

IS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST A BAPTIST?

By Pastor Al Hughes

When tradition says one thing and the Bible says something different, we must side with the Bible. This article will challenge what has traditionally been called “the Bride of Christ.”

The designation “the Bride of Christ” is NOT in the Bible. The Scriptural phrase is *the bride, the Lamb's wife* (Rev. 21:9). Notice where this terminology is found—The Revelation, which does *not* concern the New Testament local church. The doctrinal application of Revelation involves Israel and the Gentiles in the Tribulation period. The church will not be present at this time. Someone may be asking, “What about the seven churches addressed in Revelation chapters one, two, and three?” Those are churches in the Tribulation who must overcome in order to partake of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7). That cannot be said to any local church in this present age! When I trusted Christ as my Savior I received eternal life (John 5:24). Why do I need to partake of the tree of life? No member of a local New Testament church needs to fear the second death like the church of Smyrna (Rev. 2:11). No local church today has to concern itself with overcoming so it can eat hidden manna or obtain a white stone like the church of Pergamos (Rev. 2:17).

Secondly, Revelation 19:7 says, *the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife HATH MADE HERSELF READY.* If the local church is the bride, how does it make itself ready? Praise God, I don't have to make myself ready! When Christ saved me, He made me ready! (More about this later.)

Finally, it should be pointed out, the Apostle Paul never used such language as, *the marriage supper of the lamb, the Lamb's wife*, etc. Since Paul is the apostle of the Gentiles and was given the revelation of the mystery of the church (Eph. 3), it would behoove us to take notice of this fact (cf. 2 Tim. 2:7). Why didn't Paul ever refer to the church as Christ's bride? Why didn't Paul ever call Jesus a lamb? Where does it say Christ is the husband of the church? The church is always referred to as being masculine (e.g. Eph. 2:15). Forget about quoting 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5. The terminology is not there. I'll deal with those passages later.

Suffice it to say here, the church is NOT *the bride, the Lamb's wife*. I know many of my independent Baptist friends will take issue with this. That's OK. A great thing about being an *independent* Baptist is I don't have to answer to the brethren and they don't have to answer to me! We must show ourselves approved unto God, not unto men (2 Tim. 2:15).

So, if the church isn't “the bride,” who is? Let's set the traditions of men aside and compare Scripture with Scripture instead of commentaries with commentaries.

THE BRIDE IS A CITY

Notice Revelation 21:9-10.

And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.

The angel says, *I will SHEW THEE the bride, the Lamb's wife.* Then what does he show John? The angel shows him *that GREAT CITY, THE HOLY JERUSALEM.* There it is, as plain as the nose on Barbara Striesand's face! The

bride is A CITY, *not* a church!

This city is called *the hol Jer salem* (Rev. 21:10). In Revelation 21:2 we read, *And I John sa THE HOLY CITY, NEW JERUSALEM, coming do n from God o t of hea en, prepared as A BRIDE adorned for her h sband.* Notice this city is Jewish in nature. It has twelve gates and twelve foundations. The number twelve is always associated with Israel in Scripture. It's gates bear *the names of the twelve tribes of the children of ISRAEL* (Rev. 21:12). It's foundations have *the names of the t el e apostles of the Lamb* (Rev. 21:14). Again, the terminology *the Lamb* is definitely related to Israel, and foreign to Paul's writings. The twelve apostles were sent to the lost sheep **of the house of Israel** (Mt. 10:5-6). Their primary ministry was to Jews. It was Paul who was sent to the Gentiles. This *hol cit* cannot be the church since the *ne Jer salem* is entirely JEWISH.

In Revelation 12:1, Israel is pictured as *a WOMAN clothed ith the s n, and the moon n-der her feet, and pon her head a cro n of t el e stars.* This woman is clearly identified as Israel in Genesis 37:9-10. Nowhere is the church called "a woman," therefore cannot be a bride. (Don't worry! I'll get to 2 Corinthians 11:2 in a little while. Be patient.)

THE BRIDE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God had a bride in the Old Testament. Isaiah writes to ISRAEL:

For th Maker is thine h sband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and th Redeemer the Hol One of Israel; The God of the hole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a oman forsaken and grie ed in spirit, and a ife of o th, hen tho ast ref sed, saith th God. For a small moment ha e I forsaken thee; b t ith great mercies ill I gather thee. In a little rath I hid m face from thee for a moment; b t ith e erlasting kindness ill I ha e merc on thee, saith the LORD th Redeemer (Isaiah 54:5-8).

What do we learn from this passage? First, the husband is the *Maker the LORD of hosts the Hol One of Israel.* Second, He marries Israel "a woman forsaken and... a wife of youth." Third, there will be *a small moment* in which God will forsake her and hid His face from her. Fourth, after this "moment" he will gather her again in kindness and mercy.

Get the picture: God marries Israel in the Old Testament. However she plays the harlot and God forsakes her. Later, He gathers her to Himself again. Between the time He forsakes her and regathers her is a *small moment.* This interval is the church age and tribulation period. For the last 1950+ years God has set Israel aside (Acts 13:46; 18:6; Rom. 11). However, there is coming a day when Israel will make herself ready, and be gathered again to her first husband.

THE BRIDE DIVORCED

God allows a divorce when there is unfaithfulness in marriage (cf. Mt. 19:9). Israel was unfaithful to God. This is clear from Ezekiel 16:28. He says of Israel, *S rel as a ife treachero sl departeth from her h sband, so ha e e dealt treachero sl ith me, O ho se of Israel, saith the LORD* (Jeremiah 3:20). Because of her adultery, God gave her a bill of divorcement (Jer. 3:8; Isa. 50:1).

THE BRIDE IS FORGIVEN

Under the new covenant, God will forgive Israel's adultery and remember her sin no more (read Jeremiah 31:31-34). A picture of this is given in the book of Hosea. Hosea the prophet is married to a harlot named Gomer. This is an object lesson of God's relationship to Israel. Gomer

is unfaithful and plays the harlot, just as God's wife Israel played the harlot (Jer. 3:6-14). Gomer finds herself in a "thorny" situation (Hos. 2:6). Her lovers desert her. Then she says, *I will go and return to my FIRST HUSBAND; for then it is better for me than no* (Hos. 2:7). Likewise, adulterous Israel will someday return to her FIRST HUSBAND!

This is what Isaiah referred to when he prophesied,

Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marryeth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee (Isaiah 62:4-5).

THE BRIDE MAKES HERSELF READY

When will this "remarriage" between God and Israel take place? At the close of the tribulation period when the *wife hath made herself READY* (Rev. 19:7). What is this business about the wife making herself ready? Jesus gave a parable in Matthew 25 regarding His second advent. Jesus likened "the kingdom of heaven" (Jewish in nature) to *ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the BRIDEGROOM* (Mt. 25:1). The bridegroom is Jesus Christ, "the Son of man" (Mt. 25:13). The virgins are Israel. Five of these virgins were wise and five were foolish. The wise virgins have oil in their lamps, but the foolish do not. When the bridegroom (Jesus Christ) comes, the virgins with oil go out to meet Him. However, the foolish have no oil and must go to buy some. *And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and the that were READY went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut* (Mt. 25:10). Ah yes! There it is. The bride makes herself READY by having oil in her lamp when it comes time to go out to meet Him at His coming. Bear in mind, this is the second advent of Christ, at the end of the Tribulation, NOT THE RAPTURE of the church.

When Christ returns at the close of the tribulation period, Israel will come to her senses and be READY to return to her first husband. Then the marriage supper of the lamb will take place.

OBJECTIONS

Now, let's look at those verses that traditionally have been used as "proof texts" for the church being the so-called "bride of Christ."

First, Ephesians 5:22-33. Nowhere is the church called a bride or a wife in this passage. Christ is called *the HEAD of the church*, NOT the husband of the church. He is *the savior of the BODY*, NOT the savior of the bride! Paul writes, *We are members of his BODY, of his flesh, and of his bones*. Clearly, the church is the BODY OF CHRIST, not the "bride of Christ" (cf. Eph. 3:6). Christ is not going to marry His own body!!!

What about, 2 Corinthians 11:2? Paul writes,

For I am jealous over you as God is jealous: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Paul is using a figure of speech. A simile is used in comparing two things that are similar, but not the same. Similes always employ the terms "as" or "like." Paul uses the simile of *AS a chaste virgin* to motivate the Corinthians to live in purity. Paul is not likening the church to a woman since the word "virgin" can be applied to both women and men (Isa. 7:14 cf. Rev. 14:4).

Notice this verse does NOT say, "I have married you to your husband, that I may present you a chaste bride to Christ." The word "espoused" has several meanings. It could mean "married," "promised," "committed," "given," "united," "to give loyalty to" etc. The truth is,

Paul “committed” the Corinthians to “one husband.” Christ is called “one husband,” since He is *Israel's* husband, NOT the church’s husband!

If you insist that “espoused” means “married” in 2 Corinthians 11:2, I have no problem with that. A person can be “married” to someone but NOT necessarily be their husband or wife. “Married” simply means “fleshing joining flesh” (1 Cor. 6:15-18). In that sense, we are “married” to Christ since we are flesh of His flesh (Eph. 5:30). But we are *not* His bride or His wife. We are simply *nited* to Him since we are part of His body. Don’t read something into the verse that is not there!

Finally, read John 3:28-30. [Go ahead, *READ IT!* I’m not going to do *all* the work for you!] In this passage, (1) Jesus is the bridegroom; (2) John the Baptist is the friend of the bridegroom; and (3) the bride is Israel, not the church. John could not have been referring to the church, since John had no knowledge of the church! The New Testament Church did not exist when John said this. His ministry was to manifest Christ to Israel, not the church (John 1:31).

We are commanded in 1 Corinthians 10:32, “Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.” Things different are not the same. Let’s rightly **DIVIDE** the word of truth! Don’t take what belongs to the Jews and give it to the church!