 centuries, and "the Great Tribulation" of eschatological significance. The persecution - and tribulation - of the Church was clearly promised to us:

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. -John 16:33*

The source of this tribulation is the world and, of course, Satan. However, "the Great Tribulation" of eschatological significance is quite another matter.

*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. -Matthew 24:21*

The context here is clearly Israel.<sup>29</sup> Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament:

*And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book -Daniel 12:1*

Note that "thy people will be delivered": the focus of the "Great Tribulation" is Israel. That is why it is called "the time of Jacob's Trouble":

*Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. -Jeremiah 30:7*

Jesus (in the Old Testament) explains:

*I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me earnestly.<sup>30</sup> -Hosea 5:15*

To "return," He must have left His place! The offence referred to is singular and specific: their rejection of Him. In "their affliction" they will ultimately repent and He will respond.<sup>31</sup>

The Great Tribulation also involves more than the wrath of the world or the wrath of Satan: it involves the indignation and wrath of God.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, the Church has been promised:

*For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,-1 Thessalonians 5:9*

And,

*Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*  
-Romans 5:9

And, specifically,

*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour [time] of temptation [trial], which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*  
-Revelation 3:10

Peter also emphasizes,

*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: -2 Peter 2:9*

Here, Peter is using the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah "as an example,"<sup>33</sup> as Jesus also did,<sup>34</sup> in which the prior removal of Lot was a precondition before the angels could do their work.<sup>35</sup>

A complete study of this issue involves careful and diligent study of both the Church (ecclesiology) as well as the eschatology (end time aspects) of the Great Tribulation, which, of course, far exceeds the focus of this brief review. It requires precise definitions of the terms used, and great care to understand how each of the elements of the revealed truth relate to each other.

But the fundamental doctrine of imminence has to be forfeited with any view that requires the Great Tribulation - or any other precedent event - to occur prior to the Rapture.

*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. -Luke 21:36*

Are you going to escape these things that shall come to pass? If so, how? Or are you relying on the notion that the Lord is "delaying His coming?"<sup>36</sup> This could be a very dangerous presumption. Do your homework. It is important.

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See our briefing package, [The Rapture: Christianity's Most Preposterous Belief](#).

This article was originally published in the  
**January 2003 Personal Update NewsJournal.**

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## \*\*NOTES\*\*

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1. Cf. Matthew 22:1-14 and Matthew 25:1-13 for notable examples.
2. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Isaac Landman ed., Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co., Inc. New York, 1948, pp. 7, 372.
3. David R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1953, p.167.
4. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, p.372.
5. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Isidore Singer ed., Funk and Wagnalls Company, New York, 1907, III, pp.126,127. Cf. Mal 2:14; Mt 1:18-19.
6. George F. Moore, *Judaism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1946, II, p.121.
7. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, p.373.
8. *Ibid.*, p.372.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *The Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr ed., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids MI, 1957, III, p.1998.
11. Emma Williams Gill, *Home Life in the Bible*, Broadman Press, Nashville TN, 1936, p.20.
12. James Neil, *Everyday Life in the Holy Land*, Cassell and Company, Limited, New York, 1913, p.251.
13. J. Jeremias, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol IV, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI, 1967, p.1100.
14. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isaac Landman, Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co., Inc., New York, 1948, pp. 10, 399.
15. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, p.373.
16. Cf. Psalm 19:5; John 3:29.
17. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, pp.5, 504.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. 1 Corinthians 11:25.
22. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.
23. 1 Corinthians 11:25-26.
24. Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; Hebrews 10:10; 13:12.
25. Luke 16:16.
26. Ephesians 3:3ff.
27. Matthew 22:1-4; 25:1-13; and Revelation 18:23; 19:7-9; 21:2, 9; 22:17.
28. Cf. Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19, 20; Luke 5:34, 35; John 3:29; Revelation 18:23.
29. Matthew 24:16, 20.
30. KJV: "early." The word is *shachar*, to seek, seek earnestly, look early or diligently for.
31. See our briefing pack, *The Next Holocaust and the Refuge in Edom*, for a detailed review of Isaiah 63, et al.
32. Revelation 6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 17;16:1, 19; 19:15.
33. 2 Peter 2:6.
34. Luke 17:28-37.
35. Genesis 19:22.
36. Matthew 24:48-51.