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THE METAPHORICAL USE OF MARRIAGE IN SCRIPTURE: A PENTECOSTAL EXPLORATION

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THE METAPHORICAL USE OF MARRIAGE IN SCRIPTURE:
A PENTECOSTAL EXPLORATION

MASTERS THESIS

PRESENTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
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ABSTRACT

The biblical writers utilize the metaphor of marriage to describe the relationship between God and humanity. Within this imagery, the people of God are often depicted as a bride. This thesis contributes to an understanding of the metaphor of marriage in Scripture by analyzing the socio-historical wedding practices of ancient Judaism. The use of the metaphor in both Old and New Testaments is examined, followed by an analysis of bridal language in early Pentecostal periodical literature. It concludes with a constructive Pentecostal ecclesiology structured on the characters and the stages found within the typical Jewish wedding.

*For my beautiful bride, Bethany,
“Come what may.”*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Thesis and the Task

Throughout the Scriptures the relationship between God and humanity is portrayed as a marriage. It is not uncommon for the marriage customs of the Patriarchs to be depicted as analogies that reflect their covenantal relationship with YHWH. The OT prophets cautioned Israel against committing infidelity towards YHWH who is portrayed as a relentless suitor and a faithful husband. The NT writers, along with Jesus, utilize the marriage metaphor in the development of ecclesiological and eschatological themes. Early Christians made these metaphorical connections, which can be found in patristic sermons, letters, and writings. Consequently, the colorful history of this metaphor in the church is vibrant and is undoubtedly a prevalent theme. While God's covenantal relatedness is articulated in diverse ways and with many analogies, the metaphor of marriage is canonically and historically consistent and therefore serves as a leading conceptual framework for understanding humanity's relationship with the Divine.

God and people are partners whose purposes are intricately woven into the other. Not unlike the *perichoresis* of the trinity, the partnership of two spouses in a marriage may be understood as a dance of sorts.¹ The two spouses, just as the persons in the Trinity, “[move] around, making room, relating to one another without [anyone] losing their own identity.”² Eventually, through mutual affection, the identity and will of the partners will begin to become

¹ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1996), 31.

² *Ibid.*

more alike. Similarly, God's long-standing relationship with humanity is a story of betrothal that ends with a great wedding feast and a "happily-ever-after" *beginning* into eternity.

Structure and Flow of the Argument

To see the metaphor as it exists within the biblical texts, I begin in chapter two with the concept of Jewish marriage practices in their socio-historical context, though these practices varied over time. The stages of Jewish weddings can be seen in three parts: the contract stage, the consummation stage, and the celebration stage. An exploration of the metaphor of Jewish marriage from Genesis to the Second Temple Period follows in chapter three. When examining Israel's history with YHWH as part of the contract stage, it becomes increasingly evident that God's people do not always reciprocate the affections of God. Still, while they remain adulterous, "God refuses to abandon [divine] purposes despite the unfaithfulness of [God's] own people and works even in their unbelief to create a people more perfectly and completely [God's] own."³

God creates humankind in the *imago Dei* and establishes them immediately for partnership with the Divine (Gn 2:15; 3:8-9). The two human partners *together* in relationship become a more complete representation of God. Fast forward to Noah, and later to Abram, and God establishes covenants so significant that the Jewish wedding customs began to symbolically reflect them as a reminder of the greater relationship between God and the people of God. Records indicate that even as outside cultures started to influence the Hebrews, wedding traditions were largely retained with the emphasis on YHWH's covenantal promises.⁴

³ William A. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 17.

⁴ Gordon Wenham, "Marriage and Divorce in the Old Testament," *Διδασκαλία* 1 (1989): 8.

Furthermore, the OT prophets contribute a vast amount of imagery regarding YHWH and YHWH's bride. In some instances, (as in Ezekiel) this was in relation to the city of Jerusalem, and in others, the messages to Israel, as well as the lives of the prophets, became representative of God's pursuit of Israel, the scandal of their union, and the bride's constant unfaithfulness. Marriage language also exists within the Writings. The Psalter contains "the wedding psalm" (Ps 45), written as a song or poem for the wedding day of a king and his foreign bride. Additionally, Song of Songs famously provides romantic language and marital terminology which can be drawn from for the purposes of this thesis.

The marriage metaphor is not unique to the OT. Chapter four examines the use of the metaphor in the NT. Jesus uses bridal language with his disciples on multiple occasions providing his own affirmation and establishment of the metaphor. He also refers to marriage, wedding parties, and the like in his parables. Additionally, the Epistles contain the marriage metaphor, referring to Jesus as the groom. The "marriage supper of the Lamb" as found in the book of Revelation is robust in its application of the metaphor which fits within the last stage of the wedding narrative. Its emphasis on the eschatological union of the bride and the bridegroom will conclude the exploration of the canonical Scriptures.

The metaphor of marriage is examined within Pentecostal literature in chapter five, specifically within the *Apostolic Faith*, *Bridegroom's Messenger*, and *Pentecostal Evangel* publications. Following this analysis, the thesis concludes in chapter six with an identification of the wedding characters and the stages existing within the marriage metaphor and arranges them in light of ancient Jewish wedding traditions. The metaphor of marriage is present within both Old and New Testaments, is understood by early Pentecostals (as observable in their early literature), and begs for further contemplation within Jewish marriage customs.

Pentecostals have long included biblical phrases such as “the bride and the bridegroom” and “the marriage supper of the lamb” in their sermons, publications, and theologies. While the language still flourishes within many Pentecostal communities, the socio-historical context of Jewish marriage customs has been overlooked, thereby missing significant aspects of the analogy. Those within Pentecostalism have appropriately applied the metaphor into their social contexts, but have yet to define it within the world of ancient Judaism. The fullness of the metaphor is best comprehended when engaged in the context of the Scriptures where it can be seen as an overarching theme.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF JEWISH MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

Introduction

In Jewish thought and literature marriage is often used as a symbol of God's covenant with humanity. A husband and wife becoming "one flesh"¹ (Gn 2:24) represent a greater theme of God drawing humankind into God's self for eternal relationship. The metaphor can be read on multiple levels and is a recurring theme throughout Scripture as well as Pentecostal literature and tradition. This chapter describes historical Jewish marriage customs so that the use of the metaphor in scripture and in Pentecostal theology can be better understood.

Manners and customs of the typical Jewish wedding varied as time progressed, but the theme of marriage as a metaphor symbolizing God's covenant with people was retained.² The traditions of betrothal, bridal price agreements, and dowry practices also survived into the first century and even still today within some Orthodox circles. Betrothal and wedding arrangements often followed a series of stages which are outlined in this chapter. Subsequently, an examination of other practices such as endogamy (marriage permitted only within the community) and marriage laws contributes to a fuller understanding of the metaphor when applied to the canonical texts and the historical narrative.

¹ All translations of the Bible will be in the NIV unless otherwise specified.

² David Instone-Brewer, "Marriage and Divorce," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 916-917.

The Stages of a Jewish Marriage

The stages of the Jewish marriage consisted of a contract or betrothal stage, in which the terms of responsibility and payment were determined (Gn 34:12; Ex 22:17);³ the consummation stage (also known as the *chuppah* stage), wherein the bride and groom would consummate their union in the *chuppah*, or *bridal chamber* (Jl 2:16; Ps 19:6);⁴ and finally, the seven blessings and the marriage supper, when seven days of feasting would occur as a celebration of the marriage while the seven blessings were recited over the couple.⁵ It is interesting to note how this matrimonial process follows the covenant process: the naming of terms, the confession and finalization of oath, and the fellowship meal (Gn 31).⁶

The contract between the bridegroom and the father of the bride established the bridal price—the amount the bride’s parents were to be compensated “symbolically as well as materially” for their daughter’s absence from their home (Gn 24:34-50).⁷ The contract began once the interested man offered an object of value to the intended (earlier this was a monetary offering and eventually developed into a ring or a valuable object).⁸ Additionally, it included any act or achievement which the bridegroom was expected to perform (common in the Exodus-Settlement Period) (1 Sm 17:25; 1 Sm 18:25; Jo 15:16-19)⁹ and listed the dowry inheritance paid

³ Daniel Sinclair, “Marriage,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, eds. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 423-424.

⁴ S. B. Freehof, “Huppah,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, eds. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 341.

⁵ Norman Solomon, “Marriage,” in *Historical Dictionary of Judaism*, ed. Norman Solomon (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), 243.

⁶ Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, 118-119.

⁷ William C. Martin, “Marriage,” in *The Layman’s Bible Encyclopedia* (Nashville, TN: The Southwestern Company, 1964), 500.

⁸ Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love & Marriage* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1991), 144-145.

⁹ Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 72-73.

on the part of the bridegroom to the bride¹⁰ as well as the duties of both spouses which was later instituted through common law.¹¹ The prices stated in the contract varied based upon the purity of the bride, the inheritance of the bridegroom, and the social and economic classes of both parties.¹²

The treatment of the marriage contract even prior to the consummation of the marriage was not taken lightly. Any husband who abused the agreements stated within the contract or negotiated far less than a common bridal price could be accused of fornication.¹³ The contract was usually only broken if payment could not be made or for reasons of adultery.¹⁴ This process of divorce prior to consummation is defined in the Greek as δειγματικών (Mt 1:19) and is addressed later in this chapter.

The stage of negotiating and fulfilling the contract and bride price was also known as the betrothal period. Isaac and Rebekah's betrothal is an appropriate example here, but similar betrothal customs were also practiced during the Second Temple period by prominent people such as Herod,¹⁵ Pheroras,¹⁶ Herod's grandsons,¹⁷ and Mariamne and Archelaus.¹⁸ The betrothal period usually lasted at least a year, but perhaps longer depending on the needs of both parties to prepare for the marriage.¹⁹ The time frame for betrothals is not adequately addressed in historical

¹⁰ Avraham Walfish, "Ketubbot," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, eds. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 425.

¹¹ Instone-Brewer, "Marriage and Divorce," 917.

¹² Walfish, "Ketubbot," 425.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 14.300, trans. William Whiston (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998); cf. Flavius Josephus, *The War of the Jews*, 1.344, trans. William Whiston (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998).

¹⁶ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 16.194.

¹⁷ Josephus, *The War of the Jews*, 1.556-558, 560, 565; cf. *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.14.

¹⁸ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.140.

¹⁹ Walfish, "Ketubbot," 425.

sources, but as far as a specific instance for examination, “a quick calculation would imply that a considerable period of betrothal passed before Herod married Mariamne.”²⁰

The consummation stage solidified the marriage through intercourse and was the final seal of the contract (Gn 29:23-30).²¹ Just as paying off a loan today would demand signatures on the contract in order to verify completion of it, so sexual relations solidified marriage in ancient Judaism, signified the completion of the bride price payments, and marked the contract as effective. Consummation of marriage is a tradition that endures even unto today. Annulments can be granted to those who have not consummated the marriage through sexual intercourse.²² The practice of consummation of a marriage contract can be traced back to Jacob and Leah where seven years of working in place of a bride price was payment, and fulfillment of it allowed the marriage to be consummated through sexual relations. An example of this tradition exists in Jewish narrative literature of the Hellenistic period like that of *Joseph and Aseneth*.²³

Proof of the virgin bride’s blood had to be shown on a cloth to at least two witnesses chosen by the betrothed parties.²⁴ These witnesses were usually a bridesmaid and a groomsman who waited outside the *chuppah* (where the consummation took place) until the virgin’s blood was shown to them on a cloth.²⁵ This verified the purity of the bride which the bridal price reflected accordingly. The witnesses would listen for the voice of the bridegroom to signify his

²⁰ David W. Chapman, “Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 186; cf. Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 14.300; 467.

²¹ Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love & Marriage*, 144-145.

²² Nihara K. Choudrhi, *The Complete Guide to Divorce Law* (New York, NY: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 2004), 10.

²³ *Joseph and Aseneth*, 21:9.

²⁴ Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love & Marriage*, 144-145.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

physical union with the virginal bride which was known as the “triumphant shout.”²⁶ Once the consummation occurred within the *chuppah* which the bridegroom built on to his father’s house as the dwelling place for he and his bride,²⁷ the contract was finalized and the couple would return to the homes of their parents and remain apart until the public reception.²⁸

When it came time for the wedding feast the husband would be escorted by the bridesmaids and the bride by the groomsmen only after resounding a series of shouts to signify the bridegroom’s coming and to warn the bride to prepare.²⁹ When the shouts began, the bride would bathe and adorn herself in perfume, fine garments, and jewels so that she presented her best self to her bridegroom.³⁰ Feasting in celebration of a marriage typically lasted for seven days³¹ and is traced back in the biblical text as far as Jacob and Leah (Gn 29:27). Wedding feasts often occurred around “seasonal Jewish festivals.”³² The feast was the public announcement and celebration of the completed union between the bridegroom and the bride and allowed for the community to bless the married couple and to be blessed as a result of their union through sharing in the feast. The guests were served by an appointed steward over the wedding festivities who arranged and prepared the feast, and even refilled the wine during the celebration.³³

Jewish weddings were special occasions within the community. As such, specific wedding garments were required for entry into the marriage supper (Mt 22:11-13).³⁴ Guests would accessorize with special jewelry and wear their best wedding clothes for the festivities.

²⁶ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John: Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1-4* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 416.

²⁷ Chapman, “Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism,” 206.

²⁸ Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love & Marriage*, 160.

²⁹ Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 225.

³⁰ Chapman, “Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism,” 206.

³¹ Solomon, “Marriage,” 243.

³² Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 225.

³³ *Ibid.*, 226.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

The wedding feast was an occasion that required the guests to respect the bride and bridegroom by arriving in these designated garments which were cleaner and more ornate than the clothes that were worn during daily life.³⁵ The bride and bridegroom, along with their families, honored the guests by inviting them to the wedding feast, and the guests honored the marriage of the bridegroom and bride by attending.

Endogamy and Communal Purity

Owing to the nomadic nature of the Hebrews during the Patriarchal Period and the importance placed upon communal responsibility in the raising of children, marriage outside of the community was discouraged.³⁶ The behavior of children was interpreted as a reflection of how the community invested in their upbringing. This resulted in high standards for marital expectations within the community. The expectations of endogamy were not always followed (e.g., Gn 28:6-9). The community discouraged endogamy in order to maintain the purity of their culture (Jg 14:3; Gn 28:6-9). While the early Hebrews believed the best options for marriage would be found inside their own communities and even practiced marriage within extended families, the first-century Jewish philosopher, Philo, writes that “intermarriages with strangers produce new relationships, which are in no respect inferior to those which proceed from ties of blood.”³⁷ Philo endorsed the practice of marriage outside of family ties, but still within the faith and community of Judaism.³⁸

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 21.

³⁷ Philo, “The Special Laws III,” in *The Works of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria*, ed. E.C. Marsh, trans. C.D. Yonge (Amazon Digital Service, LLC), Kindle.

³⁸ Ibid.

Exogamy, or intermarrying outside the community, increased until Moses instructed against it (Dt 7:3). Joshua also reminds the community, while in his old age, to heed this instruction (Jo 23:12). It is not until Solomon's foreign marriages that exogamic tendencies toward those of other nations are practiced—often for political reasons (1 Kgs 11:1). The Hebrews were meant to be a nation of witnesses to the rest of the world (Gn 12:3; Is 45:4-6).³⁹ Therefore, their purity mattered, their faithfulness to God was critical, and their eventual adoption of monogamy hinged upon the community's ability to remind and encourage each other in their worship of YHWH. For this reason, the community needed to maintain a sense of identity apart from the rest of the world.

Challenges to a Successful Jewish Marriage

First-century historian Flavius Josephus asserted that Jewish law forbade marriage based upon an expectation of a sizable dowry: γαμεῖν δὲ κελεύει μὴ προικὶ προσέχοντας, “it gives instruction to marry not paying heed to the dowry.”⁴⁰ It is interesting to note, however, that this legal stipulation is not found within the Pentateuch law codes, nor does dowry-hunting appear in the biblical text or Jewish scriptures other than in 2 Maccabees 1:14.⁴¹ This is not to say that dowry-hunting is an admirable practice. In truth, it transforms the focus of a suitor from searching for a potential partner to love into a selfish endeavor of economic or social advancement.

³⁹ Michael A. Grisanti, “Israel’s Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55: An Update,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 39-61.

⁴⁰ Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, Translation and Commentary by John M. G. Barclay (Boston, MA: Brill Publishers, 2007), 283.

⁴¹ Eberhard Bons, “Marriage and Family in Flavius Josephus’s *Contra Apionem* (II, § 199–206) against its Hellenistic Background,” *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook: Family and Kinship in the Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, ed. Angelo Passaro (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 462.

The Greek term, *δειγματίζω* (“to expose,” “disgrace,” or “to make an example of”)⁴² (Mt 1:19), refers to the Hebrew practice of nullifying a contract before consummation of the marriage.⁴³ One of the betrothed parties usually “exposed” the other due to sexual infidelity or failure to provide that which they were required to provide based upon the marriage contract.⁴⁴ The expectation for each spouse was that the husband would provide food, cloth, or money for both, and that the wife would cook, sew, or hire a servant to do both.⁴⁵ If the potential husband had a legal right to claim the unfaithfulness of the bride, he could expose her publicly and regain all payments made to her father. If he intended on breaking the engagement quietly, as Joseph did (Mt 1:19), he did not regain any payment and in turn had to pay the remainder of what was stated in the contract.⁴⁶

In cases, other than infidelity, divorce meant that payments would be made to the bride and her family by the bridegroom.⁴⁷ Closer to the Second Temple Period, marriage contracts protected wives from sudden divorce and were even kept as a reminder of their rights and the responsibilities of the husband.⁴⁸ However, while the law seems to be in favor of the bride, the bride had no claim to divorce within the biblical text.⁴⁹ Husbands could not divorce without evidence regarding their wives. They could, however, divorce their wives due to infertility (and sometimes had divorce imposed upon them after ten years of barrenness)⁵⁰ as well as infidelity.

⁴² Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlberger III, “δειγματίζω – #1165,” *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

⁴³ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 76.

⁴⁴ Avraham Walfish, “Ketubah,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, eds. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 424.

⁴⁵ Instone-Brewer, “Marriage and Divorce,” 917.

⁴⁶ Walfish, “Ketubah,” 423-424.

⁴⁷ Instone-Brewer, “Marriage and Divorce,” 917.

⁴⁸ Walfish, “Ketubah,” 423-424.

⁴⁹ Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 134.

⁵⁰ Instone-Brewer, “Marriage and Divorce,” 917.

Those who wrongly accused their brides of adultery were subject to pay a fine and to be whipped in public (Dt 22:13-19).⁵¹ If a husband chose to divorce his wife privately (as Joseph could have), he would organize a writ of divorce in the presence of two witnesses as opposed to a public disgrace.⁵² In the case of an unfaithful wife, however, the wife and her lover (only if unwed) could be publicly beaten or even killed.⁵³

Summary

The description of the socio-historical background of Jewish wedding/marriage customs offered in this chapter provide a context in which the specific passages of scripture can now be analyzed in the following two chapters. The endogamic precautions the Hebrews observed along with their respect for the contract and dowry reveal the heart of the Hebrews to safeguard (sometimes ineffectively) the institution of marriage. Marriage, for the ancient Hebrews, was more than a commitment between two people; it was representative of God's commitment to humanity, as I demonstrate in the following chapter. For that reason, protecting the customs, sanctity, and purity of their wedding traditions and marriage partners was of primary concern.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Osborne, "Matthew," 76.

⁵³ Instone-Brewer, "Marriage and Divorce," 916-917; Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 134.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MARRIAGE METAPHOR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introduction

The Hebrews understood their physical unions to be a representation of God's covenant with them.¹ The covenantal phrase, "I will be your God and you will be my people," is found within the Old Testament repeatedly in some form or another (Gn 17:8; Ex 6:7; Lv 26:12; Jer 30:22; Ez 14:11; etc.) and later resounds as a renewed theme at the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation (Rev 21:3). As marriage traditions evolved and developed nuances from period to period, the overarching theme of the metaphor symbolizing the covenantal relationship between humankind and the Divine remained a prominent theme.

Inside of this thematic expression of union between God and humanity, it is impossible to discern Israel "without reference to YHWH" just as it will prove equally difficult to discern YHWH with no reference to Israel.² The relationship that God opens up to is vulnerable, giving, and even yielding. God is vulnerable in this relationship, and therefore receives pleasure when the actions of the people are sincere and loving (which God repeatedly displays).

When read through the lens of the marriage metaphor, the Old Testament becomes a singular story of the history of Israel and its pursuer. It is where the betrothal, contract, and the bride price fit within the love story. In this narrative, God pursues humankind and offers a covenant between them. Following the agreement of the contract, God offers provision for the bride and is met with infidelity and unfaithfulness.

¹ Solomon, "Marriage," 243.

² Walter Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 19.

The Garden Wedding

No nuptials took place in the garden and yet Genesis 3:8 refers to Eve as Adam’s “wife” (*ishshah*).³ To better understand the metaphor here, I want to focus on the relationship between the humans present in Eden and the Creator who placed them there. The freedom to love only exists because the freedom to rebel also exists. When all parties are participating in this loving relationship out of their own desires for it, the union between God and humanity is realized in this dance where the two “make room” for the other.⁴ God loves and exists with humans and humans reciprocate this love back through partnership in the plans of God. Still, “love woos—it does not compel.”⁵

Eve is Adam’s wife and Adam is Eve’s husband because God has established their union *in* and *with* God. While Adam and Eve partner together in the garden, they partner together with God as humans connected to God through obedience. This obedience was not something which God demanded or required, but something that identified those who accepted the terms of what it meant to be God’s partner.⁶ Just as Adam and Eve were partners with different contributions to make, God seeks humans as partners in redemptive activities. Consequently, while no “suitable helper” (*ezer kenegdo*) could be found for Adam, the only suitable helper for God would be those who are created in the divine image. Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God.⁷ Notice Adam’s declaration to Eve: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 31.

⁵ Ibid., 157.

⁶ Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God*, 21-24.

⁷ “A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man” (1 Cor 11:7). Notice Paul still retains Eve’s identity as being created in God’s image, not Adam’s.

flesh” (Gn 3:23). Just as Adam recognized his own likeness in Eve,⁸ so the very creation of humanity in God’s own image enables humanity to serve as partners with God.

Marriage and the Patriarchs

The contractual agreement in the Patriarchal Period varied a bit from contracts that would come in later times. Dividing animal carcasses and walking between them was the finalization of the agreement.⁹ Within the metaphor, this would be the consummation stage. In all types of Jewish covenants and oaths it was the blood that sealed the contract. The division of the animals served as a visual warning of what could legally happen to the one who broke the covenant (Jer 34:18). God put Abram to sleep as the Spirit moved alone down the covenantal path. God initiated the covenant as the suzerain¹⁰ and God could be held responsible for any trespass against it by either party.

Abraham and his people were still required to “keep” the covenant (Gn 17:10-14) and identify themselves as God’s partner by exemplifying their desire to participate in divine plans. This covenant represented the partnership between God and the Hebrews. As man and wife become one in goal and dwelling, so too, God and humanity partner together in a union with the goal of reconciliation and restoration. Of course, a reminder of this shared commitment must exist. Just as the rainbow served as the signifier of the Noahic covenant for those who belonged to it, circumcision acted as the signifier to all of those who would belong to the Abrahamic covenant.¹¹ Like the bride who later received a symbol of her husband’s love (often a ring), the

⁸ John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰ Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, 117.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

Hebrews would be reminded of their betrothal to God through the practice of circumcision (Gn 17:10-14; Jer 4:4; Ez 44:9).

As marriage customs evolved over time, outside influences upon Jewish traditions became a reality. The Jacob-Laban story suggests some Neo-Assyrian influence within certain marriage practices.¹² The tradition of selling slaves to others for marriage seems to be how Laban treated Jacob's proposal and the promising of his daughters due to the sizeable dowry which Jacob received in place of Leah or Rachel.¹³ This most likely occurred as a result of economic crisis.¹⁴ Jacob worked fourteen years for Laban's daughters (Gn 29), Laban brought Jacob into his household (thereby adopting him),¹⁵ and all of this guaranteed that Jacob received the inheritance of Laban as the adopted son who also married Laban's oldest daughter. The practices found here regarding the inheritance and the *errebu* ("to enter") marriage (wherein the groom lives in the house of his father-in-law) were common within the Neo-Assyrian customs around the same time of the Patriarchal Period.¹⁶ This also helps to further indicate why Rachel and Leah complained about the loss of their inheritance (Gn 31:14) as well as Laban's following the Assyrian custom of giving maids to his daughters as wedding gifts (Gn 29:24, 29).¹⁷

Consequently, the Jewish wedding customs take shape not through Israel's ability to isolate themselves, but through the narrative of their experiences, interactions, and the developments of their communities including the influences from other cultures. Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel were consummated when Jacob entered the tent of Laban where

¹² John Van Seters, "Jacob's Marriages and Ancient Near East Customs: A Reexamination," *Harvard Theological Review* 62, no. 4 (October 1969): 394.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 380ff.

¹⁶ M. Burrows, "The Complaint of Laban's Daughters," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 57, (1937): 270ff.

¹⁷ Seters, "Jacob's Marriages and Ancient Near East Customs," 394.

the brides waited for him. Leah and Rachel were contracted to Jacob prior to the consummation (Gn 29:18-19), and yet they lived apart from each other until then (although within the same household of Laban). The tradition of the groom remaining apart from the bride until the consummation and ceremony seems to derive from this historical event (with the influence of the Assyrians). However, once Jacob left Laban, grooms began to retrieve their brides from her father's house in later wedding practices.¹⁸

A prominent theme in relation to some of the wives of the Patriarchs such as Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, is the issue of infertility (Gn 11:30; 25:21; 29:31). An understanding of the bride price along with the significance of child-bearing in pre-historic times, means that one cannot neglect this matter of barrenness which seems to be repetitive among the Patriarchs and their wives. Infertility was often grounds enough for divorce without stipulation of repayment on the part of the groom.¹⁹ On the contrary, the groom could receive a portion of the bride price back after discovering her barrenness. The Patriarchs seem to act mercifully in this regard, however, demonstrated by the emphasis of marriage for unconditional love and commitment over a distorted theme of conditional marriage covenants.

The Marriage Metaphor and the Prophets

The metaphor is a crucial theme in much of prophetic literature, especially as it relates to the lives of the prophets such as Moses, Hosea, and Ezekiel. The symbolism in daily life, messages, or visions provided by each of these prophets represents the marriage covenant between God and

¹⁸ Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 225.

¹⁹ Susan Treggiari, "Marriage and Family in Roman Society," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 138-39; Geoffrey MacCormack, "Coemptio and Marriage by Purchase," *Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding* 20 (1978): 179-99.

Israel in various ways. Since “it is the task of prophetic ministry to bring the claims of the tradition and the situation of enculturation into an effective interface,”²⁰ the metaphor can be viewed as the tension *and* the harmony between the two. In other words, the marriages and messages of the prophets served to illustrate a relationship between God and Israel that is both loving and loathing.²¹

Although the events and stories of Moses are not located canonically in the prophetic literature, Moses was a prophet nonetheless (Dt 18:18; 34:10). When Moses married an Ethiopian woman, Miriam criticized him and questioned his judgement (Nu 12:1-2). God intervened in favor of Moses and silenced Miriam and Aaron, indicating that the relationship between the prophet and the Divine “merits a different kind of prophetic vision.”²² This can be attributed to the prophet’s countercultural role within the Hebrew community. Moses was not concerned with “transform[ing] a regime,” but “with totally dismantling it in order to permit a new reality to appear.”²³

The community of Moses was told that the “LORD set [his] heart on [them] and chose [them]” (Dt 7:7). To “set one’s heart” (*hashaq*) is a term which ascribes a passionate “pursuit of [a] partner, perhaps in lustful ways.”²⁴ The OT prophets were living representation of God’s purposes, struggles, griefs, joys, and jealous pursuit of humanity. It is for *that* reason that Moses’ marriage was not only permissible, but encouraged by God as a symbol of the marriage metaphor.

²⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 2.

²¹ D. J. Clark, “Sex-Related Imagery in the Prophets,” *Biblical Theology* 33 (1982): 409-413.

²² Moshe A. Zipor, “‘Scenes from a Marriage’- According to Jeremiah,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 65 (1995): 84.

²³ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 21.

²⁴ Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God*, 22.

Similarly, God instructed the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute so that his marriage reflected God's relationship with Israel (Ho 1:2). Gomer repeatedly committed adultery against Hosea and became a symbol of Israel and her infidelity towards YHWH (Ho 2:1-13; 4:12, 14). Likewise, Hosea's prophetic uniqueness is affirmed in texts like Hosea 12:10: "I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets gave parables."²⁵ Shortly following, there is a reference to Moses made within Hosea's text (12:13) connecting the two once more so that the inescapable theme of the metaphor is realized. Both Moses and Hosea were prophets, they both married controversial women, and their marriages served to illustrate God's special, prophetic invocation upon them regarding the metaphor.

There can be no denying the gruesome extent to which the prophets went in describing the nation's consequences for adultery and rebellion against God. Rape, mutilation, provocative language, and abuse are all elements of prophetic language regarding Israel's behavior and punishment. For Hosea, the pain hit close to home. His own marriage was used as an analogy of God's marriage to Israel. He likens Samaria to "a sexually depraved wife who... is doomed to be stripped naked, barricaded, and prevented by her husband from any further illicit contact with her lovers (Ho 2:1-13)."²⁶ Jeremiah wrote two centuries after Hosea and compared Jerusalem's demise to the humiliation of a woman whose private parts are exposed to the public (Jer 13:20-27). Ezekiel reflected on Jerusalem's ruin and compares it to a woman who "[betrays] her husband's kindnesses" and love "and as a result rightly deserved to be left to the vilest impulses of her lovers (Ez 16; 23)."²⁷

²⁵ A. A. Macintosh, *Hosea*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 501.

²⁶ Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Within Near Eastern thought, cities were often referred to as “goddesses who were married to the patron god of the city.”²⁸ Hellenistic Phoenician coins depict cities as women wearing crowns.²⁹ In the OT, however, there is never a reference to a deified city or even to YHWH’s wife as a goddess.³⁰ The metaphor of the city as wife exists and yet Ezekiel communicated the completely carnal reality of Jerusalem and her infidelity. Only YHWH can be divine.

The metaphor of Jerusalem as YHWH’s bride in Ezekiel is consistently portrayed more negatively than positively.³¹ YHWH’s wife does not reciprocate the love and affection which YHWH displays to her. Furthermore, while the greater narrative pushes toward gender equality among humankind, the metaphor must maintain the bridegroom as the superior party in the marriage covenant. This means that as suzerain, YHWH offers protection and provision “in exchange for obedience and exclusive loyalty.”³² Whereas the unfaithful wife could be legally beaten in public or even killed,³³ God initiates the covenant and walked the covenantal path alone, so it is God who is accountable to suffer the beating and die due to Israel’s infidelity. Within the OT, the city loves those other than YHWH and has to face the consequences of their own choices. The ruin of Jerusalem is a direct result of their marital trespasses against God.

²⁸ A. Fitzgerald, “The Mythological Background for the Presentation of Jerusalem as Queen and False Worship as Adultery in the OT,” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 34 (1972): 405.

²⁹ L. Kadman, *The Coins of Aelia Capitolina* (Jerusalem: Israel Numismatic Society, 1956); A. Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia: The Classical Art of the Near East* (London: Phaidon, 1969).

³⁰ Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh’s Wife*, SBL Dissertation Series (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 25.

³¹ Galambush, “Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel,” 26.

³² *Ibid.*, 34.

³³ Instone-Brewer, “Marriage and Divorce,” 916-917; Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 134.

Marriage in the Writings

Psalm 45 was written for a king and his foreign bride (most likely Josiah, though commonly argued as Solomon).³⁴ The king that is praised within the Psalm is celebrated not for his physical qualities, but for his inner beauty.³⁵ For instance, the psalmist detects beauty in his “lips” because they are “anointed with grace” (v. 3b).³⁶ Likewise, the terms “splendor” and “majesty” (v. 4; cf. Ps 96:6) are attributed to the king and are “characteristics normally reserved for God.”³⁷ The psalmist is most likely trying to emphasize the divine right of the king to rule, which was common in relation to those belonging to the Davidic Monarch.³⁸ Specifically, the phrase, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever” (v. 6a), is not an indication that the psalmist believed the king was God, but understood that his throne was established by the eternal God.³⁹ As such, a better reading of this text when “vocalizing כסאך as the Piel of a denominative verb, ‘enthroned,’” would be, “The eternal and everlasting God has enthroned you.”⁴⁰

In a poetic shift, the psalmist directs the song to the bride of the king (45:10-16). In contrast to Song of Songs wherein external beauty is often emphasized, the psalmist focuses once more on the internal qualities of the bride by first attributing her inner traits to that of precious gold, and then by acknowledging her garments which suggests her “inner honor and integrity of her person” (v. 14a).⁴¹ Additionally, the poet recognizes the loneliness and heartache

³⁴ Murray J. Harris, “The Translation of Elohim in Psalm 45:7-8,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 35 (1984): 65.

³⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1983), 339.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Herbert W. Bateman IV, “Psalm 45:6-7 and its Christological Contributions to Hebrews,” *Trinity Journal* 22 (2001): 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 273; Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 336-37.

⁴¹ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 340.

of the bride and proceeds to comfort her by revealing the noble character of the king she is marrying.

Although Psalm 45 was written for two physical characters, it is possible to read it Christologically, allowing the metaphor to show through. The king is noble, just, and kind. His throne is established by God and he is the epitome of righteousness with wickedness as his enemy (v. 8).⁴² Subsequently, the bride is revealed to the reader (or hearer) as lonely and homesick. The psalmist soothes her grief by encouraging her in the qualities of the king to whom she is to be wed. This is not the only place within the Writings that the metaphor is mysteriously present.

According to Winslow and Winslow, “The Jewish and Christian producers of the Bible struggled to balance the exclusiveness necessary for creating a coherent, identifiable community with the inclusiveness necessary to fulfill the reason for their existence.”⁴³ Papyri discovered in Elephantine (Southern Egypt) written by Aramaic-speaking Jews from the fifth century BCE reveal that while some Egyptian practices were adopted in marriage ceremonies and contracts, the overarching theme of the covenant and much of Jewish marriage traditions were retained.⁴⁴ This should not be a surprise. This is around the time that the Jews were released from their exile and Ezra was sent to restore order and remind Israel of their laws and traditions. Endogamy also reemerged at this time as a crucial theme for social reconstruction (Ezr 9). Not only do individuals like Nehemiah and Ezra appear on the scene and beg the Jews to remember their traditions, the very exile itself would have driven the Jewish community closer together so that their traditions were fresh in their minds and hearts just as the homes they left behind.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 339.

⁴³ Luke A. Winslow and Karen Strand Winslow, “Ezra’s Holy Seed: Marriage and Othering in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament,” *Journal of Communication & Religion* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 45.

⁴⁴ Wenham, “Marriage and Divorce in the Old Testament,” 8.

How was the Jewish community supposed to balance their desire for inclusion with their identity as witnesses of YHWH to the world? Ezra's instruction came at a time where rebuilding was crucial in multiple areas. The walls of Jerusalem needed reconstruction just as the identity of Jewish traditions that kept the community distinctly Yahwistic also demanded attention.⁴⁵ Four of the recovered Elephantine contracts include the phrase, "she is my wife and I am her husband from this day and forever."⁴⁶ There is striking similarity between this phrase and the covenantal phrase of YHWH; "I will be your God, and you will be my people." The survival of this covenantal phrase and its inclusion in wedding contracts during this period help illuminate the success of Ezra's message and the practice of endogamy.⁴⁷ At times, it seems it was more vital for the Jews to focus inward and strengthen the community through their unique practices like that of endogamy even though the narrative progresses to a place where inclusion and unity become the greater theme.

Song of Songs contains ample spousal and wedding imagery. Although the modern love story does not often include rhetoric likened to nature, this was the reality of the Postexilic, Middle Eastern culture and thus there are plentiful references to types of trees, birds, fruits, animals, and the like.⁴⁸ Terms of endearment are also common in dialogue between spouses of the modern-day world and the same can be said about third century BCE as well as any other era even when variances exist from culture to culture. Endearments found in Song of Songs, however, are not ones that are used in the twenty-first century. One might become comfortable

⁴⁵ Winslow and Strand Winslow, "Ezra's Holy Seed: Marriage and Othering in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," 49ff.

⁴⁶ Wenham, "Marriage and Divorce in the Old Testament," 8.

⁴⁷ Nehemiah also instructed the Jews to divorce their foreign wives (13:23-30).

⁴⁸Dennis F. Kinlaw, *Song of Songs*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 1211.

with terms like “Darling among the maidens” (2:2) or maybe “dove” (2:14; 5:2; 6:9), but not with titles like “a wall” (8:9-10) or “a door” (8:9).⁴⁹

The poetic nature of this collection within the Writings can be better analyzed with masculine and feminine forms and grammatical clues.⁵⁰ Furthermore, it progresses as a single work depicting the expectation of the finalization of the contract and consummation between the bride and groom (which seems to take place in 5:1) and describes the pleasurable experience on part of the groom to think fondly of his bride and their union. Song of Songs contributes to this thesis in its portrayal of endearing, bridal language and reveals the anticipation of the groom to finalize the wedding contract and live with his bride. The pursuit that’s displayed within this text also cultivates a colorful image of God’s pursuit of people and the Divine affections toward them.

Summary

Understanding the historical narrative of God’s relationship with humans in the Old Testament as a marriage metaphor is not difficult. In fact, many OT writers portrayed the relationship this way. From the first moment when Adam and Eve were partnered together to reflect God’s own image, humans became partners with God like that of a marriage.⁵¹ Humans can respond and react to God as God also responds and reacts to humans. They each make room for the other and allow the identity of the other to be retained.⁵²

Marriage customs may have varied over time, but the basic traditions and understanding of the metaphor was never lost. YHWH approached Abraham with intentions and affections (Gn

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 49-77.

⁵² Ibid., 31.

17:7), offered the bridal price and declared that he would “be [the Hebrews’] God” (Gn 15:18; 17:8), took the role of the suzerain *and* became responsible for both parties (as husband *and* father) (Gn 15:17), and offered a reminder of the covenant through the practice of circumcision (Gn 17:10-14; Jer 4:4; Ez 44:9).⁵³ Though YHWH remained faithful, the Hebrews did not.

The prophets’ personal lives and their messages to Israel were representative of God’s feelings toward the bride. She ran off to other lovers and still, God pursued. God’s frustrations grew, however. God would not force the bride to keep the agreements of the contract if she desired others, and as a result, God needed to remind her the dangers of her choices. This was done through the lives and messages of the prophets. Even in reference to the city of Jerusalem, Ezekiel warns that as the bride of YHWH, she will be publicly humiliated as a result of her own choices.

Wedding language within the Writings conveys an understanding of marriage for the broader uses of the marriage metaphor and for the purposes of this thesis. Psalm 45 provides a snapshot of a royal wedding song while Song of Songs cultivates an emphatic expression of union and the anticipatory moments of the groom until the completed union. Even Ezra’s instructions to Israel and the discovery of ancient of wedding contracts dating to back to the reformation of the nation of Israel assist in more effective contemplation regarding the metaphor. The wedding language, evidence of maintained traditions, and even the poetic terms of endearment all exists within the OT texts and were understood on multiple levels, thus contributing to the metaphor of marriage in various ways.

⁵³ Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, 117.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MARRIAGE METAPHOR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Introduction

NT authors convey the metaphor of marriage vividly. The gospels, Acts, the epistles, and even Revelation provide an image of the metaphor that exceeds the Patriarchs and Postexilic Period. This continuity suggests that the metaphor is broader than any singular contextualization of a time or culture, and rather reaches across all time and space as part of the larger narrative.

Jesus used wedding language and consistently confounded those around him with his words and actions, speaking and acting on behalf of, and *as*, God. While some believed that he could be a Messiah or a prophet, it was a hard sell to suggest that he was the Son of God. As the Son, though, he represented the affections of God to humankind and communicated these affections through his teachings and even his use of the marriage metaphor. Jesus' usage of the metaphor exists in various ways. He issued rebuttal against the Pharisees using an analogy of a bride and bridegroom, taught with a parable about ten virgins (bridesmaids), and spoke of his ascension to heaven as preparation in his "Father's house" for his followers who must wait in great anticipation.

Various writers of NT epistles also refer to the marriage metaphor. The writer of Hebrews specifically quotes Psalm 45 and likens the physical marriage, which the psalmist celebrates, to the marriage of the bride and bridegroom, namely, the Son and the church. James reiterates the cautions of the prophets in his address to those within the church community by calling them "adulterous" while 2 John contains bridal imagery also beneficial for the understanding of the metaphor. Similarly, the writer of Ephesians also offers a depiction of Jesus as the head of the church, but only after a reference to the husband as head of the wife.

The use of the metaphor culminates in Revelation when its eschatological elements connect with the ecclesiological ones. In a book rich with metaphors and vibrant imagery, the wedding analogies climax as a primary theme within Revelation. Several subjects relating to the metaphor come into play within a few chapters. The bride and bridegroom language is repeated, the last stage of the Jewish marriage is revealed, and the ecclesiological rhetoric of the “washing of the robes” adds a layer to the metaphor heretofore unused.

Jesus, Marriage, and the People of God

The friend of the bridegroom, or the *groomsman*, played a crucial role in Jewish weddings.¹ It was his responsibility to help lead the bride to the place of consummation where the bridegroom would arrive with his escort of bridesmaids (Jn 3:29; Mt 25:1-10).² John the Baptist goes as far as to self-identify as this groomsman character and claims further that his message of repentance is the completion of his task (Jn 3:29).³ As the groomsman, John’s role was to lead the procession of the bride and to “watch over the [fidelity]” of both parties.⁴ The baptizer was effectively representing the message of the bridegroom and preparing the bride for him. John’s proclamation and call to repentance for the sake of communal purity was affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 11:7-11. Perhaps Jesus’ baptism by John can be viewed as his validation of John’s message. Thus, Jesus’ actions could be interpreted as his affirmation that he has come for his bride and that she is to purify herself from within, just as he will remain pure for her.

¹ Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 225.

² Ibid.

³ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 52-53.

⁴ Ibid.

In the Johannine text, Jesus' first miracle occurred at a wedding feast. The "master of the banquet" (or steward) was about to run out of wine for the guests and Jesus intervened by turning water into wine so that the wedding festivities were not abruptly ended. It would have surely been disappointing to the bride and bridegroom to have their wedding cut short due to a lack of preparation on the part of the steward of the wedding feast. Furthermore, the reputation of the master of banquet would suffer scrutiny if the festal celebration that should have endured for a week met its premature end.⁵

The anticipated disdain that awaited the steward may have affected Mary, the mother of Jesus, to some extent as well if she was involved in catering at all (which the text suggest is a possibility).⁶ This could better illuminate Jesus' words: *τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι*, or "Woman, why do you involve me" (Jn 2:1-11)? At first, his response seems hostile in a sense. However, *γύναι* is the same word he uses for Mary when hanging on the cross (Jn 19:26) and could perhaps be better translated as "my lady" or "madam."⁷ Even if the title "mother" is retained, the phrase may be more accurately translated, "I am not clear, Mother, why are you telling me this?"⁸ It is possible that Mary had some sort of personal stake in the work behind the scenes for the celebration. Regardless, Jesus prolongs the wedding feast and saves the reputation of those involved as well as the jubilant feasting for the guests.

Jesus uses a parable of virgins (bridesmaids) which structures the metaphor both eschatologically and ecclesially (Mt 25:1-13). Within the parable, there are wise bridesmaids who bring extra oil for their lamps so that they may wait as long as necessary for the bridegroom,

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 69.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 129.

and there are foolish bridesmaids who do not bring additional oil. While the foolish bridesmaids who were unprepared rush off to buy more oil, the bridegroom arrives and is escorted by the wise virgins to the wedding feast. The foolish ones are then locked out of the feast and most likely assumed to be wedding crashers due to their late appearance.⁹

Moreover, Jesus' own words to his disciples beg attention within the marriage metaphor: "In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and welcome you into My presence, so that you also may be where I am" (Jn 14:2-3). If this text was written in Hebrew, perhaps the words "rooms" or "place" would be translations of "*chuppah*." As previously noted in chapter two, the *chuppah* was an addition onto the father of the groom's house made by the bridegroom for he and his bride.¹⁰ When the festivities were over, the bride and bridegroom retired to their new home located in or onside of the father's house to begin their new lives together.¹¹

Luke recounts an instance where Jesus insinuates that *he* is the bridegroom in a rebuttal against the Pharisees who were questioning why the disciples were not fasting (Lk 5:33-35). Jesus' response as to why the disciples were not fasting reveals an emphasis upon the joyous occasion of being with him which can be compared to a wedding celebration. Whereas fasting is reserved for practicing spiritual strengthening and to move closer to God, Jesus' presence with the disciples fills that void. Jesus comments, "the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days" (Lk 5:35). Jesus predicts his death *and* prophesies about the church and its fasting following his ascension. Furthermore, "to think at a

⁹ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 512-513.

¹⁰ Chapman, "Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism," 206.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

wedding of the possibility of the groom's death is highly unusual."¹² Jesus is identified as the Son of God within the Lucan text (Lk 3:22; 8:28) and his words here suggest that his absence will provoke his followers to fast like those who anticipate the arrival of the wedded couple to the wedding feast.

The Marriage Metaphor in the Epistles

James uses the OT metaphor, *μοιχαλίδες*, or “adulteresses,” to offer rebuke and urge his audience to repentance (Jas 4:4). Curiously, no masculine form is present here which suggests that James uses metaphorical connotation tracing back to the OT prophets who identified the people of God as YHWH's bride.¹³ His criticism is given, it seems, to those who have become “friend[s] of the world.” James seems to recall the OT spousal imagery by concluding that his audience has traded their love for God in for desires to chase other things they prioritize more. In short: “The disloyalty of Israel to God,” Tasker writes, “was often designated ‘adultery’ by the prophets; and the feminine word used by James suggests that he had especially in mind the wantonness of Hosea's wife, in whose unfaithfulness the prophet was bidden to see an acted parable of the unfaithfulness of God's people.”¹⁴

Similarly, the second epistle of the Johannine letters begins with an address to “the lady chosen by God” or “the elect lady” (2 Jn 1), which *also* seems to be a reference to a church body.¹⁵ Clement of Alexandria proposed that 2 John was written to a Babylonian woman named

¹² Carson, “Matthew,” 885.

¹³ Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publishers, 1988), 148.

¹⁴ R.V.G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 89.

¹⁵ Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publishers, 1988), 318.

Electa.¹⁶ This is improbable, however, even when understanding the elevated status of women within the Johannine community.¹⁷ The language changes between singular and plural, suggesting that it is meant for the broader audience of a congregation.¹⁸ Additionally, the instructions given beginning at verse 5 support this conclusion.¹⁹ Likewise, if it is assumed that the Elect Lady is a reference to a church congregation, then one can deduce the Elect Lady's sister (2 Jn 13) is another congregation and its members.²⁰

The writer of Ephesians used the marriage metaphor of the Christ-Church relationship as an example for the husband-wife relationship (Eph 5:21-33).²¹ Two relationships are highlighted within this pericope, but the supreme example for the human-human relationship is the Divine-human relationship between Christ and the church. The husband is advised to be the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church. Many readers have taken this to mean that the husband “rules” the wife or practices authority over her in his role as the “head.”

Notice, though, that the connotations of leadership in relation to headship are not present in the text. On the contrary, the husband is called the head and compared to Christ who did not lead the church into submission or expect her to yield to his decision-making in her interest, but who, himself, became a picture of the Divine “making room” for the people of God. If anything, the head is an advocate for the rest of the body. The head speaks, sees, and warns so that the body may operate to benefit the head just as the head benefits the body. The author of Ephesians did not incorporate an authoritative role for the husband over the wife as an image of the Divine-

¹⁶ Clement of Alexandria, “Stromata I 4: Comments on the Second Epistle of John,” *ANF* II, 576.

¹⁷ John Christopher Thomas, *The Pentecostal Commentary on 1 John, 2 John, 3 John* (Cleveland, TN: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 40.

¹⁸ Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 318.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; cf. Thomas, *The Pentecostal Commentary on 1 John, 2 John, 3 John*, 40-41.

²⁰ Thomas, *The Pentecostal Commentary on 1 John, 2 John, 3 John*, 51.

²¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publishers, 1988), 352.

human relationship. The writer adds, “this is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32).

The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 45:6-7 in Hebrews 1:8-9: “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore, God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” The psalmist who sings the praises of the king is replaced by the Father who sings the praises of the Son. The anointed king within the metaphor becomes the Anointed One of Israel who is the good King in whom the bride should find comfort and joy. The church’s identity as both Jew and Gentile within this context, helps display her as the foreign bride whose attachment to the world weighs on her mind. She is the one in need of comfort in the arms of the kind and just King. If at any time she rejects the King and turns back to the world, she, in light of the rebuke James gives, becomes an “adulteress.”

Subsequently, the phrase, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Ps 45:6a; Heb 1:8a) takes up two meanings once placed inside the metaphor as well as with its original reading outside of it. A better reading of this phrase in the psalter would be, “The eternal God has enthroned you.”²² Thus Jesus receives the Divine title in Hebrews whereas the king who is the subject of the psalm, does not. There are some who suggest that such a phrase in the psalter is identifying a king belonging to the Davidic monarchy,²³ but even still, Jesus is the point of transit for the metaphor. Clearly, the author of Hebrews sees the metaphorical connection of marriage between God and humanity and takes advantage of utilizing the text this way. Just as Jesus

²² Dahood, *Psalms*, 273, followed by Craigie, *Psalms*, 336f.

²³ Herbert W. Bateman IV, “Psalm 45:6-7 and its Christological Contributions to Hebrews,” *Trinity Journal* 22 (2001): 10.

placed himself in the position of bridegroom and spoke regarding the metaphor thereafter, the authors of various epistles followed suit in ascribing that role to him.

Revelation and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Revelation 17 and 18 allegorically render Babylon as a harlot. She is a symbol of an empirical machine who extorts the innocent for her own greed. Babylon is judged as a prostitute because “she has glorified herself” (18:7) in her pursuit and accumulation of wealth via “social, political, and legal spheres.”²⁴ Those who have “committed adultery” with her are the political and social elite who have used her systems to benefit their lives of luxury.²⁵ The leaders who are accused of this fornication weep at her destruction and at their loss of their economic surpluses.

The judgment expelled here, mirrors that of Tyre’s judgment in Ezekiel 26-27 and could perhaps be a fulfillment of foreshadowing which occurred with the OT prophet.²⁶ The model of this judgment is undoubtedly the same. The groups who weep and are judged over the city’s demise are reintroduced in the apocalyptic text.²⁷ The sin against the innocent within the city is no mere trespass here, but is depicted as sexual immorality²⁸ and therefore contributes significantly to the metaphor. The judgment of these who lived with Babylon in luxury also alludes to Isaiah 23:17 and again “mentions the kings of the earth.”²⁹ The warning of the

²⁴ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 716.

²⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 905.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 717.

²⁹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 997.

prophets within their own historical contexts resounds in Revelation with judgment of another city and with language that is replicated from the OT accounts.

In Revelation 18:23, Babylon is told that “the voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in [her] again.” The city is no place for the feasting of the great wedding. The text metaphorically likens Babylon to a prostitute and yet she is also a city *of* prostitution. It would be absurd to hold a sacred wedding reception in a brothel. Further, “Babylon, who removed the joys of life from the saints, will have her own pleasures taken away.”³⁰ This is a time for judgment on Babylon, not celebration.

Against the temptations and oppression of Babylon, the “bride has made herself ready” (19:7).³¹ The juxtaposition between the harlot and the bride is evident within the apocalyptic text. To everything the harlot said “yes” to, the bride has said no. Just as the brides of Jewish tradition, she wears fine, white linens (19:8). It is crucial to note, however, that the bride within this text did not provide her own garments, but she was given them (19:8).³² Those invited to the feast in verse 9 are graciously received in contrast to those who gather to be devoured by the birds of the air in verse 17.³³ Those listed who are consumed here are the militant, political, and social elite just like those who wept over the destruction of Babylon, but also included are even those who were “small” and “slaves,” yet still enemies of God. Revelation 19:17-18 also begs further reflection of Ezekiel 39:4, 17-20:

I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird.... Speak to the bird of every wing ‘Gather yourselves together and come ... so that you may eat flesh ... you will eat the flesh of mighty ones and the blood of princes.... And you will be satisfied at my table with horses and chariots, mighty ones, and all the men of war.’³⁴

³⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 920.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 934.

³² *Ibid.*, 935.

³³ Koester, *Revelation*, 731.

³⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 965.

Again, the prophetic text could be foreshadowing the things to come in the final judgment of the powerful and the oppressors. The “supper” is a two-sided coin of hospitality and judgment for those who did not practice hospitality or righteousness thereof.³⁵ The wedding supper is set to follow the arrival of the bride who will emerge from the wedding chamber prepared for the feast.³⁶ Jerusalem is identified as the metaphorical “bride, the wife of the Lamb,” who descends from heaven (her wedding chamber) (21:1-2; 9-10)³⁷ and is described with beauty like precious jewels.

Revelation 21:2, 9 repeatedly refer to Jerusalem as the bride. The covenantal phrase of God is repeated here again as well: “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (21:3). This resounds the OT accounts of the phrase (Lv 26:11-12; Ez 37:27; 43:7, 9) thereby connecting the greater theme of the metaphor within the historical narrative.³⁸ It can be concluded, then, that the city of Jerusalem represents the collective people of God. After reissuing this statement of oath, the Divine Bridegroom becomes the King of Psalm 45 in whom the bride can find comfort from her mourning (21:4; Heb 1:8-9; Ps 45:10-17). Those who were ruled over by the oppressors of Babylon and those who turned away from her temptation take on a new identity within this corporate bride and find comfort and joy in their union with the bridegroom. “Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy” (22:11).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1029.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 965.

Perhaps a reading of this text could be interpreted through the lens of election or with the inference that repentance is too late at this point in the future, but “these approaches [would] miss the rhetorical function of the verse, which [aims] to startle the readers into changing their behavior.”³⁹ The primary concern of the text is to urge the wrongdoers to “wash their robes” (22:14).⁴⁰ While many could interpret this washing as ritualistic practicing to make themselves clean, “the Ethiopic and Vulgate translations” included the phrase “in the blood of the Lamb” after indicating the washing of the robes.⁴¹ Rather than considering this an improper addition made to the text, one should instead recall that the bride’s wedding garments were given to her (19:8). Thus, it is not the deeds of washing that make her clean, but the identification of her purity within the reputation of Christ. Jerusalem’s past experiences reveal the warnings of the prophets and their misconduct against their betrothed. Jerusalem has been restored here and has come apart from the systems of Babylon in order to be found in purity before her groom.

Summary

Jesus and those surrounding him utilize and even perform the marriage metaphor. John came to lead the procession of the bridegroom and to watch the fidelity of the couple by calling for communal repentance. Jesus’ disciples were told that they would be brought with him to live when he returned, but that while he was away he would be “[preparing] a place” for them. Even in his parables and his defense against the religious leaders, Jesus insinuates his role within the metaphor and prophecies regarding a bride who will be in mourning following his death.

³⁹ Koester, *Revelation*, 841.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1139.

Many of the epistles also contain metaphorical language regarding marriage to God. James offers a rebuke similar to that of the OT prophets which includes terminology of infidelity. Second John is addressed to the Elect Lady whom one can conclude is a church congregation. Ephesians offers a rich image of the metaphor wherein it maintains Christ as the head of the church just as a husband is the head of a wife. Finally, the author of Hebrews quotes the wedding psalm in reference to the superiority and beauty of the Son.

Revelation provides the pivotal scene of the eschaton wherein the metaphor is completely revealed. The harlot and those who extorted the innocent are judged, the invitation for the wedding feast goes out, and the bride is given clean garments to wear. Those who have persevered while oppressive and greedy powers exploited them are adorned in the beauty of righteousness which is bestowed upon them. The finality of the metaphor is realized here when the feast symbolizes the end of the betrothal and the future union of the couple.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MARRIAGE METAPHOR WITHIN EARLY PENTECOSTAL LITERATURE

Introduction

I remember singing “We Shall See the King” in my home church out of the blue, Assemblies of God hymnals that were kept in the back of the pews.¹ I still remember the words: “It may be evening, morning, or noon; The wedding of the bride, united with the groom.”² Growing up Pentecostal, I was accustomed to bridal language regarding the church’s relationship with God. Prior to 1948 when this hymn was published in the blue-back hymnal, wedding imagery was common among Pentecostal tradition, even from its conception in North America.

Three selected publications are utilized in this chapter for examination and engagement with the marriage metaphor: *The Apostolic Faith*, *The Bridegroom’s Messenger*, and *The Pentecostal Evangel*. The use of the metaphor within each publication is surveyed in order to convey an understanding of its existence among early Pentecostals in North America. While more texts could be sampled for further analysis, the following analysis is confined to these three publications from the early twentieth century, which provides a sample of early Pentecostal belief and practice.

The Apostolic Faith

As the Azusa Street Revival was drawing crowds in from all over the country and internationally, the publications printed each week provided testimonials from the attendees as

¹ J. B. Vaughn, “We Shall See the King,” in *Assembly Songs* (Springfield, MO: The Gospel Publishing House, 1948), 169.

² *Ibid.*

well as articles on various subjects.³ One such testimony is that of a message given in a song of tongues by a woman named Mildred.⁴ The report reads as follows:

The interpretation of the song was ‘Jesus is calling you, Jesus is calling, O sinner, come home. Glory to His name, O sinner, come home.’ Then she arose and the crowd was silenced like death. She began to wave her arms and preach in tongues and interpret. Will give you a part of it(.) ‘He that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out.’ (Tongues.) ‘The Lord has prepared me to preach His Gospel.’ (Tongues.) ‘Jesus is coming soon.’ (Tongues.) ‘He will take away His bride, one will be taken and the other left.’⁵

Glossolalia is believed to connect the Divine with humanity in moments and services like that experienced at the Azusa Street Revival. The tongue-speech here not only bridged the moment the word was given with the eschaton but bears striking resemblance to the language of Revelation where the bride is gathered unto the bridegroom and “the other,” most likely a reference to the harlot, is left to the destruction resulting from her immorality. This call to the “sinner” could be interpreted as a request for those who have not done so, to wash their robes in the blood of Jesus.

From the onset, the *Apostolic Faith* contained poetry, songs, testimonies, prayer needs, all in addition to the articles published by those in leadership. A poem titled, “Jesus Talking to His Bride” can also be found in early issues:

Come, Sing to Me, My own sweet bride.
Surely, I love thee well;
I purchased thee with My own Blood
To save thy soul from hell.

I love to hear thy voice in song,
And know thy heart is glad.
Thou hast no need to fear, My love;

³ *The Apostolic Faith* was a newspaper-styled publication from 1906-1908 sent out by William J. Seymour and the Apostolic Faith Mission, detailing the works of God through Azusa and around the world.

⁴ Florence Crawford, “Beginning of World Wide Revival,” *The Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 5 (January 1907): 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

No cause for feeling sad.⁶

The author pulls from Song of Songs 4:7 and implements popular Pentecostal theology of the early twentieth century in producing this poem. Wedding language was commonly found among those involved or influenced by the Azusa Street Mission. As this poem reveals, an understanding of bridal imagery was present from early on.

Further evidence regarding this can be found with William J. Seymour.⁷ Seymour believed that the picture of the Spirit and bride in Revelation 22:17 conveys a partnership between those saved through faith and the Holy Spirit.⁸ He suggests that those baptized in Spirit co-labor with the Holy Spirit in calling the thirsty to come Jesus, “the water of life” (Rev 22:1).⁹ These, whom Seymour identifies as having “the spirit of Pentecost,” belong to the bride who is at work with the Holy Spirit in adding to her number and helping others to wash their robes in preparation for the coming of the bridegroom.¹⁰ Furthermore, he proposes that the church is currently married to Jesus *through* the works of the Spirit and thus, provides some of the earliest Pentecostal theology relating to the marriage metaphor.¹¹

The Bridegroom's Messenger

Perhaps one of the richest storehouses of wedding language exists within the publication named using the terminology within its own title. *The Bridegroom's Messenger* provides excessive

⁶ A. Beck, “Jesus Talking to His Bride,” *The Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 8 (May 1907): 3.

⁷ William J. Seymour, “The Holy Ghost and the Bride,” *The Apostolic Faith* 2, no. 13 (May 1908): 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

amounts of this marriage rhetoric on behalf of the International Pentecostal Church of Christ.¹² Separation between occupational clergy and the laity was not as prevalent within these early traditions, either. This gave the common person the opportunity to share word, song, poem, or charge via publications like *The Bridegroom's Messenger*. When practiced, the emphasis on preparing the church as the bride of Christ was prominent in common Pentecostal theology and practice.

Julia Morton Plummer is one of those who contributed to the publication with a charge for the church to help prepare the bride for the return of the bridegroom.¹³ Not only does Plummer use the metaphor from scripture to alert the readers to the coming bridegroom, she also examines what this preparation looks like:

Never since the love-watch of the faithful few, who were last at the cross and first at the tomb, has there been the call to such a love-watch as that in which we may now share; a watch of Spirit-likened love and worship, of welcome and expectation; a watch of Spirit-empowered service and cooperation in the divine program so blessedly nearing fulfillment.¹⁴

For Pentecostals like Plummer, righteous acts were not what was needed for purity, but cooperation with Spirit through hospitable interactions and sincere expressions of worship. The “washing of the robes” again demands an understanding of salvation through faith even among early Pentecostals. This is further maintained through published testimonies like that of Blanche Hamilton who warns of overemphasizing tongue-speech and missing the greater anointing of

¹² *The Bridegroom's Messenger* was published from 1907-1941 by G. B. Cashwell in Atlanta, Georgia. It was significantly influenced by the Apostolic Faith Mission.

¹³ Julia Morton Plummer, “The Bridegroom Cometh,” *The Bridegroom's Messenger* 1, no. 6 (January 1908): 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

love through Spirit-baptism.¹⁵ This, she concludes, is the true baptism of the Spirit and the means by which robe washing occurs.

Julia Plummer uses this call to loving service by first utilizing the call to come and meet the bridegroom from Matthew 25:1-13.¹⁶ She then attributes the “Spirit-given prayer, ‘Even so, come,’” to those who responded appropriately to the call and who now belong to the corporate bride.¹⁷ Advertisements of entire books on the ecclesiological components and what this bridal partnership with Spirit means could also be found within issues of *The Bridegroom’s Messenger*.¹⁸ One could easily suggest that early Pentecostals developed a functioning ecclesiology centered around the marriage metaphor and the church’s placement as the bride within it.

The Pentecostal Evangel

One issue of *The Pentecostal Evangel* particularly lays out a theology of the identity of the bride for its readers.¹⁹ The author of the article, entitled “Who is the Bride,” argues that those adding to the bride (the church) are fulfilling the role of the groomsman just as John the Baptist in John 3.²⁰ Therefore, those who are prepared for the bridegroom are added to the bride and those who help to call out to others to prepare are also groomsman characters.

¹⁵ Blanche Hamilton, “A Portion of a Letter from C. and M. A. Missionary to a Friend in Florida,” *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 1, no. 17 (July 1908): 2.

¹⁶ Plummer, “The Bridegroom Cometh,” 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ For the promotion of “The Spirit and the Bride” by G.F. Taylor, see Taylor’s excerpt in *The Bridegroom’s Messenger* 1, no. 6 (January 1908): 2.

¹⁹ *The Pentecostal Evangel* has changed names since its beginning in 1913 and still provides readers with history, doctrine, and happenings of the Assemblies of God, USA. It was started by J. Roswell and Alice Flower and its last printed publication was December of 2014. Issues are now accessed via email or other online formats.

²⁰ “Who is the Bride,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, no. 224 (1918): 2-3.

The themes of preparation and purification-through-faith were significant among all early Pentecostal literature because of its ecclesiological placement within Pentecostalism. *The Pentecostal Evangel*, however, detailed the works of Pentecostals in various countries and their attempts to call the nations to join the bride in preparation and Spirit-baptism resulting in the same mission-minded work.²¹ Again, it is a necessity to reiterate here that the writers and contributors to *The Pentecostal Evangel* also perceived these missions work and robe washing as acts of hospitality and love which Christ displayed and charged the church to display through the power of the Holy Spirit. Bridal language is used to illuminate this theme even more. An excerpt from an issue of *The Pentecostal Evangel* reads: “The love to Christ produced by the Spirit is of the same nature as that between bride and bridegroom—in explicable and inexpressible. It is not a love for what He has done but for Himself alone.”²² Wedding language was not absent from early Pentecostal literature. On the contrary, the marriage rhetoric was established from the conception of North American Pentecostalism.

Summary

Pentecostal literature recounts a robust history of utilizing the marriage metaphor in its theological pondering and application. The tradition also offers rich wedding language when conveying these ongoing themes. *The Apostolic Faith* publication provides testimonies, songs, poetry, and articles revealing Pentecostal understanding of the metaphor and diverse, artistic expressions when doing so. *The Bridegroom's Messenger* offers contributions of Pentecostals to the same efforts so as to establish a grounded theology of practicing preparation for the

²¹ See *The Pentecostal Evangel*, no. 142 (1916): 4f.

²² “Article VII. —The Gift of Tongues, and the Pentecostal Movement,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, no. 142 (1916): 4.

bridegroom. The list of missions and Spirit-baptism experiences within *The Pentecostal Evangel* interwoven with the bridal terminology suggests a functioning ecclesiology among Pentecostals. Thus, Pentecostals have not only thought appropriately about the marriage metaphor, but they have accurately practiced ecclesiological robe washing techniques in the love they displayed for the other and in their worship of God.

CHAPTER SIX

A PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY OF THE MARRIAGE METAPHOR

Introduction

How can or should the marriage metaphor be interpreted and applied theologically? I propose that it is best for it to be framed by the characters and stages of ancient Jewish weddings. The regular participants in a Jewish wedding serve as analogies for particular characters in the biblical redemptive narrative. In this chapter the groom, the bride, the friend of the groom, and the steward of the feast will be identified and placed appropriately. Subsequently, the historical narrative will be set within the stages of the Jewish marriage customs engaged thus far. Specifically, the contact stage, the consummation stage, and the celebration stage all provide a lens through which the metaphor can be seen as the overarching theme of God's relationship with humans throughout history and into the age to come.

The Wedding Party

The metaphor of marriage was used by NT authors and early Pentecostals who ascribed the title of bride to the church (or the people of God) and anticipated the return of Christ, the bridegroom.¹ Early church theologians did the same, following the lead of biblical authors. Psalm 45, for example, was understood within the marriage metaphor by thinkers like Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine who emphasized the Christological themes within the psalm and began to identify the characters allegorically.² While Ambrose and Jerome analyzed the text and the

¹ For examples see Ephesians 5:21-33; Beck, "Jesus Talking to His Bride," 3; Seymour, "The Holy Ghost and the Bride," 4; Plummer, "The Bridegroom Cometh," 4; "Who is the Bride," 2-3.

² David G. Hunter, "The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine," *Church History* 69, no. 2 (June 2000): 281ff.

metaphor through the lens of asceticism, Augustine argued for a primary understanding of the whole church as the bride of Christ with communal and ecclesiological emphases. He writes:

I do not imagine that anyone is such a fool as to think that some mere woman is here praised and described, as the wife, that is, of one who is thus addressed... Obviously, this is Christ, anointed above his Christian followers. For they are his followers, from whose unity and concord in all nations that queen comes into being, who in another psalm is described as ‘the city of the great king.’³

Those of the early church like Augustine believed that the Holy Spirit wove the canon through time and analogies, such as the marriage metaphor, wherein Christ was the central theme throughout. Augustine argued against the Donatists that Psalm 45, which Ambrose and Jerome used to propagate their ascetic teachings, alluded to Christ and his church whose “beauty is all within” (Ps 45:14).⁴ For Augustine, it was not merely an external beauty of purity that was required of her, but an internal love and dedication to Christ and others: “that she is one, that she is found among all nations, that she is chaste, that she ought not to be corrupted by perverse conversation with evil companions.”⁵ Whether in his sermons, letters, or polemical treatises, Augustine is consistent in engaging Psalm 45 with these ecclesial and Christological elements.⁶

Beyond the psalm, an understanding of the relationship between church as bride and Christ as bridegroom in relation to the metaphor became increasingly necessary. Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:21-33 suggests that the church is ontologically united to Christ, who is its head. The church, then, as his body, is in some way “both identified with and yet distinct from the Trinity.”⁷ Humanity’s only access to the Divine is through the humanity of Jesus, meaning that

³ H. Bettenson, *Augustine: Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 747.

⁴ Hunter, “The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church,” 298.

⁵ Augustine, *Sermo* 138.8 (PL 38:767).

⁶ Hunter, “The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church,” 296-302.

⁷ Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series* 38 (Dorset: Deo Publishing 2011), 52.

the metaphorical relationship of bride and bridegroom contains a stipulation of dependence upon the other.

Just as God is only God as three persons in communion, the man is only fully human in relation to the woman. . . . The same can be said of Christ. Christ *in his humanity* is not complete apart from his bride, the church. Just as it was not good for man created in the image of the Triune God to be alone, it is not good for Christ as the image of the Triune God to be alone. For apart from the church, he could not bear witness to the interpersonal communion of the Triune God in his human state.⁸

Christ's relationship with the church is necessary because the Spirit is in the church and partners with the church. Furthermore, the church is dependent upon Christ because the Spirit unites their purpose and identity in him. As Bonhoeffer states, "man is not alone, he is in duality and it is in this dependence on the other that his creatureliness consists."⁹ So too, this duality exists within the marriage metaphor between the betrothed parties. The bride and her groom are one flesh through God's love (Eph 5:28-31) and the Spirit who "communicates to the Father and Son the love they have for one another" also saturates the hearts of the church with this same divine love (Rom 5:5) by reminding the saints the promises of God (Rom 8:15-17; 2 Pet 1:3-4).¹⁰ Christ then takes upon the unrighteousness of the bride (like that of the harlot she played within prophetic literature) and bestows his own righteousness upon her in this "joyful exchange" which Luther ascribes through his views of justification.¹¹

What is the Spirit's role then? The Holy Spirit prepares the table which connects the divine-human relationship, and refills the cups of those at the feast with water from the "river of

⁸ Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 22, 24.

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1959), 37.

¹⁰ Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 29.

¹¹ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 604.

life” (Rev 22:1-2). Therefore, the Spirit plays a role similar to the steward. The church, through the indwelling of the Spirit, is the meeting place of heaven and earth, God and humanity. Simon Chan writes, “If Jesus is the temple, the meeting place of God and humanity (Jn 1:14; 2:19-21), the church as the body of Christ is the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor 3:17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:22).”¹² Thus, where there is feasting with Christ there is filling of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit connects the creatures of earth to the heavenly feast with the Son.

If the Spirit provides a place for the affections of the bridegroom and the bride to be realized and celebrated, there must be an ecclesiological relationship that leads to this point. As seen in early Pentecostal literature, the bride prepares for the bridegroom as the bridegroom prepares a place for the bride. In short, “the relation between the church and creation” is one wherein “the church is the goal of creation rather than the instrument to fulfill God’s purposes in creation.”¹³ The Holy Spirit is not empowering the bride to work herself into the graces of the bridegroom, but speaking to her the affections of the bridegroom who would have her despite her past indiscretions. Just as the Spirit communicates to the persons of the Trinity their love for each other, the Spirit communicates the Son’s love for the church to her.

Through the indwelling of the Spirit, more characters come to light: the groomsmen and bridesmaids. Who within the metaphor safeguards the purity of the bride, helps her to prepare, and announces the coming of the groom? This role belongs to the prophets. Encompassed within this group are those within the church who assist the bride in adding to herself in number (by means of charity and hospitality), reminds her of her purity found in Christ alone, and declares the groom’s coming (as a triumphant shout) so that she may adorn herself in love for him (and the other). John self-identified as groomsman to the Messiah and proclaimed his work as

¹² Chan, *Pentecostal Ecclesiology*, 64.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 63.

complete with his message of repentance and love for one another (Jn 3:29). The church is both bride and friend of the groom. She is the joy of heaven as well as the one who adds to herself in announcing the coming of the bridegroom. Her work is proclamation and charitable deeds which result from salvation found in the works of the Son.

The Hebrews understood the metaphor of YHWH and the bride, if in no other way, at least in the words of the prophets. NT characters such as Jesus, John the Baptizer, the author of Hebrews, John the Revelator, and others, articulated the metaphor clearly while indicating the roles of Christ as the bridegroom and the church as the bride. By examining the metaphor further, the Spirit's role is revealed as the steward who fills the vessels of the church. Just as the OT prophets called for repentance and faithfulness to be shown to YHWH, so too, the laity are responsible for communicating this message in love to those who would be found as belonging to the bride.

Contract Stage

History prior to the death of Jesus was the contract stage within the greater narrative. During this time, God pursued humanity, made a covenant with them, drew up terms, and offered a bride price—rescue. This bride price is not that which is found in God's covenant with Abram, but that which is found on the lips of the divine when victory of the Son of Man over sin is foretold in the Genesis narrative (Gn 3:15). From this point, time moved toward the complete payment of this bride price so that the bride may be claimed and brought into relationship with the Son.

As previously stated, the early Hebrews saw marriage as a reflection of God's covenant with them.¹⁴ Marriage contracts often included a phrase within that which reads, "she is my wife

¹⁴ Solomon, "Marriage," 243.

and I am her husband from this day and forever.”¹⁵ The covenantal phrase, “I will be your God and you will be my people,” resembles this phrase which is found within the OT in a variety of places (Gn 17:8; Ex 6:7; Lv 26:12; Jer 30:22; Ez 14:11; Rev 21:3). By God’s own doing, the divine affections for humanity are made known early on. God pursues Israel first (not as though they are superior, but chronologically) and the world through them, followed by the church and those reached through her as well.

The covenantal phrase became a divine statement and along with God’s promise to care for the people of God was repeatedly displayed throughout the narrative with Noah and his family after the flood, to Abram and his descendants, to Israel through the prophets, and the like. When tracing the metaphor thousands of years later, God’s pursuit is not for an elect group of people, but for all nations through those who accept and love him early on (Gn 12:4b; Is 56:6-8).¹⁶ This pursuit fits best when read over all of history. It is not enough to read that God *only* desired relationship with the Hebrews or even that the Hebrews were the sole recipients of God’s affections as displayed in the metaphor. God was and is pursuing humanity as displayed over and over throughout both testaments and history following.

Consummation Stage

As with any contract, covenant, or oath in ancient Judaism, blood was the sealer of the marriage contract. The proof of virginity had to be shown.¹⁷ It is easy for Pentecostals to think back to the cross when blood is mentioned. It is crucial not to adopt an understanding of the shedding of

¹⁵ Wenham, “Marriage and Divorce in the Old Testament,” 8.

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 18-26; Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Leo Perdue (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 421ff.

¹⁷ Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love & Marriage*, 144-145.

Jesus' blood on the cross as an overtly mystical theme within the metaphor wherein Jesus' relationship with the church is overly sexualized. However, it was Jesus' blood that became the divine symbol of purity and innocence which could not have been offered by the people of God. Jesus' incarnation was necessary for this purpose within the metaphor of marriage. It was amidst the duality of his divine self and his human self that his blood was spilt while he remained blameless.

The physical union of man and woman when consummating marriage is a symbol of *oneness* with each other and with God. This oneness is expressed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As recently addressed, the indwelling Spirit connects people to God because the Spirit *is* God in the body of Christ and the one whom makes a way for Christ to be *with* his body. The collective church community can identify with Mary, mother of Jesus, in that it holds Christ in itself through the womb of the Spirit who is also in us. Beyond the metaphor of marriage, the church's relationship with Jesus can be understood on multiple levels. Jesus is in the church, with the church, holds the church, and the church holds him. This may seem strange, but it is the bond of the Spirit that connects the members of the church relationally just as the Spirit connects the Trinity in complex relational structures.

Unlike consummation within the *chuppah*, the consummation of the divine with humanity takes place on a rugged cross planted in a hill of death. It occurs in the dwelling place of the bride, not the blessed chamber prepared by the anxious groom. Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them prior to his ascension (Jn 14:2). Maybe this place was not ready. Maybe the bride was not ready. Again, God has pursued and is pursuing *all nations*.¹⁸ The task of the church is not only the task of a bride, but the that of the friend of the groom. The

¹⁸ Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, 18-26; Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 421ff.

message of love and repentance must persist longer so that all can experience the grace of the divine sacrifice.

The Celebration Stage

The celebration stage is both now and not yet. It is entry into heaven which itself, is both now and not yet. Christians may celebrate because they are one with the groom, the Spirit fills Christians with these affections, and yet they long for their groom to come so that their reality is eternal dwelling with him. They are currently living in both the consummation stage *and* the celebration stage. They share in the feast of heaven (although the marriage supper of the Lamb will not be experienced until the eschaton) and they invite others to come and they are blessed because of it (Rev 19:9). In this tension, the role of the church as both bride *and* friend to the groom is better understood.

The marriage supper of the Lamb will be the ultimate celebration of God's union with humanity in which they can live together in eternity. The church experiences this joy in being divinely connected to heaven and they also long for its fullness because of that connection. The completed arrival of heaven upon earth will be like a day where the shouting of the groom and his bridal party in joyous annunciation signifies their journey to the bride's house. The church will then be in the presence of God and their *chuppot* will be built in the temple—God and the Lamb (Rev 21:22). God, who has pursued humanity since the creation of the heavens and earth, will finally be among them and they will be with their groom.

Additionally, the wedding garments are required for entry into the marriage supper.¹⁹ However, the garment has been given to the bride and she has washed it only through the blood

¹⁹ Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 225.

of the Son (Rev 19:8).²⁰ It is the purity of Jesus that seals the marriage and erases the past of the bride. The bride is encouraged toward good deeds, but her acts of righteousness are not for result of salvation,²¹ but for witness so that others might join in the feast.

Summary

The wedding party within the marriage metaphor includes Christ as the groom, the church as the bride, the Holy Spirit as the steward (master of the feast), and those in the church as friend of the groom. The historical narrative can be interpreted with these characters developing throughout it in relation to the metaphor. It can also be analyzed within the stages of ancient Jewish weddings. History only up to the point of Jesus' death on the cross serves as the contract stage. Within it, God laid out the terms of a covenant with humanity, set up the bride price, and reiterated the covenantal phrase to remind the Hebrews of the divine promises. Jesus' death, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit can be viewed as the consummation stage. Here, the divine provided the purity and blood necessary for sealing the contract. God and humankind who would accept the offer of Jesus became (and become) one through the event of the cross. The celebration stage has begun already for those who have accepted Jesus as their groom, it will begin for those that love him in the future, and the climax of the feast is the marriage supper of the Lamb when the church's task is completed and she is brought to Christ at last.

²⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1139.

²¹ Koester, *Revelation*, 841.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The marriage metaphor is best understood through the framework of ancient Jewish wedding traditions and its stages of a wedding ceremony. The contract stage, consummation stage, and celebration stage of ancient Jewish weddings provide an outline of history with a God who instituted marriage for the Hebrews. Their conception and development of marriage customs provide the best lens for the metaphor because they understood marriage in relation to God's covenant first and as a primary reason for it.

OT texts offer historical accounts of marriage along with wedding language that helps the reader engage the metaphor from early on. The Patriarchs worked their way through different manners of marriage as they progressed as a people group.¹ The prophets spoke to the people of God with rhetoric indicating their adulterous actions against God.² In some instances, their lives became examples of God's relationship with Israel. Marital terminology and bridal language in the Hebrew Writings also contribute wedding imagery for attention within the metaphor.

Beyond the OT, NT authors and characters have a lot to say regarding this theme. John claims to be the groomsman to the Messiah while Jesus refers to himself as a bridegroom in a parable and speaks to his disciples regarding his Father's house and the place he will prepare for them there. Other NT writers, like those who authored various epistles as well as John the revelator, allude to or explicitly speak of Christ and the church as groom and bride.³

Pentecostal literature proves the perseverance of the metaphor in the understanding of those who read and exegete from the biblical texts. Testimonies, words of interpretation, songs,

¹ Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 224-225.

² Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets*, 12ff.

³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1139; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 352.

poems, and articles are all found within the early publications of Pentecostalism. Those most intrigued by bridal language and who utilized it further include early literary journals like *The Apostolic Faith*, *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, and *The Pentecostal Evangel*.

Historically, the relationship between God and humanity fits in such a way where the contract stage includes the relationship up until the event of the cross; the cross, resurrection, and outpouring of the Spirit is act of consummation between God and humanity; and the eschatological event of the marriage supper of the Lamb will be the finality of the festal celebrations leading into eternal dwelling between bride and groom. Jesus, as the groom, will come to retrieve the bride for the feast. The church, who is the bride, is also the friend of the groom in her invitation to others to come and be joined to him. The Spirit fills those in the church with love and affections for the groom and the other so that she is worshipping God in fullness.

Various metaphors exist within the biblical texts. Others are cultural or societal metaphors that help communities to engage the texts differently. The metaphor of marriage as covenant between God and humanity is the best metaphor for understanding divine-human relationship within the historical narrative. It is best read within the stages of ancient Jewish marriages and the wedding customs found within them. The church is still actively apart of this metaphor because the marriage supper of the Lamb has not yet come to pass. The church waits on the great feast, anticipating the *chuppah* and the coming of the groom, Jesus.

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