

Two weddings and a funeral
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All passages are from the New American Standard Bible unless noted.

Passages: Romans 7–8; Jeremiah 2; Isaiah 61–62; Proverbs 1–5; Revelation 19–22

Sukkot is a harvest festival, and harvesting involves cutting plant material, separating it from its previous environment on a branch or stalk and starting its journey of transformation to something else. That something else could be decorations for a sukkah, which looks forward to God's setting up a permanent home for the Kingdom of God on Earth. Today's we'll explore two weddings and a funeral found in Scripture.

We look forward to great "marriage moments" in the account of the Kingdom of God's bringing the Kingdom of Rebellion to an end. The first is called the "marriage dinner of the Lamb" after the deceiving Babylon power is put down.

"After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS [Psa. 19:9]; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER [Deut. 32:43; 2nd Kings 9:7 (Yezebel)].'

And a second time they said, 'Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER.' And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah!'

And a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.'

Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.'

Then he said to me, 'Write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."' And he said to me, "These are true words of God.'" (Rev. 19:1–9)

The second great wedding event with the marriage of the Lamb is the "bridal chamber" "coming to Earth after the recreation of all things.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." (Rev. 21:1–2)

In *Romans 6* the apostle Paul compared our transformation under God's power to the all-consuming commitment of a slave to a new master. In the next chapter, he compared this transformation to marriage, with the death of the "bride," or believers, freeing her from her first husband, the Law of God, and allowing her to "marry" a new "husband," Messiah Yeshua, the Lamb. As Paul elaborated in *Romans 8*, the people of God can't be the same type of people as when they came to know Him.

"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Messiah Yeshua our Lord.

Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Messiah, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God." (Rom. 6:20–7:4)

- You may have heard someone quote this passage before to show that that believers in Messiah are "dead to the Law," i.e. it's not relevant to us much anymore.
- Paul seemed to anticipate this assertion, likely drawing on the type of rancor to his message as recorded in *Acts 21* to clarify what he meant (Rom. 7:7ff).

To help us understand more about this marriage to the Lamb, let's explore the language of marriage, groom and bride, adultery and divorce (Jer. 3:8) common throughout the Prophets and Writings.

- There are passages that compare the wandering of Israel away from the LORD to a spouse wandering away to other lovers.
"Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says the LORD, 'I

remember concerning you the devotion¹ of your youth, The love of your betrothals, Your following after Me in the wilderness, Through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the LORD, The first of His harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; Evil came upon them,' declares the LORD." '... ' "Can a virgin forget her ornaments, Or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number." ' ' " (Jer. 2:1–3, 32)

- This painful recounting of Israel's "outgrowing" God in Jeremiah 2 sounds a lot like the message to the congregation of Ephesus (Rev. 2:1–7).
 - "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: "The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent. Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.' " 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'" (Rev. 2:1–8)
 - The "first love" (ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην *agapen sou ten proten*, literally "the first selfless love of you people") of Rev 2:4 is similar to the Greek translation of "the love of your betrothals" in Jer. 2:2: ἀγάπης τελειώσεώς σου *agapes teleioseos sou*, literally "selfless love of the upbringing of you people."
 - Notice that the congregation in Ephesus described here is doing almost everything right — eschewing evil people and charlatan apostles from the congregation and persevering, presumably through persecution.
 - Yet doing the right things and holding to the right teachings are no substitutes for the active *agape* that comes with the first "tingly" days of a connection to God.
 - Marriages can mature over time, so that the bond of selflessness during courtship and the honeymoon strengthen as pressures of life multiply and physical bodies age.
 - Marriages can wither over time when the selfless bond during courtship is forgotten or exposed as selfishness under the stresses of life and effects of aging.
 - The first five chapters of the book of Proverbs discuss the crucial need to have the "fear of God" to start to gain knowledge (1:7) about reality and be granted God's wisdom. At the end of that passage is wisdom that is as applicable to our relationship with God as in marriage: "Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth." (Prov. 5:18)
 - "Wisdom" is described as a woman in these chapters and is contrasted with the "strange² woman" or "adulteress"³ (2:16), who convinces those who listen to her "leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God" (2:17).
 - The Greek translation emphasizes that this "companion" is the teaching of the covenant: "My son, do not let bad counsel overtake you, that which forsakes the teaching of youth and has forgotten the divine covenant" (2:17).⁴
 - This may help shed light on the apostle Paul's description of the law's being like a tutor: "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one *party only*; whereas God is *only one*. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Yeshua Messiah might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua. For all of you who were baptized into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah." (Gal. 3:19–27)
 - Some claim that this description of the Law as being an unneeded tutor tells us that the Law is no longer necessary.
 - However, this understanding neglects timeless biblical instruction to hold onto true knowledge and true wisdom by holding onto the "teachings of our youth" about the "divine covenant."
 - Guarding our relationship with God, as with marriage, begins with what's inside us, which shows up in our behavior.

1 *Devotion* = תּוֹבָחַ *chesed* (Strong's lexicon No. H2617a): lovingkindness

2 *Strange* = זָר *zur* (Strong's H2114a): adulteress, foreigner

3 *Adulteress* = נַכְרִיָּא *nakheriyya* (Strong's H5237): foreigner, alien

4 Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds. *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*. International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Inc. Oxford University Press: 2007.

“Watch⁵ over your heart with all diligence⁶, For from it *flow* the springs of life.” (4:23)

- The next few verses talk about “abolishing” or “cutting off” lying and gossiping and “leveling” one’s “path” through life so that it goes straight and doesn’t deviate.
- Yeshua, when the religious leaders accused Him of casting out demons by the power of the Adversary said:
 - “ ‘Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless⁷ word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.’ ” (Matt. 12:33–37)
- With our spouses and with God we should control our words, so that they are true and they are “useful.”
 - God knows what is in our hearts, so we can’t fool Him with empty adoration.
 - Our spouses often learn to see when our actions match our words, and trust builds when the two are in agreement.
- There also are passages that present God’s hope for a restored “marriage” with His people.

“It will no longer be said to you, ‘Forsaken,’ Nor to your land will it any longer be said, ‘Desolate’; But you will be called, ‘My delight is in her,’ And your land, ‘Married’; For the LORD delights in you, And *to Him* your land will be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, So your sons will marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So your God will rejoice over you.” (Isa. 62:4–5)

 - This is part of a long passage in Isaiah 56–66 in which the LORD promises to restore His people from various exiles and apostasies to the Land.
 - Key to this restoration is the coming of the “Redeemer” to those who have “turn[ed] from transgression” and have the Spirit of God “on” them and the words of God in their mouths.

“ ‘A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn⁸ from transgression in Ya’akov,’ declares the LORD. ‘As for Me, this is My covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,’ says the LORD, ‘from now and forever.’ ” (Isa. 59:20–21)

 - This promise of implanted words of God in us by His Spirit is part of the prophecy of the “new covenant” in Jer. 31:31–34:

“ ‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’ ” (Jer. 31:31–34; cf. Ezek. 36:25–27)
 - Yokhanan the Immerser said Yeshua brings the most direct rendition of God’s words and gives the Spirit of God:

“ ‘He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. He who believes⁹ in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey¹⁰ the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.’ ” (John 3:31–36)
 - God also seeks to “remarry” the lost ones of the Kingdom of Israel at a time when the dwelling place of God is with mankind (Jer. 3:12ff).

So now let’s go back to Paul’s comparison of our relationship with God to marriage in Romans 7–8.

- We die to the our old “husband,” so we can be married to our new “husband,” God.
 - In modern society, we would say divorce is a more civilized principle for dissolution of marriages than death.
 - Taking Paul’s discussion further, one can’t divorce himself from the Law of God.

5 Watch = נָצַד *natsar* (Strong’s H5341): to watch, guard, keep

6 Dilligence = מִשְׁמָר *mishmar* (Strong’s H4929; 1038b; from H8104): place of confinement, jail, prison, guard, watch, observance

7 Careless = ἀργός *argos* (G692; from 1 and 2041 ἔργον *ergon*): inactive, idle, lazy, useless

8 Turn = שׁוּב *shub* (H7725)

9 Believes = πιστεύω *pisteuo* (Strong’s G4100): to trust, to pledge fidelity (*Thayer’s* lexicon)

10 Obey = ἀπειθέω *apeitheo* (Strong’s G0544): to not allow oneself to be persuaded, to not comply with (*Thayer’s*)

- The Law reveals the boundaries of fidelity to God (Rom. 7:7).
- Divorce is allowed only for the hard-hearted and for infidelity (Matt. 19:7–8).
- God has been the faithful one in the relationship.
- In a prophecy about the Kingdom of Yehudah’s infidelity with other gods to the point that the worship of God is “despised” and considered boring, the LORD said through Malachi that He “hates” the “divorce” that Yehudah has given the wife of its youth, i.e. the covenant with God. “This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. “For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘and him who covers his garment with wrong,’ says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.’ ” (Mal. 2:13–16)
- When we are exposed to the Law of God, we become fully aware of what fidelity and infidelity to God fully entail.
 - Fidelity then becomes our choice.
 - However, our introduction to God through His Law is an introduction to condemnation for infidelity.
 - The Law is “holy,” because it’s a testimony about God from God. Through it, God reveals the standards of a righteous God to a rebellious world.
 - Compared to that standard, by which God designed reality to function, we fail. “Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.” (Rom. 7:13)
 - Mankind prone to rebellion against God is incompatible with His kingdom long-term.
 - Paul calls this the “ministry of condemnation” and “ministry of death” in *2nd Corinthians 3*.
 - As “slaves” to another “master” other than God and “married” to a “spouse” other than God, we were stuck under the condemnation of the Law.

“I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:21–24)
 - God didn’t leave us in that wretched condition, under condemnation of the Law of the righteous Creator. However, the people we used to be couldn’t go into the new relationship.

“Thanks be to God through Yeshua Messiah our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua. For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Rom. 7:25–8:4)
 - We may want to see ourselves as the “wretched” people of verses 21–24 because we stumble in our “walking” according to the Spirit, or as selfless “spouses” of God.
 - God views us as heirs to the Kingdom of God, made righteous before Him by entrusting the completion of our death penalty under the Law to Messiah Yeshua.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to *become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” (Rom. 8:28–30)
 - And while we wait for the recreation of all things that have been tainted because of the Curse, we can be confident to go before God.

“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ ” (Rom. 8:15)

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” (1st John 2:1–2)