

# WEDDING GARMENTS

## Lesson 9

### I. The Symbolism of a Wedding Is Used Several Times In The New Testament.

- A. In order to understand these passages correctly, it is helpful to know the wedding customs of the first century.
1. The first major step in a Jewish marriage was betrothal. Betrothal involved the establishment of a marriage covenant or contract.
  2. The prospective bridegroom would travel from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride. There he would negotiate with the father of the young woman to determine the price that he must pay to purchase his bride.
  3. The bride's father considered that he was diminishing the efficiency of his family. Often unmarried daughters would tend the flock of their father, or work in the field, or render help in other ways. Therefore, upon her marriage, a young woman would be thought of as increasing the efficiency of her husband's family.
  4. A young man who expected to get possession of his daughter had to be able to offer some sort of adequate compensation. This compensation was the marriage "dowry." This also established her worth to the groom.
  5. Once the bridegroom paid the dowry, the marriage covenant was established, and the young man and woman were regarded to be husband and wife.
  6. From that moment on the bride was declared to be consecrated or sanctified, set apart exclusively for her bridegroom.
  7. As a symbol of the covenant relationship that had been established, the groom and bride would drink from a cup of wine over which a betrothal benediction had been pronounced.
  8. This covenant was as binding as a wedding ceremony and could only be broken by a divorce.
  9. After the marriage covenant had been established, the groom would leave the home of the bride and return to his father's house. There he would remain separate from his bride for a period of twelve months.
  10. This period of separation afforded the bride time to gather her trousseau and to prepare for married life. During this year, the bride was expected to be faithful to her betrothed in every way.
  11. The groom occupied himself with the preparation of living accommodations for his bride, usually by building an addition to his father's house. At the end of the period of separation the groom would go to the home of the bride and to take her to their new living quarters.
  12. The taking of the bride usually took place at night. The groom, best man and other male escorts, all dressed in festive garments, would leave the

- groom's father's house and conduct a torch light procession to the home of the bride.
13. The bride and her female attendants, also dressed in festive garments, waited at the home of the bride's father for the groom to come to escort them to the feast. Although the bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the exact time of his coming.
  14. The groom made it a game to try to surprise the bride. The groom's arrival would be preceded by a shout which forewarned the bride to be prepared for the immediate coming of the groom.
  15. The groom received his bride together with her female attendants and the enlarged wedding party would walk from the bride's home to the groom's father's house.
  16. All who were with the wedding party were admitted to the feast. The guests were already present and they too were provided with festive garments for the celebration.
  17. Once the wedding party entered, the doors were locked and no one else would be permitted entrance.
  18. The members of the wedding party would escort the bride and groom to the bridal chamber which the groom had previously prepared.
  19. Prior to entering the chamber the bride remained veiled so that no one could see her face until she came out of the chamber to take her place as a wife.
  20. The wedding feast would be available to all who were "invited" and it continued for the next seven days.

B. We will keep these customs in mind as we consider some of the passages that compare weddings to spiritual lessons.

## II. The Term "Wedding Garment" Is Only Used Once Among All Of The Passages That Speak Of A Wedding In Any Way -- Matthew 22:1-14

A. In this passage Jesus tells a parable of a "Wedding Feast":

*"<sup>1</sup> And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: <sup>2</sup> "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, <sup>3</sup> and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. <sup>4</sup> Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding." <sup>5</sup> But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. <sup>6</sup> And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. <sup>7</sup> But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. <sup>8</sup> Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup> Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' <sup>10</sup> So those servants went out into the highways and*

*gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. <sup>11</sup> "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. <sup>12</sup> So he said to him, 'Friend, **how did you come in here without a wedding garment?**' And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' <sup>14</sup> "For many are called, but few are chosen."*

- B. This parable begins, "The kingdom of Heaven is like...". In fact, almost all of the parables Jesus told began the same way.
1. It is important for us to understand what Jesus means when he refers to the "kingdom of heaven".
  2. The kingdom is only finally identified after the death of Jesus when the church was established on the Day of Pentecost following the crucifixion of Jesus. There is scriptural evidence to show that the "kingdom" and the "church" are the same thing.
    - a. **Matthew 3:2** – John the Baptizer came preaching "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." By this we know that the kingdom had not arrived at that time.
    - b. **Matthew 4:17** – Jesus preached that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand". The kingdom was still not established at that point.
    - c. In **Matthew 6**, Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray. In his model prayer he said "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Jesus taught them to pray for the "kingdom" to come.
    - d. Jesus said in **Matthew 16:28** – "*Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*" Jesus confirmed that the kingdom would come before most of the people he was speaking to died. This narrows down the amount of time before the kingdom would come.
    - e. **Luke 22:16-18** – When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the night before His crucifixion, he said that he would not eat the bread nor drink the fruit of the vine "until the kingdom of God comes". This indicates that it will be very, very soon.
    - f. Jesus said to Nicodemus in **John 3:5** – "*Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"*
    - g. **Acts 2:38** – "*Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." = water and Spirit.*
    - h. **Acts 8:12** – "*But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized." This is the same baptism that Jesus*

spoke about to Nicodemus in John 3:5 and that Peter spoke to the multitude about in Acts 2:38. This adds you to the Lord's church, which is the Kingdom of God.

- i. **Acts 2:47b** – *"And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."* Saved = in the kingdom
3. After teaching the "Parable of the Soil", the disciples asked Jesus about the meaning of the parable. Jesus said: **Mark 4:11** – *"<sup>1</sup> And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know **the mystery** of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables." Then Jesus went on to explain the parable about how different people behave when they receive the word of God (the gospel message).*
  - a. **Ephesians 3:1-7** – *"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> how that by revelation He made known to me **the mystery** (as I have briefly written already, <sup>4</sup> by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), <sup>5</sup> which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: <sup>6</sup> **that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,** <sup>7</sup> of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power."*
  - b. This "mystery" of including the Gentiles in the kingdom of God was the biggest stumbling block for the Jews, who considered the Gentiles not worthy of God's love or acceptance.
- C. Many of the Jews expected the kingdom to be an earthly kingdom. The Jews thought the Messiah would restore Israel to her former greatness as an independent country with the Messiah as her king.
  1. Even the disciples who had followed Jesus for three years thought the kingdom would be restored to Israel.
  2. After Jesus was resurrected, He spent 40 days with the apostles. **Acts 1:3** *"speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."*
  3. At that time they asked Jesus, **Acts 1:6** *"Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*
  4. Jesus then sent them to wait in Jerusalem until they received "power" from the Holy Spirit, which occurred on the Day of Pentecost.
- D. With our understanding that the "kingdom" and the "church" are the same thing, let's look at the meaning of this Parable of the Wedding Feast.
  1. The King in the Parable represents God who is preparing a wedding feast for His son.
  2. The son of the King represents Jesus (the Lamb of God)

- Revelation 19:6-9** – "<sup>6</sup> And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" <sup>7</sup> Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."<sup>8</sup> And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for **the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.** <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'"
3. The bride represents the church or kingdom of God.
  4. The first group of servants sent out to invite people to the wedding feast represent the Prophets who were sent out to call the children of Israel to obedience to God.
  5. Those who were invited represents the nation of Israel who often ignored the Prophets who called them back to obedience to God.
  6. The second set of servants were sent out to tell those invited that the feast was already prepared, and they should come right away. These servants also represent the Prophets that continued through the centuries to carry the word of God to the Children of God. Some of those invited simply ignored the invitation, but others actually attacked the servants and abused them and killed many of them.
  7. The King's reaction to the murder of his servants was severe. He sent out his army and destroyed them and burned their cities. This represents God's reaction to centuries of disobedience and idolatry among Israel and Judah. God finally allowed their enemies to conquer their people and make them slaves. They also destroyed their cities – including Jerusalem.
  8. The King determined that the ones who were first invited were no longer worthy of the honor of attending the Wedding Feast, so he sent out his servants to invite anyone they found on the highways and invited both good and bad people. Then the hall was filled with guests. These people represent the Gentiles who became equally eligible for salvation when the church (kingdom) was established. For the first time, the Gentiles were also "invited" to become children of God.
  9. The man who was not clothed in "wedding garments" was not eligible to partake of the Wedding Feast. He apparently had slipped in unnoticed with the wedding party when they entered the hall, but he was easy to spot because he had not been given the proper wedding garment. He represents those who think they can slip into the kingdom (heaven) by their own good works or perhaps they are hypocrites that masquerade as Christians, but inwardly they are unrighteous.
  10. When the master of the feast asked how he got into the Wedding Feast, verse 12 said that he was "speechless". Many will likely be speechless on the day of judgment.

11. **Revelation 19:8** tells us that the garment of the bride was "...*fine linen, clean and bright*" which is the "righteous acts of the saints." This garment will be orn by all who will enter the kingdom of God (heaven) when the judgment occurs.
12. The final verse of the parable states, "Many are called, but few are chosen." In fact, all of mankind is "invited" to become a Christian, but few will accept that invitation by obeying the gospel message by repenting, confessing that Jesus is the Son of God and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. It is a sad, sad fact and it is our job to inform as many as we can of the opportunity that is being offered to them.

### III. The Parable Of The Wise And Foolish Virgins Also Compares The Judgment To A Wedding.

- A. **Matthew 25:1-13** – "<sup>1</sup>Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. <sup>3</sup> Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. <sup>6</sup> "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' <sup>7</sup> Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' <sup>10</sup> And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' <sup>12</sup> But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' <sup>13</sup> "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."
- B. The analysis of this parable also becomes clearer when we consider the wedding customs of the times. However, there are some additional customs related to this portion of the wedding festivities.
1. This parable begins on the day that the groom is scheduled to take his bride to their new home, which he has built as an addition to his father's house. This represents the Day of Judgment.
  2. The bride is gathered with ten of her maiden friends. The bride is bathed and dressed in a clean, white, linen garment that represents her purity. She represents the church
  3. The bride does not know when the groom will appear. It is a game that is played, where the groom tries to surprise the bride. No one knows when Jesus will return to receive his bride (the church).
  4. When the groom is on his way, a shout is given near the bride's home to alert her that he is coming very soon. The bride and her attendants must

- be ready to go. The bride and her attendants represent the Church. Jesus will also appear with a shout on the Day of Judgment.
- 1Thessalonians 4:16** – *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God."*
5. Everyone in the wedding processional was required to carry a lamp because the streets were so dark at night. No one could join the wedding processional without a lamp.
  6. Five of the maidens failed to bring extra oil for their lamps, even though they were aware that it could take a long time for the groom to arrive. They represent those who will be "unprepared" or in a lost condition when the Day of Judgment occurs – but by then it will be too late to change.
  7. They wanted to borrow oil from the five wise ones, but the five wise ones knew that they had to have a working lamp to be included in the processional and they were unwilling to risk being left out of the wedding party. The Christians who are prepared when the Day of Judgment arrives will NOT be able to help anyone who is unprepared on that day.
  8. By the time the foolish maidens went to buy oil and returned, the door of the wedding feast had been locked and no one else was allowed to enter. It will be the same with those souls who are unprepared on the Day of Judgment – it will simply be too late to be allowed in to the kingdom.
  9. This parable simply emphasizes the importance of living the Christian life to the best of our ability every single day of our lives. We still do not know when Jesus will come again to take us to Heaven; neither do we know when our life on this earth will end. In both cases, we MUST be prepared hear, *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* **Matthew 25:33**

#### **IV. One Final Passage That Gives Us Great Comfort Is Based Upon The Marriage Customs Of The First Century.**

- A. **John 14:1-3** – *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. <sup>2</sup> In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*
- B. Most people who read this passage do not associate it with any links to the marriage customs of the first century. However, it is a very interesting comparison.
  1. Remember in the marriage customs, it all begins when the groom leaves his father's house to go to the bride's house to determine the price to be paid for the bride.
  2. The family of the bride considered that in losing a daughter, they were diminishing efficiency in their home because she often was the shepherd to their sheep, or worked in their fields or contributed in other valuable

ways to the benefit of the family. On the other hand, the groom would be increasing efficiency of his home by acquiring a bride. Therefore, the price indicated her value to the groom.

3. The groom represents Jesus, and He left His father's house in Heaven to come to earth to establish a "covenant" with his bride (the church).
4. On the same night in which Jesus made His promise in **John 14** He instituted communion. As He passed the fruit of the vine to His disciples, He said: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (**1 Cor. 11:25**). This was His way of saying that He would establish a new covenant through the shedding of His blood on the cross. This parallels the custom of the Jewish groom paying a price to purchase his bride. Jesus paid a price to purchase His bride, the Church, which was His own life's blood.
5. It was because of this purchase price that Paul wrote the following to members of the Church:
  - **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** – "<sup>19</sup> *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?* <sup>20</sup> *For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's..*"
  - Paul also said to the elders in Ephesus: **Acts 20:28** - "*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*"
6. Once the marriage covenant was established the groom left the bride and went back to his father's house to build accommodations for his bride in his father's house. This period of separation lasted 12 months. Once the covenant was sealed between Jesus and his bride (the church) and the purchase price was paid by the crucifixion of Jesus, He went back to His father's house in Heaven to prepare a place for his bride to live at the end of the period of separation.
7. The groom promised to return to receive his bride and take her to live in their newly created home. Jesus has promised that he will return to retrieve his bride and take her to her new home in Heaven.
8. Just as the Jewish bride did not know the exact time the groom would come for her, the Church does not know the exact time Christ will come for her.
9. The taking of the Jewish bride was accomplished by a procession of the groom and male escorts from the groom's father's house to the home of the bride which was preceded by a shout to notify the bride that he would be there very soon. So also the taking of the Church will be accomplished by a procession of Christ and an angelic escort from His Father's house in heaven to the home of the Church (Earth) which will be preceded by a shout.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16** – "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

10. Just as the Jewish bride leaves her home and goes with the groom to his father's house, the Church will be caught up in the air to meet Christ and go to His Father's house in heaven where her new home has been prepared. **1 Thessalonians 4:17** – "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."
  11. In the same manner as the Jewish wedding party found wedding guests assembled in the groom's father's house when they arrived, there is speculation that Christ and the Church will find the souls of Old Testament saints assembled in heaven when they arrive. These souls will serve as the wedding guests.
  12. According to the account of Lazarus and the poor beggar in **Luke 16**, the beggar died and was carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham. Lazarus was taken to "torment in Hades", but he could see Abraham far off and Lazarus was being comforted by Abraham. So, the rich man could recognize Abraham, even though he lived thousands of years before the rich man.
- C. One possible circumstance of the marriage customs of the first century that we have not considered so far is this: During the year of separation, while the groom is building the new home for his bride, the bride could commit adultery by giving herself to another man.
1. In like manner it is possible for believers today to commit spiritual adultery against Christ before He returns to take His Church home to Heaven.
  2. Paul expressed concern over this possibility when he wrote the following to Christians: **2 Corinthians 11:2-3** <sup>12</sup> *For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.* <sup>3</sup> *But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.* <sup>4</sup> *For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!"*
  3. James expressed the same concern when he rebuked Christians in: **James 4:4-5** – "<sup>4</sup> *Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* <sup>5</sup> *Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?*

4. The context of James' statement indicates that spiritual adultery is committed when a believer becomes more devoted to the godless world system and the things that please it than he is to Jesus Christ and the things that please Him.
5. Those who teach "once-saved-always-saved" are in effect proclaiming that a Christian can be "spiritually adulterous" by partaking in all of the evil that society offers and STILL be acceptable to God on Judgment Day.
6. Wedding vows usually contain the statement "until death do we part". We become "betrothed" to Jesus when we are baptized into Christ. We are committing ourselves to be "faithful to Christ until we die" at that time. It is ridiculous to think that Jesus Christ won't mind if we are "unfaithful" to him while we are waiting for him to return to take us to Heaven.
7. There are also those who think that you really don't have to attend church services to be a Christian. They may have forgotten that the church is the "bride of Christ". He is preparing a place for her to live with Him forever in Heaven. How could you NOT love the church and want to assemble with other Christians when Jesus paid for that with his own precious blood? To forsake meeting with other Christians in worship to God is saying that the sacrifice Jesus made was for His bride is unimportant.  
**Hebrews 10:24-25** – <sup>24</sup> *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,* <sup>25</sup> *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*
8. **James 1:12** – *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."*
9. **Revelation 2:10** – *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."*

#### V. In Conclusion, Let's Review Revelation 19:6-9

- A. <sup>6</sup> *And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"* <sup>7</sup> *Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."* <sup>8</sup> *And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.* <sup>9</sup> *Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'"*
- B. Just as the wedding guests had to be clothed in the proper "wedding garment", we will be wearing proper garments at the wedding of the Lamb and His bride (the church).
  1. Those garments are the "righteous acts of the saints."

2. The "saints" make up the church – and WE are those saints.
3. All faithful Christians are saints!  
See the following scriptures that call Christians "saints": Acts 9:41; Acts 26:10; Romans 1:7; Romans 12:13; Romans 15:26; Romans 16:15; I Corinthians 1:2, I Corinthians 14:33
- C. It is our duty to be involved in "righteous acts".
  1. **Matthew 5:16** – *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*
  2. **Ephesians 2:10** – *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*
  3. **Titus 2:7** – *"...in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,"*
  4. **Titus 3:8** – *"This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men."*
  5. **Titus 3:14** – *"And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful."*
  6. This is our way "preparing our trousseau" as the Jewish bride did. It is comforting to think that with every good work we are stitching our "wedding garment" in preparation for when Jesus comes to take us to our new home.