

# The Raptured Bride

By Nathan Warner

God has given us a beautiful context in His Word to help us understand the reality of the Rapture—the “catching away” of the Church to Jesus. This is found in the Bride (or Wife) of Christ. Scripture regularly refers to the Church as Christ’s Bride: *“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church”* (Eph. 5:29-32 NASB).

From creation, God established the institution of marriage (Genesis 2:24), and He uses the concept of marriage to directly describe the Church’s relationship to Jesus as a reality, not as an imperfect analogy. We don’t understand all the details of implications of this “mystery” as Paul calls it. In many ways, it is like the mystery of marriage to a young man and woman who are preparing to enter into it together – they know about the concept of marriage, but they have yet to experience it.

Looking at the New Testament Jewish wedding ceremony (like the wedding that Jesus participated in at Cana) can help us understand this Scriptural context for the Rapture.

## THE JEWISH MARRIAGE CEREMONY

Every story of “how I met your mother” began with a man seeking a bride. When he found a woman he liked, he would go to his father and say, “I want to marry *so-in-so* who lives in *such-and-such* house.” His father would go to the father of that woman and negotiate to pay the required “bride price” (purchase price) for the bride, paid to her father. This “payment” changed her status and set her free from her responsibility to her family, so she could be married. After this was agreed, the man and the woman entered into the betrothal agreement that signifies the start of the betrothal period (Kiddushin, which means “period of sanctification”). Every Jewish marriage ceremony was initiated with a “betroth-al,” just as Mary was betrothed to Joseph. The man and the woman are now legally husband and wife, but they cannot yet live together or consummate their marriage for very good reasons, as we shall see. Furthermore, the only way to annul the betrothal period was with formal divorce proceedings.

At this point, the bridegroom and the bride would perform “Mikveh” – a ritual immersion in water, symbolizing their cleansing of themselves for each other – their sanctification for their union. After this, the bridegroom must leave his bride, but before he does, he gives his wife a bridal gift or pledge of his love, which will be a reminder to her of him while he is away (this could be a ring, for example). The bridegroom would leave his bride for at least a year during this betrothal period to prepare a home for them to start their life together. Neither the bridegroom nor the bride knew how long this would take.

Even though the bridegroom was working on preparing their home (often additional rooms added onto his father’s house), it wasn’t up to him to decide when it was finished. His father would determine when it was ready and when the bridegroom could leave to get his bride and bring her to her new home.

While her husband was away working on their home during the betrothal period, the bride would put aside the things that she had been doing to learn the things she would need to know as

a wife. Another huge task for her to complete while waiting for her husband's return was the preparation of her wedding garment. She needed to be focused and eager as she had to be ready at all times to leave immediately when her husband appeared (he could show up at any moment without warning). She was to be watchful for her bridegroom's appearing, for when he came for her, he would precede his arrival with a loud shout or trumpet blast to alert her that he had come for her. She needed to come out to him as quickly as possible. In this way, she would put on her wedding garment, veil her face, come out of her father's house, and meet her bridegroom outside. He would then take her away to his father's home, where they would enter their chambers for a 7-day honeymoon. Inside this chamber, the bride would remove her veil for the first time, and at the end of the honeymoon, the bride and groom would come out of the chamber. Then the wedding guests would see the bride unveiled and glorious with her husband for the first time. At this point, the wedding feast would commence with all the guests to celebrate the union of the husband and wife.

## **THE HEAVENLY MARRIAGE CEREMONY**

**THE BRIDE PRICE**—Before we became the Church, we were in bondage to the elemental things of the world, enslaved to our false father, satan, through sin and death. God in His love and mercy sent His Son to pay the price for the Church's freedom, so that we could become the Bride of Christ. This is why when the Church eagerly looks for the Rapture, we are *"looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds"* (Titus 2:13-14). The price God paid for the Church was Jesus' very life. Paul explained this to the Elders of the Church: *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood"* (Acts 20:28). John confirmed this when he saw a vision in Heaven where *"they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation'"* (Revelation 14:3). Therefore, we are told, *"You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body"* (1 Corinthians 6:20) during your time waiting for Christ's return – the Church's betrothal period: our period of sanctification.

**THE BETROTHAL PERIOD** (called Kiddushin—Literally "sanctification")—It is important to note that "sanctification" means "to be set apart" for something. In a betrothal, the man and woman were setting themselves apart for one another, "cleansing" themselves from all other desires, purposes, plans, and interests. They would then remain faithful to one another throughout the betrothal (sanctification) period before they would be married. The Church is betrothed to Christ as Paul described, *"For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin"* (2 Corinthians 11:2). Just as this was symbolically initiated through the "Mikveh" (a ceremonial immersion in water, symbolizing the initiation of sanctification – cleansing the body to be set apart for one another), Jesus was baptized for us, and we are to be baptized for Him, as a symbol of our new life in Him.

Baptism is a symbol of our being sanctified for Jesus – for Believers, sanctification is a

process that continues throughout our lives here on earth. Jesus said concerning His disciples, *“For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth”* (John 17:19). Paul, therefore, encouraged us with this message: *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). Paul also commands: *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless”* (Ephesians 5:25-27). So, we are not sanctifying ourselves, but we are being sanctified by the Word of God and by His Spirit in us: *“You were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:11b).

**BRIDEGROOM’S PLEDGE**—Just as a bridegroom would give his bride a pledge to be a comfort and reminder of his love for her while he was away preparing a place for them, so *“He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge”* (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). *“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory”* (Ephesians 1:13-14). Just as the pledge would bring to the bride’s remembrance all the promises and words that the bridegroom had told her, Jesus told us that *“the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and **bring to your remembrance all that I said to you**”* (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit is Christ’s pledge to us that we belong to Him—a living pledge in us—God’s own Spirit. Thus, in longing desire for Jesus’ return, *“the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’”* (Revelation 22:17a) until He appears!

**THE BRIDEGROOM LEAVES**—In the same way that a bridegroom had to leave his bride to go away and prepare a place for them in his father’s house, so Jesus told us, *“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also”* (John 14:2-3). Here we have not only the promise that He is preparing a place for us, but that He is returning for us to take us to be with Him in the Rapture and the Resurrection. But as a bridegroom did not know when his father would decide that things were ready for him to leave to retrieve his bride, so Jesus told us, *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone”* (Matthew 24:36).

**THE BRIDE WATCHES FOR HIS RETURN**—For the young bride, her sanctification period can be a challenging time while she waits for her bridegroom to return for her. She must endure distractions and temptations, just as she must endure mockery and abuse in her father’s house or her hometown, as these things try to prevent her dedication to be prepared and watching for her husband. She always keeps her eyes on the horizon in the direction her husband has gone and from which he will come back for her.

In the same way, every generation of the Church must not tire of looking and longing for the

return of Jesus Christ. We are so easily distracted, tempted, and abused by the world we were born into. It still acts like it has power over us and it takes advantage of us, but we have been bought from it with a price. Our abusive “father’s household” (the world ruled by satan) no longer has true power over us.

We must watch for our Bridegroom’s return! *“Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming”* (Matthew 24:42), and *“watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap”* (Luke 21:34). *“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Mark 14:38).

THE BRIDEGROOM RETURNS FOR HIS BRIDE (called nuptials or “Nisuin”—Literally “elevation”)— *“The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away”* (Song of Solomon 2:13). When the bridegroom’s father was satisfied that all was prepared properly, then came the time for the bridegroom to leave his father’s house to retrieve his bride. Just as the bridegroom would make a commotion with shouts to alert the bride that he was ready to take her away, so *“the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words”* (1 Thess. 4:16-18). Thus, the Church will ALWAYS be with the Lord from that moment on. In the same way, the earthly bridegroom would take his bride, veiled in her wedding garment, back to his father’s house where they would enter their closed chambers and consummate their marriage.

THE SEVEN DAY “HONEYMOON”— *“Draw me after you; let us run. The king has brought me into his chambers. [ Others ] We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you”* (Song of Solomon 1:4). In the human example, as soon as the bride and bridegroom returned to his father’s house, they were hidden from the world in their chamber for 7 days, enjoying their union, while their friends and guests celebrated for them outside. This could very well correspond to the 7-year Tribulation period on earth while the Church is “hidden” in Heaven with Christ, as John saw in his vision: *“I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride [wife] has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’ –for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints”* (Rev. 19:6-8).

EXITING THE MARRIAGE CHAMBERS FOR THE MARRIAGE FEAST—After their honeymoon, the bridegroom would emerge with his bride for the marriage feast with all the guests. This was the first time that the guests saw husband and wife together, and the bride was seen unveiled in all her beauty beside her husband. In the same way, Paul cheers us with these words: *“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”* (Col. 3:4). The Church will no longer be veiled but will be seen sharing the glory of her Lord and Savior forever! *“Then he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb”’”* (Rev. 19:9). This heavenly marriage feast will occur before Jesus returns to earth to end the 7-year Tribulation period that has been occurring in the world

while Jesus has been with His Church in Heaven.

**MARRIED LIFE**—After this, the new husband and wife begin life together as one. In similar fashion, the Church is joined to the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ. He is a conquering King, and He will set out to conquer the earth. The Church accompanies Jesus in His invasion of earth to end the Tribulation and initiate His Millennial reign: “*And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following Him on white horses*” (Rev. 19:14), but like a young queen, the Church is not there to fight for her King in battle – rather, she is there to witness her King’s victory singlehandedly, for “*from His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords*” (Rev. 19:15-16). From this moment on, the Church will reign with Jesus on the earth, for Jesus has promised, “*He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father*” (Rev. 2:26-27).

**YOU ARE THE BRIDE TODAY**—In this world today, we are enduring the betrothal period, when we are away from our Lord. Yet, we have Jesus’ Holy Spirit as His pledge to us that He will return to take us to Himself. In this world, we are tempted and treated badly by Christ’s enemies, even in our own households because He has made us His Bride and we have taken His name: “*You will be hated by all for My name’s sake*” (Matt. 10:22a).

But, “*since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God*” (2 Peter 3:11-12a). Therefore, “*walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory*” (1 Thess. 2:12).

In this present time, we are to be entirely absorbed with eagerness for Jesus’ return. Yes, at all times to Jesus, “*the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’*” (Revelation 22:17a)! Our eyes are to be fixed in the direction that our Bridegroom has gone, eagerly waiting for His return for us. Remember His precious promise: “*Surely I am coming soon*” (Rev. 22:20a). May the precious words, “*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus*” (Rev. 22:20b) be always whispered in our hearts and on our lips. Jesus has promised to take us to Himself. We will never be parted from Him again, and we will be with Him forever, through all Eternity. Even so, Amen.