

The Wife of Jehovah

Many people are familiar with the teaching that the church is the bride of Christ. This doctrine can be found throughout the New Testament. First, Jesus referred to Himself as the “bridegroom” (Matthew 9:15) which only makes sense if He has a bride. In the parable of the 10 virgins our Lord compared Himself to a bridegroom who has gone to take a bride (Matthew 25:1-13). John the Baptist called himself the “friend of the bridegroom” in reference to the Messiah (John 3:29). Revelation 19:7 (which takes place at the end of the tribulation) says that “the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife hath made herself ready”. Revelation 19:9 says “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb”. Revelation 21:9 speaks of “the bride, the Lamb's wife” when talking about the New Jerusalem (which is the city where the church will live after the day of judgment).

All of this evidence firmly establishes the fact that the church is the bride of Christ. The marriage will take place in Heaven while the seven-year tribulation is taking place on Earth. Jesus said that the marriage feast will be celebrated in the millennium, after His return (Matthew 22:2-13).

What many people don't realize is that the Old Testament teaches that Israel was the wife of Jehovah. This is something that we need to understand to properly interpret the Old Testament.

The Bible teaches that marriages start with a covenant which a bridegroom makes with his bride. In Deuteronomy Moses told Israel that God had made a covenant with them at Horeb:

Deuteronomy 5:1-3: “And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep,

and do them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.”

This is actually a marriage covenant that God made with Israel. There are several ways that the Bible verify this. First, God said that He was a jealous God and His hand would be against the Israelites if they sought after other gods:

Exodus 20:5-6: “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.”

Exodus 34:14: “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:”

Deuteronomy 4:24: “For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.”

The Lord told the Israelites that if they broke the covenant He made with them He would become *jealous*. God required Israel to be faithful to Him and not seek after any other gods (just as a husband requires his wife to be faithful and not seek after other men). Idolatry was repeatedly condemned as adultery throughout the Old Testament:

Jeremiah 3:9: “And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks.”

What were the people doing? They were worshipping idols made of wood and stone. The Lord condemned this wicked practice as *adultery*. Why? Because the Israelites were married to Him.

If you're familiar with the Old Testament then you know that the Israelites repeatedly violated the covenant they made with God. One passage that talks about this is found in Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 3:1: “They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord.”

What had the Israelites done? They had chased after other gods. In response the Lord called her a harlot who had gone after “many lovers”. Yet the Lord wanted His wife to return to Him in spite of all she had done.

The book of Hosea also illustrates this principle. God commanded Hosea to take a “wife of whoredoms” (Hosea 1:2). When Hosea's wife left him, God told him to go after her and take her back (Hosea 3:1-3). The Lord did this to show that although His wife Israel had been unfaithful, He wanted her to repent and return to Him. He wanted to take her back.

This verse makes it even more clear:

Jeremiah 3:20: “Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord.”

The nation of Israel was described as a wife who had left her husband. Notice that Israel wasn't called a bride! The imagery that's used for Israel is different from what's applied to the church.

Because of Israel's repeated adultery, God said that she had broken the covenant:

Jeremiah 31:31-32: “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 break, although I was an **husband** unto them, saith the Lord:”

In this passage God specifically says that He was Israel's *husband*, and His wife had broken the covenant He had made with her. So what did God do? He divorced His faithless wife:

Jeremiah 3:8: “And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.”

Isaiah 50:1: “Thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgression is your mother put away.”

Since Israel was an adulterous wife, God gave her a bill of divorcement and put her away. The book of Hosea talks about this divorce in graphic terms:

Hosea 2:2-7: “Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her

husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink. Therefore, behold I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.”

God specifically said that He was going to make Israel's life very difficult so that she would return to her first husband. Even though the Israelites had been wicked and adulterous, God still loved them. In other words, He wanted His wife back.

The Bible tells us that God won't always be estranged from Israel. We've already seen Jeremiah 31:31, which says the day is coming when God will make a different covenant with Israel. There are several other passages that also talk about this remarriage:

Ezekiel 16:61: “Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my

covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.”

Isaiah 54:4-7: “Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.”

Isaiah 62:3-5: “Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”

Hosea 2:19-20: “And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in

lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.”

Do you see the difference between the Lord's relationship with Israel and His relationship with the church? The church is called the bride of Christ, who will one day marry her bridegroom (the Messiah). That marriage will take place in Heaven while the tribulation is happening on Earth. However, Israel is different. God made a covenant with her at Horeb in the days of Moses and took her as His wife. However, Israel repeatedly broke that covenant and sought after other gods. The Lord condemned this as adultery and commanded His wife to repent, but she refused. Ultimately God divorced Israel and put her away – but one day Israel will finally repent and seek Him again, and He will take her back.

You may wonder what the Bible means when it says that one day the church will be married to Jesus. If you want to understand that then read the Old Testament. Israel has already experienced what it's like to be the wife of God! You may have noticed that God treated Israel very differently from the way He's treated the church. Israel was given a place to live and a land to call their own. God watched over Israel and protected her from her enemies whenever the nation called on Him for deliverance. God richly blessed Israel with astounding material blessings as long as the nation was faithful to Him. On top of all that, God manifested His presence in her midst in a visible way. The church hasn't experienced these blessings – but I think we can look forward to them after the marriage of the Lamb.

This does bring up another question. Does God have two wives? Well, the Bible teaches that Israel was the wife of Jehovah while the church is the bride of Christ. It's true that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three persons and yet one being (which is a mystery no one can fully understand). However, it seems that Israel is the wife of the Father while the church is the bride of the Son.

Some scholars have made things more complicated by saying that God treated Israel and Judah as two separate wives and divorced both of them. Although there's a case to be made for that, I think that goes beyond the scope of this study. My point here is simply to introduce this topic and illustrate that the imagery God used to describe His relationship with Israel is *very* different from how He has described His relationship with the church.