



# Marriage Matters

Examining the Biblical roots of civilization's most significant institution

## FOUR WEDDINGS, PART TWO

### Sinai, Cana, & the Wedding of the Lamb

#### I. Metaphors of Salvation

The Bible uses multiple **images** (metaphors) to describe the richness of salvation offered us in Jesus Christ. To limit one's understanding to only one of these images is to have a **partial** view of God's purpose in redemption. Though other metaphors appear in Scripture (the journey, the vine, the sheepfold, etc.), perhaps the three primary images of salvation are the following:

	COURTROOM	FATHER/CHILD	MARRIAGE
Who Is God?	Judge	Father	<u>Father-in-law</u>
Who Is Jesus?	Our lawyer/ advocate	Our brother	<u>Bridegroom/ Husband</u>
Who Am I?	Guilty, condemned sinner	Newborn (or adopted) child	<u>Fiancée/ wife</u>
What's the Problem?	Sin, guilt, punishment	Dead (unborn), children of the devil	<u>Unloved and alone, other lovers</u>
What's the Solution?	Justification, pardon, forgiveness	New birth, adoption	<u>Engagement, Marriage</u>
How Do I Become a Christian?	Confess, repent, believe	You must be born again!	<u>Be captured by love and get married!</u>
How Do I Know I'm a Christian?	There is no condemnation... (Rom. 8:1)	The Spirit of adoption cries Abba. (Rom. 8:15)	<u>My beloved is mine and I am his</u> (Song of Songs 2:16)
How then Should We Live?	If anyone sins we have an advocate... (I John 2:1-2)	As obedient children, be holy... (I Pet. 1:14-15)	<u>Keep yourself a pure virgin...</u> (II Cor. 11:2-3)

#### II. Four Weddings

A picture is worth a thousand words. The best way to understand marriage is to attend a wedding and **watch closely** all that is happening. Every element is important: white dress, rings, vows, father of the bride, music, reception, etc. Although the Bible contains occasional theological statements about marriage, its most important teaching comes through the four weddings that punctuate the biblical narrative at **key moments**. It is as we *watch closely* what is happening that we learn the real meaning and purpose of marriage.

##### A. Eden: The Garden Variety of Marriage (Genesis 126-28; 2:18-25).

Human history begins not with a government or even with a temple/church. It begins with a wedding: a family. Marriage is:

1. One man and **one woman**.
2. A union of **differences** (two become one).

3. A fertile union (children). Intimacy means **fertility**.
  4. Intended to reflect the **image of God**.
  5. The **most important** human institution (leave and cleave).
- B. **Sinai: A Covenant of Love** (Exodus 19:1–8, 16–20; 20:1ff.; 24:3–11; 25:1–9; 32:1–6; 40:34).

Though Mount Sinai has negative associations for many (legalistic obligations, threatening deity, etc.), a closer look reveals what most people have missed entirely: **a wedding!** This was the moment when God and Israel entered into a **covenant** relationship of love. The prophets understood this reality and preached it often (Isa. 62:4–5; Jer. 2:2; 31:31–32; Hosea 1:2; etc.).

The Covenant Is Established (Exodus 19–24)			The Tabernacle Is Constructed (Exodus 25–40)		
Preparation	Stipulations: The Law	Ratification: Vows & Ceremonies	The Plan Is Given	The Golden Calf	The Plan Is Carried Out)
19	20–23	24	25–31	32–34	35–40

1. Notes on the text:
  - a. Notice that Sinai is not in **Egypt**. The covenant comes *after* redemption. Keeping the law is the **result** of salvation, never the *cause*! We obey God’s law not in order to be saved but because we already are!
  - b. Just as creation began with a wedding, so does **redemption**. From among all the nations, God **chose** Israel, rescued her from bondage, and brought her to himself as his “treasured possession” (19:4–6; John 15:16). This is a love story!
  - c. The heart of the covenant is expressed in solemn promises: God makes **vows** to Israel (23:20–33; etc.) and Israel makes vows to God (19:8; 24:3, 7).
  - d. Other elements of the covenant-making ceremony at Sinai are carried over into traditional wedding ceremonies today: **trumpet** music (19:16, 19), a reception (24:9–11), **symbols** and signs (31:12–17), and fear and trembling (20:18–21).
  - e. The **law** defines what covenant love looks like (Ex. 20–23). The Bible does not hesitate to join together law and **love** (John 14:15; Rom. 13:10; etc.).
  - f. The Tabernacle is constructed (Ex. 25–31 and 35–40). Worship is **intimacy** with God; living with the Holy One (25:8; 40:34).
  - g. Adultery is grounds for **divorce** (Ex. 32–34).
2. What the covenant at Sinai teaches us about marriage.
  - a. **Initiating** love. God *pursued* Israel and chose her for his bride. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. **Leadership** for men has been a challenge ever since the Fall.
  - b. **Responding** love. Though Israel was chosen, she had the option of refusing the advances of her lover. In worshiping the golden calf (Ex. 32), she did! Wives are to **submit** to their husbands as to the Lord. The Fall made this very challenging!

- c. **Romantic** love. The covenant at Sinai is not a *contract* between business partners, a *treaty* between nations, or even a *social arrangement* between families. It is a love story! Song of Songs is a vivid illustration.
- d. The importance of **vows**. These promises are *exclusive* (“forsaking all others”), *comprehensive* (“for better, for worse”), and *irrevocable* (“till death do us part”). Broken vows create the possibility of **divorce** (Ex. 32:7–10, 19, 30; Jer. 3:6–10).
- e. The **obligations** of love (law). Weddings have always included legal demands. These laws simply state what is expected in the relationship. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).
- f. A **ceremony** fitting the occasion. Making a covenant is a **Big Deal** and demands all the solemn dignity we can give it. It is also a time of great joy. Thus it should include food, music, symbols, ceremony, awe, etc.

C. Cana: Glimpse of Glory (John 2:1–11)

Jesus chose to launch his public ministry at a wedding. Here he did his first miracle and here he first “manifested his glory.” John underscores that the wedding at Cana was a **sign**: it is intended to point beyond itself to something bigger.

The events at Cana teach us two primary truths about marriage:

1. Every wedding has **cosmic significance**. Every wedding is a *sign* (symbol) that points beyond itself to something much bigger. Those who want to tamper with the basic elements (one man, one woman, vows, etc.) are thus destroying the very thing that God intends to lead us to salvation!
2. Christ is the **bridegroom**. It is no accident that the bride and groom at Canaan are never named. The occasion is the opportunity for John to reveal that Jesus is a real bridegroom who has come in search of his bride. This is why he cleansed the temple (his fiancée) right after this (John 2:13–22) and why John the Baptist understands his role as that of the **best man** (John 3:28–30).

D. The Wedding of the Lamb (Revelation 19–22)

A story is only as good as its **ending**. Just as human history began with a wedding, so it will end with one. But before the bride of Christ is revealed, the Great Prostitute (Babylon) must first be exposed, judged, and **destroyed** (Rev. 17:1–19:5). Part of Babylon’s final demise includes the statement: “the voice of the bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more” (Rev. 18:23). The fall of Babylon creates the occasion for the original Hallelujah Chorus (Rev. 19:1–8). The joyful music means that wedding invitations can finally be sent out!

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the almighty Reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the **marriage of the Lamb** has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are **invited** to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” (Rev. 19:6–10)*

1. The arrival of the Bride (Rev. 21–22)

The bride is identified as the **New Jerusalem**. Human history does not end when we “go up” to heaven but when the City of God “comes down” to earth (21:1–5). The last page of the Bible is not describing the end of the story but the

**beginning!** Note especially how the City of God is described as a bride, dressed for her wedding day (21:2, 9). The arrival of the Groom had already occurred (see Rev. 19:11–16). Riding on a white horse, he comes as King of kings and Lord of lords.

2. What the wedding of the Lamb teaches us about marriage:
  - a. The last word on marriage is that marriage is the **last word!** Human history will culminate in a glorious wedding. We were created and redeemed for this! Weddings are written into our very DNA.
  - b. Every wedding in human history is a **hint** of this final wedding yet to come. Every earthly wedding is a reflection of a glorious heavenly and eternal reality.
  - c. The ultimate question that confronts every human is this: will I be seduced by the Great Prostitute (Babylon) and destroyed with her or will I be captured by the love of the Mighty King who comes on the white horse? Does Babylon or Jerusalem define my identity? Am I **ready** for the return of the bridegroom (Matt. 25:10–13; Rev. 19:7)? Do I have the proper **clothing** (Matt. 22:11–14; Rev. 19:7–8)?

### III. Summary of the Four Weddings

#### A. Concluding observations.

Looking over the four weddings in the Bible, we can summarize our findings in a few profoundly simple statements that are simply profound:

1. The one who created marriage and defines it is **God**; not the state, not popular opinion, not courts.
2. Marriage is of **ultimate** significance. History begins and ends with a wedding. Marriage is the primary metaphor to understand God's ultimate purpose in both creation and redemption.
3. When marriage fails to be what God intended, the **damage is greater** than we imagine. It damages our view of God, of covenants, and of one another. Civilization simply cannot survive without healthy marriages. It will ultimately implode.
4. The basic *purpose* of marriage is threefold:
  - Intimate **companionship**.
  - Fertility, procreation—**children**.
  - To reflect the **image of God**.
5. The basic *elements* of marriage are:
  - One **man** and one **woman**.
  - Covenant **vows**.
  - **Romantic** love.
6. Every marriage in human history is intended to reflect these ultimate purposes of God (#1–#5). Marriage has **cosmic significance**.

B. Concluding applications.

1. Marriage is worth **fighting for**. As the most foundational of all human institutions, everything hinges on this. This is a hill to die on.
2. Though sin has occasioned all manner of dysfunction in marriage (polygamy, divorce, adultery, abuse, same-sex marriage, etc.), it has not destroyed **the model**. As sinners saved by grace, we must honestly confess and confront our shortcomings while at the same time we hold forth the original standard.
3. Those who seek to **redefine** what God has clearly defined are playing with fire. Sodom and Babylon are biblical examples that warn what happens to those who try to redefine what God has clearly established.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How has this study changed the way you think about marriage?
2. Describe a time when you attended a wedding and caught a “glimpse of glory”.
3. What’s at stake in the effort to redefine marriage today?
4. If in fact God is calling his people to stand firm and fight for marriage today, what do you intend to do to oppose error and promote truth?

## Lord, Who at Cana’s Wedding Feast

Adelaide Thrupp, 1853

*Lord, who at Cana’s wedding feast  
Didst as a guest appear,  
Thou dearer far than earthly guest,  
Vouchsafe thy presence here;  
For holy thou indeed dost prove  
The marriage vow to be,  
Proclaiming it a type of love  
Between the Church and thee.*

*The holiest vow that man can make,  
The golden thread in life,  
The bond that none may dare to break,  
That bindeth man and wife;  
Which, blest by thee, whate’er betides,  
No evil shall destroy,  
Through care-worn days each care divides,  
And doubles every joy.*

*On those who at thine altar kneel,  
O Lord, thy blessing pour,  
That each may wake the other’s zeal  
To love thee more and more:  
Oh, grant them here in peace to live,  
In purity and love,  
And, this world leaving, to receive  
A crown of life above!*