

## CHAPTER 10

# Enter the Bride

The Bible is a single work; it is not a collection of disjointed books. Across the Scriptures we find common themes and patterns. They move in and out of the books of the Bible like threads on the back of a great tapestry. In looking only at the back of the tapestry you do not see the glorious picture that is being woven, but when you turn the tapestry around and look at the front, you see the picture as it was intended. The themes that weave themselves in and out of the books of the Bible have come together to form a great panorama of the purposes of God from beginning to end.

### *The Prostitute and the Wife of Noble Character*

The major themes of the Bible can sometimes be discovered in surprising places. The Book of Proverbs, for example,

is a collection of sayings full of moral warnings with advice to young men and old to avoid the adulteress, to stay away from the prostitute, and to be careful of the unfaithful wife (see for example Prov. 2:16-19; 5:3-20; 6:23-26; 7:1-27; 9:15-18; 23:27-28; 29:3; 30:20; 31:3). These are severe warnings. But they are not just moral lessons; they are also spiritual lessons. There is a temptress who would lure us away from the things of God. These Scriptures unveil a hidden evil. They issue us with a warning that we should consider seriously.

Thankfully, the Book of Proverbs ends on a happier note. There is a wife of noble character (see Prov. 31:10-12, 29-31). The climax of the book is an ideal of faithfulness and family life, of a wife who brings nothing but honor to her husband, a wife in whom he can delight. This could be the story of Christ and the Church. Jesus is seeking a wife of noble character, a wife who is more valuable than rubies. He has eschewed the prostitute and cast out the adulteress. He has set His love upon the one who has captured His heart.

### *God Loves a Wedding*

Jesus began His ministry at a wedding, where He demonstrated the power of the coming Kingdom by turning water into wine. Finally when history comes to its climax and the purposes of God are forever finished, it will be at a wedding: "*For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready*" (Rev. 19:7). In the beginning, when God creates all things, He adds an epilogue to every day of creation by saying, "It is good." This goes on until one day He says, "It is not good." This is not that something has gone wrong; God has

not made a mistake. He says, "*It is not good for the man to be alone*" (Gen. 2:18), and what unfolds next is a divine comedy.

God is a God who loves humor. We are made in the image of God, and like God we love to laugh. God says, "I need a bride for my son, Adam," so He brings the animals to Adam as if it were a beauty contest. The animals parade before Adam, and he identifies, gives a name to, each of them. In naming the animals Adam acts prophetically, because he is interpreting the work of God and helping the creatures understand who they are. But Adam does not find a suitable companion from among the animals. There is no creature that corresponds to him. Can you see the humor? Adam needs a wife—an elephant walks by. He is overawed by the power and majesty of a God who can create such a thing, but he does not feel a stirring in the depth of his soul. God knows what He is doing. Adam was never supposed to fall in love with an animal. What God is showing us is something profound and highlighted in the Book of Revelation—we are not supposed to relate to the beast.

At the point when it becomes clear that there is no animal to correspond to Adam, God moves from comedy to intense drama. God puts Adam into a deep sleep. He opens up Adam's side, takes a rib and fashions it into a woman. He does not take a bone from Adam's head that she might dominate him, and He does not take a bone from his foot that he might trample her. He takes it from his side that she might stand beside him, equal to him. He takes it from under his arm that he might protect her. He takes it from near his heart, that he might love her (see Matthew Henry's Commentary). When Adam wakes, God presents the woman to him. Moses' commentary on this is, "*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be*

*united to his wife, and they will become one flesh*" (Gen. 2:24). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul quotes these words and interprets them to refer to the mystical relationship between Jesus and his Church (see Eph. 5:31-33).

Like Adam, Jesus went into a deep sleep, but far deeper than the one Adam experienced. He went into the sleep of death. As He hung dead on the cross, they opened up His side, and out of His side came blood and water (see John 19:34), the very elements that God would use to make a bride for His Son: blood to redeem her and water to wash and prepare her for the day of her wedding (see Heb. 9:19,22).

### *The Hero Gets the Girl*

It is not just in myths, legends, and fairytales that the hero gets the bride. In the Bible you will discover the genesis of that idea. It's a biblical truth. When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream, he was made second in command in Egypt. His wisdom and ability to strategize saved Egypt from starvation. Furthermore, the whole world went down to Egypt to buy corn. Joseph saved a nation from disaster and launched a heroic rescue operation throughout the wider world. Raised up by God to feed men, he was rewarded with the hand of a beautiful bride.

When Caleb, one of only two survivors of the wilderness wanderings, came into the land of promise, he stood in the foothills of the mountains where he had walked 40 years before. He removed his sandals and ran his toes through the grass, smelled the familiar scents of the countryside, and all the old expectations and hopes sprang up in his heart again, and he declared: "I may be old but I still have strength and vitality.

I am still strong in God to go out in battle and come back again." However, he knew that his role was to help shape the next generation, so he decided "*I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher*" (Josh. 15:16). That tells us something about Acsah. She must have been extremely beautiful, because no man would risk his life for a hag!

In response, Caleb's nephew Othniel went out to take the city. Scripture tells us two important facts about this city. First, we read that giants lived there. Second, its name was Debir, which means, "Word." But previously the city had been called Kiriath Sepher, which means, "City of Books." This city was a seat of learning and knowledge. It was a university town. This town was home to the philosophies of the Canaanite enemy; to take the land they must first bring down the town's philosophies. The struggle was not just against the physical mass of a giant. Before we can take our world we have to bring down its philosophies.

Samson and David were both heroes who won beautiful brides. On the way to meet the girl he wished to marry, Samson encountered a lion, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands. Later, when Samson found the carcass of the lion swarming with bees, he composed a riddle, "*Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet*" (Judg. 14:14), to describe how he "the strong" wins "the sweet"—the bride.

David won his bride by defeating the Philistines. He arrived on the battlefield as the armies of the Lord were being threatened and ridiculed by the Philistines, whose champion,

Goliath, was a nine-foot giant. He learned that Saul had promised a reward to whoever killed the Philistine champion—an exemption from taxes and the hand of his daughter Mirab in marriage. This is the champion's reward.

In Scripture the champion is not an athlete or the winner of the egg-and-spoon race. He is an outstanding warrior. In Psalm 45 there is a picture of a heavenly bridegroom subduing all his enemies while celebrating the love of a beautifully prepared bride. This psalm is full of Messianic concepts and insights.

Compared to all these heroes, Jesus is the ultimate hero. He has come to feed a starving world. He has come to pull down every false philosophy and bring it into obedience to His lordship and His Word. He has come to trample the lion underfoot. He has come to kill the giant. He deserves the bride. God loves weddings, and He has arranged a wedding for his Son. God wants to see the wedding of His Son just as Abraham wanted to see the wedding of Isaac, but he did not want his son to take a wife from among the Canaanites. Abraham called his trusted servant, who had stewardship of all he owned, and he loaded him with gifts and sent him on a journey to find a bride for Isaac. He sent him back to his own people, and there the servant saw a woman watering her camels. When he was sure that she was the right woman, he showed her his master's treasure and persuaded her to return with him to marry his master's son.

In the same way, the Father in Heaven has sent forth the steward of His house with a message for us, "Will you come back and marry my master's son?" He has come to His Church, and He has shown us His gifts, His grace, and His anointing,

and, overwhelmed by His generosity, we have said, "Yes! We will come." We have not seen Him yet, but we are persuaded. The description He has brought us and the story so far is enough.

In Scripture wars and weddings are not incompatible concepts. We have already seen how Othniel returned from a battle to claim his bride. Samson defeated a lion to get his bride. David killed a giant and won his bride. In the nineteenth chapter of Revelation, war and wedding go hand in hand. There is a rider on a white horse dressed in fine linen, and He leads the armies of Heaven out to battle—and the bride has gone to war in her wedding dress! The "*fine linen, bright and clean*" of her wedding dress is the "*fine linen, white and clean*" of her warfare. She is following the bridegroom and sharing in His victory.

### *The Bride Makes Herself Ready*

Remember that the Book of Revelation is a series of action replays. In chapter 19 we have a description of the bride who has made herself ready. In chapter 21 we have a much fuller description in terms of the holy city:

*Then I saw a new Heaven and a new earth, for the first Heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Revelation 21:1-2).*

This is the holy city of which we are citizens. This is the church of which we are members. As you look out on the church in the world and see it divided and defiled, it is difficult

to imagine that this is its destiny. Yet the evidence of its triumph is more real than what we see before our eyes. For who could believe even for a moment that Jesus, who shed His blood to possess a beautiful bride, would be satisfied with the decrepit and ugly church we can so often see in the world. He came to redeem her with His blood and wash her with the water of the Word, and this Word will penetrate the hearts and minds of the redeemed. The Bible will no longer be a book of mystery gathering dust on a shelf, never read, never put into action. There is a time coming when the Word of God will be unbound. There is a time coming when things will change because God will say, "So far and no farther!" There are days of preparation at hand. God will not allow His bride to walk this world in filthy clothes. His promise in Old Testament Scriptures stands:

*He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Isaiah 61:10).*

The Church comes forth full of gifts and graces. Most importantly she is coming down from Heaven. She comes down from above. Her life source is in Heaven.

That does not mean she is going to suddenly arrive on the doorstep like Mary Poppins. When it says she comes down out of Heaven, it is telling us that all the life and gifting of the church comes from God. As James writes, "*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father*" (James 1:17). The life-source of the church is God himself. The church is different from everything else. She has a beauty that surpasses that of the prostitute who, with all the cosmetic surgery and



makeup in the world, could not ever begin to imitate her. The prostitute sparkles, but the bride shines. The world is full of imitations that sparkle, but there is only one bride, and she shines with the beauty of God.

The bride is to show the world the glory of the bridegroom. The bride also wants to make herself ready for her husband. This is an amazing thing. In His mercy and grace God allows us to work with Him. We believe in the sovereignty of God. We believe that before the foundation of the world we were chosen in Christ according to His purpose. But there are actions we can take to cooperate with God in bringing His purpose to pass.

This does not mean that God needs us. There are those who believe that they are there to get God out of a hole. The truth is that God has done very well without us, and when we are dead and gone, He will continue to do well. The Bible tells us that *"the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age"* (Titus 2:11-12). We can resist the devil, and he will flee from us. We can overcome temptation. What is more, we can do things for ourselves that we once thought only God could do. Many people ask for prayer for things that God has said they should do for themselves. One says, "I am plagued by the old nature. Could you pray that I get rid of my old nature?" God says, *"Put off your old self"* (Eph. 4:22). Another says, "I want to be holy." God says, *"Be holy, because I am holy"* (1 Pet. 1:16); we can be holy because *"everything we need for life and godliness"* (2 Pet. 1:3) has already been given to us in Christ.

But this does not mean that we are left entirely to our own devices. I am not a do-it-yourself expert. If I begin a job in my home, experience tells me that somewhere along the line I am going to have to call an expert in. Then not only does he have to finish the job, he has to undo the work that I began. Help is at hand. In the same way, every ministry under whose influence we sit is there to equip us. This is how Paul spoke to the Corinthians: *"I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him"* (2 Cor. 11:2). Those of us who have responsibility in the church are there to help the bride get ready. People must help themselves, but there are areas of expertise where they can call in help. There are areas of revelation that individuals will never achieve on their own. That is why we need one another. There is no such thing as just Jesus and me. The church blesses and edifies herself so she can grow and mature. The ministries that God sends are to help the church prepare herself.

Not only that, but the Lord, the heavenly bridegroom Himself, is involved in the preparations, as Paul writes to the Ephesians:

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body (Ephesians 5:25-30).*

Paul says, "I want to present you to Christ." Christ says, "I want to present you to myself." We must say, "I want to present myself to Jesus" (see 2 Tim. 2:15).

### *The Ultimate Wedding*

In the opening chapters of Revelation Jesus writes to the churches. He says that they are like those who wear defiled robes and that they need to cover their nakedness. He writes to them because they are not what they should be, and he says: "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*" (Rev. 2:7). God has a word for the churches, and it is a word that says change, adjust, and overcome.

This is how the Spirit speaks to the churches at the beginning of the Book of Revelation. By the end of the book, the Spirit and the church speak in unison, and so we read of one voice: "*The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'*" (Rev. 22:17).

The change that has occurred is the same change that occurs to you in the personal realm. When we came to Jesus, God gave us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a vocal Spirit; He continually speaks. He is the Spirit of prophecy, and He cannot keep quiet. When God sent the Spirit into your heart, He came shouting; the Spirit shouted God's love for you. In Galatians we read,

*But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father"* (Galatians 4:4-6).

The Spirit came shouting, "Abba Father," "Daddy God." The Spirit is doing all the shouting because He wants to convince you of the truth of what He is saying. But when we turn to Romans (a book written after Galatians, despite coming first in our Bibles), it says:

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).*

When the Spirit came, He did all the shouting, but when He has convinced us, we shout, too—and we shout exactly the same thing as the Spirit was shouting. Now we find the bride persuaded by the Spirit. We find the bride prepared, so the great shout goes up; the Spirit and the bride say, "Come! Come to the waters, come to the feast, come to the wedding, come to the Lord!"