

Jesus the Bridegroom

The picture of a husband and wife (or bride) is used throughout the Old Testament representing the nature of the relationship between God and his people, so the idea would be one that is familiar to those who the gospels and Revelation were written for.

The Lord said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods ... **Hosea 3:1**

No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.

But you will be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;

for the Lord will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.

⁵ As a young man marries a young woman,
so will your Builder marry you;
as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so will your God rejoice over you. **Isaiah 62:4-5**

(Hephzibah means my delight is in her and Beulah means married.)

There are three places in the New Testament where Jesus is pictured as a bridegroom, two in the gospels and one in the book of Revelation.

¹ "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

⁷ "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

⁹ "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

¹⁰ "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹ "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!'

¹² "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'

¹³ "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. **Matthew 25:1-13**

What do we learn from this? The first and obvious one is not to let things slip. Be prepared and be alert. You never know when the Lord might return or we might be taken to be with him.

We also find Jesus portrayed as a bridegroom in a number of other passages where the disciples of John the Baptist are asking questions. The Gospel of John records John's disciples coming to him with a question about Jesus.

²⁶ They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan - the one you testified about - look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

²⁷ To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.' ²⁹ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less." **John 3:26-30**

There are parallel passages in the three remaining Gospels all reporting a similar conversation between the teachers of the Jewish law and Jesus.

³³ They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."

³⁴ Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? ³⁵ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast." **Luke 5:33-35** (see also Matthew 9:14-15 and Mark 2:18-20)

Clearly from these passages of scripture we see both John the Baptist and Jesus affirming that he was the Messiah. The one sent by God to save his people. More than this, this would not be a formal religious relationship. It would be characterised by joy and intimacy.

There is another passage in the New Testament that hints at a similar relationship between Jesus and the church. This passage is different from the others in that it is dealing with the relationship between husbands and wives, which would be a distraction from our current subject. Suffice to say that in part of the passage, Paul was probably countering a contemporary false teaching about the nature of women, originating from local pagan beliefs.

Several times in the passage Paul draws a parallel between the love and sacrifice of a husband for his wife and that of Jesus and the church.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church - ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church. **Ephesians 5:25-32**

Finally, in the last few chapters of the book of Revelation we see the culmination of the ages in picture form as the Lamb (Jesus) takes his place, his enemies are defeated and his kingdom is established.

⁶ Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

⁹ Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” **Revelation 19:6-9**

It is often thought that the bride refers to the church but clearly from the verses in chapter 21, the bride is the new Jerusalem.

² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

⁹ One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life. **Revelation 21:2, 9-10 & 25**

At the very end of Revelation we hear the words of Jesus addressing the church. Still addressing the church, we hear the Spirit and the bride inviting the church to come and partake of the water of life.

¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. **Revelation 22:16-17**

In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant was the meeting place between God and his people. It was kept in the Tabernacle (tent) and then in the permanent temple in Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the holy city, was the place that the people of God recognised as being where God was. It came to represent the place where God ruled - God’ kingdom on earth.

(In a similar way Egypt and Babylon were representative of the kingdoms of this world.)

We see this picture being reproduced in the Revelation as the new Jerusalem - a promise to the hard-pressed and persecuted Christians that the kingdom of God would triumph and would be established on the earth. The picture we have in Revelation 21 is of the kingdom of God literally being brought down from heaven.

Whilst the church is the means that the Lord uses to establish his kingdom on earth and is part of God's kingdom, the kingdom is wider than this. We establish God's kingdom wherever we are. At home, in our work, in our relationships. Jesus' parable about the ten virgins starts off "At that time the kingdom of heaven ..." We know that Jesus loves the church but it's the establishment of his kingdom wherever we are that is important. We value our churches but we live to establish his kingdom.

So what does a study of Jesus, the bridegroom tell us?

- We need to be prepared and alert to the coming of Jesus
- He is the Messiah - the chosen one from God to establish his kingdom
- We are all invited to be part of that kingdom
- Whilst church is important, ultimately it's about the establishment of God's kingdom on earth

Bible passages where Jesus is pictured as a bridegroom

Reference	Context	Bride	Others involved
John 3:26-30	John the Baptist's disciples question him about Jesus	Not mentioned	Bridegroom's friend or best man (John the Baptist)
Matthew 9:14-15 Mark 2:18-20 Luke 5:33-35	Teachers of the law question Jesus	Not mentioned	Guests
Matthew 25:1:13	Kingdom parable of a wedding banquet	Not mentioned	Wise/foolish virgins
Revelation 19:6-9	Wedding feast of the Lamb	Being made ready	Those who are invited
Revelation 21:9-25	Picture of the future rule (kingdom) of God	The new Jerusalem	Those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life