

# Christ Bridegroom

Understanding the Second Coming through Types and Shadows

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# Chapter 1

# The Betrothal at Sinai

The Second Coming of Christ has often been referred to in the scriptures as a wedding ceremony. An example of this is found in the parable of the ten virgins:

> Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1).

The bridegroom in this parable represents Christ (see Mark 2:19-20),<sup>2</sup> and wherever there is a bridegroom to be found, you are also sure to find a bride and a wedding. The wedding, according to the Lord, represents the Second Coming:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See for example the Parable of the Wedding Garment, as recorded in Matthew 22:1-14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> President Joseph Fielding Smith said, "the Savior spoke of the Bridegroom when referring to himself" (Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:61).

And at that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins (D&C 45:56).

President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that "the marriage of the Lamb is a figure of speech, having reference to the second coming of our Savior and the feast, or supper, that the righteous shall receive at his coming."<sup>3</sup>

Knowing that the wedding in this parable is the Second Coming, and knowing that the bridegroom is Christ, the next question is, who is Christ's bride?

# The Identity of the Bride

While the identity of the bride is not revealed in this particular parable, she has fortunately been identified in several other passages of scripture. For example, John the Revelator wrote:

The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.... Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9).<sup>4</sup>

According to John, the bride of Christ consists of individuals who are "called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). They are the individuals who

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See also Revelation 21:2

have been pronounced "clean and white" and who have been clothed in "righteousness" (Revelation 19:8).

Other prophets have also confirmed that the bride of Christ is identified with the righteous follows of Christ. For example, President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that "the bride of the Lamb is the organization of the righteous who have inheritance in the holy city."<sup>5</sup>

This was confirmed by Joseph Smith, who, during the dedication of the Kirtland Temple prayed that the Lord's Church would someday be "adorned as a bride for that day when thou shalt unveil the heavens" (D&C 109:74). Similarly, the prophet Isaiah twice referred to the righteous as the Lord's "bride" (Isaiah 62:5; 61:10) while simultaneously referring to the Lord as Israel's "husband" (Isaiah 54:5).

#### **Husband and Wife**

Now that we have discovered the true identity of Christ's bride, we must ask ourselves why the Lord chose to use the analogy of a husband and wife to describe the relationship between himself and his followers. As it turns out, there are many similarities between the two. For example, just as "a man...shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Geneses 2:24), so too has the Lord commanded us to become "one" with him (John 17:21). And just as we are meant to love our spouse, we have also been asked to "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:62.

and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). The Apostle Paul taught us the following:

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.... Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Ephesians 5:23-25).

## Donald Parry and Jay Parry added this insight:

The marriage of the Lamb, who is Christ (D&C 33:17-18), to his bride, who is the Church (D&C 109:73-74)...is a metaphor for the union between the Lord and his people, made possible through the atonement of Christ.... The Lord uses marriage as a symbol to underscore the sweetness and blessing of that union. There is no sweeter or more meaningful relationship on earth than that between a holy husband and a holy wife; that is the kind of relationship (in depth of feeling and completeness of union) that the Lord is inviting us to participate in.<sup>6</sup>

It is also interesting to note that anciently, the Israelite men had to pay an expensive dowry for the bride of their choice, which made these women somewhat of a "purchased possession." For example, before his marriage to Ruth, Boaz declared to the elders that "Ruth the Moabitess…have I *purchased* to be my wife" (Ruth 4:10; emphasis added).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Parry and Parry, *Understanding the Signs of the Times*, p. 430.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p. 108.

In a similar way, the Apostle Paul referred to the saints of his day as "the church of God, which [Christ] hath *purchased* with his own blood" (Acts 20:28; emphasis added).

One additional similarity worth mentioning is how each party is joined together. Just as the husband and wife are to be sealed together for eternity in the Lord's temple, so too must each and every one of us enter into sacred covenants with the Lord in his temple if we are to be bound to him in the eternities.

## The Engagement

As we have just learned from the parable of the ten virgins and from other scriptures, we are symbolically married to the Lord *at* his Second Coming. However, just as a man and woman do not get married until after they become engaged, so too must we be engaged to the Lord *before* his Second Coming.

This symbolic engagement occurs when we receive our endowments in the Lord's holy temple. As we enter into these temple covenants with the Lord, it is as if we are agreeing *to be* married to him at his Second Coming. However, just like an actual engagement, our symbolic marriage to Christ at the Second Coming will only occur if we remain true and faithful from the time of our engagement until the time of the wedding.

#### The Hebrew Betrothal

In the Hebrew culture, engagements were known as *betrothals*. And while the Hebrew betrothal was very similar in many respects to our modern-day engagement, it is worth pointing out a few minor differences between the two. According to Donna Nielsen:

Betrothal in Jewish mind was a serious covenant, with a much greater idea of commitment than an engagement has today.... Betrothal was so legally binding that one could not break the contract without a divorce.... During betrothal, a couple was considered legally married, even though the marriage was not yet consummated.<sup>8</sup>

# Similarly, according to Reed Durham:

The betrothal was considered to be more than the promise of marriage.... Engagements could be broken off, a promise might be set aside, but the betrothal was considered binding because it was entered into by a sacred oath and covenant.<sup>9</sup>

This oath and covenant that the Hebrew couple entered into at the time of betrothal was considered the first of two ceremonies in connection with their marriage, the second being the wedding ceremony itself. According to Richard Hart:

<sup>9</sup> Durham, "Mary Was Espoused to Joseph," *Instructor*, July 1967, p. 265, as quoted in Hart, "The Marriage Metaphor," *Ensign*, January 1995.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p. 24.

First there was a betrothal—an engagement ceremony at which covenants between the bride and groom were formalized.... Following the year of betrothal, the solemnization of the wedding vows took place.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to covenants being made, "the betrothal," according to Marvin Wilson, also included "an act of sanctification or consecration," where the future bride was "set apart" and made "holy." There is even some evidence that suggests that the bride was washed, anointed and clothed as part of her betrothal. With this in mind, is it any wonder that the temple endowment should be considered a betrothal ceremony between the participant and the Lord?

Once we are betrothed to the Lord in his temple, we should consider ourselves legally married to him, just as the Israelites of old considered themselves legally married to each other after exchanging their betrothal vows. And similar to the Israelites of old, we too are expected to remain faithful to the Lord from the time of our symbolic betrothal to the time of our symbolic marriage at the Second Coming. Parry and Parry put it this way:

Though we are to prepare for the marriage all our lives (Matt. 25:1-13; D&C 45:56-57), it will be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Hart, "The Marriage Metaphor," *Ensign*, January 1995.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Wilson, Our Father Abraham, p. 205.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Benson, *Commentary of the Old and New Testaments*, under Ezekiel 16:8-12. See also Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, p. 135.

brought to its culmination, with the body of the Church, when Christ returns in glory.<sup>13</sup>

#### The House of Israel's Betrothal

Just as we are symbolically betrothed to the Lord today by entering into sacred covenants in our modern-day temples, so too was the house of Israel given the opportunity to be betrothed to the Lord at Mount Sinai. After the house of Israel fled Egypt, and after they crossed the Red Sea, the Lord led them safely to his holy mountain, where he proceeded to offer to them the same betrothal terms that he offers us in our day. According to Hart:

The symbolic betrothal of the bride (the house of Israel) to the Bridegroom (Jehovah) took place in the Sinai wilderness after the Exodus. There, characteristic of Hebraic betrothal, the Lord entered into a covenant relationship with Jacob's descendants. 14

According to the Old Testament, this symbolic betrothal occurred when the Lord called out unto Moses from Mount Sinai and said to him:

Thus shalt thou say to...the children of Israel...if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Parry and Parry, *Understanding the Signs of the Times*, p. 430-31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Hart, "The Marriage Metaphor," *Ensign*, January 1995. See also, Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, p. 138.

all people.... And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation (Exodus 19:3-6).

And thus, a proposal—or rather a betrothal covenant—was offered by the Lord to the Israelites. The Israelites responded to the Lord's proposal by saying, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8).

With both parties in agreement, the betrothal ceremony would soon be underway. As part of this betrothal ceremony, the Lord offered to reveal himself to the Israelites upon Mount Sinai and gave them three days to sanctify themselves in preparation for this sacred event. This preparation was to include being washed, anointed, and clothed (see Ezekiel 16:8-12; Exodus 19:10), which was not unlike the customs of the traditional Jewish betrothal. According to the text, here is what happened next:

And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people

<sup>15</sup> Ezekiel 16:8-12. Of these verses in Ezekiel, Joseph Benson noted,

<sup>&</sup>quot;Yea, I entered into covenant with thee — This was done in mount Sinai, when the covenant between God and Israel was sealed and ratified.... Then I washed thee with water — It was a very ancient custom among the eastern people to purify virgins who were to be espoused. And I anointed thee with oil — Thus also were women, on some occasions, prepared for their nuptials" (Benson, Commentary of the Old and New Testaments, under Ezekiel 16:8-12). See also, Nielsen, Beloved Bridegroom, p. 125.

out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly (Exodus 19:16-18).

According to Donna Nielsen, while this mountain was no doubt a frightening sight for many of the Israelites, there were nevertheless many manifestations of God's love being shown here, which one might expect from a formal betrothal ceremony:

The Semitic root word for "love" is *haw* or *hav*. It means "to warm," "to kindle," "to set on fire." To the Hebrews, a "burning in the bosom" could be a manifestation of *love*. It is interesting that at Mt. Sinai (which the Jews think of as the place where God chose Israel as a covenant marriage partner), the mountain appeared to be on fire. This dramatic event naturally terrified the Israelites. But it is a sweet thought that perhaps the fire represents a level of love that we mortals cannot even comprehend. The truths that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and that "He dwells in everlasting burnings" (Isaiah 33:14-15) are semantically related. <sup>16</sup>

#### **Broken Covenants**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Nielsen, Beloved Bridegroom, p. 13.

Unfortunately for the Israelites, soon after their betrothal to the Lord, they were unable to obey the voice of the Lord in all things as they had previously covenanted to do, and failed to live up to the higher law which was offered to them. We read:

Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence (D&C 84:23-24).

Knowing that the Israelites would have a hard time living up to the terms of their betrothal covenants, the Lord warned the Israelites that "thou shalt have no other gods before me...for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:3-5). As noted previously, in ancient Judaism the man and woman who were betrothed were "considered legally married, even though [their] marriage was not yet consummated." Because the Lord considered himself to be a jealous God, and because he considered the covenants that the house of Israel entered into at Mount Sinai to be as serious as marriage covenants, he often referred to the house of Israel as adulterers and fornicators when they later broke their end of the covenant by serving other gods throughout their history. For example:

[Jerusalem is] as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband (Ezekiel 16:32).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Nielsen, Beloved Bridegroom, p. 24.

# And again:

I have a few things against thee, because thou hast [allowed]...the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to *commit fornication* (Revelation 2:14; emphasis added).

# And again:

For the land hath *committed great whoredom*, departing from the Lord (Hosea 1:2; emphasis added).

## And again:

Though thou, *Israel, play the harlot...*(Hosea 4:15; emphasis added).

# And finally:

Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; *for I am married unto you....* Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel (Jeremiah 3:14, 20; emphasis added).<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly enough, even the very word for *adultery* in Hebrew implies apostasy.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> See also Exodus 34:15-16; Jeremiah 3:6-8; Ezekiel 16; Ezekiel 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Nielsen, Beloved Bridegroom, p. 120.

#### **A New Covenant**

Because the house of Israel constantly broke their betrothal covenants, the Lord chose to scatter them throughout various times of their history. However, "thus saith the Lord [to the house of Israel]: Have I put thee away, or have I cast thee off forever?... Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement?" (2 Nephi 7:1).

Although the house of Israel rejected the Lord several times throughout their history, rather than calling off the marriage entirely, the Lord in his mercy has offered to renew this betrothal covenant to latter-day Israel. This was prophesied of by the prophet Jeremiah:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

We have been invited to enter into this "new covenant" with the Lord in our day through the ordinances of his holy temple. By doing so, we are symbolically betrothed to the Lord which makes us eligible to one day enter into a symbolic marriage with him at his Second Coming, if we

remain faithful. John the Revelator prophesied of this future event:

The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.... Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9).

We hope you enjoyed reading this sample chapter from Richard Brunson's Christ as Bridegroom.

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