
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON CXXI : THE WISE AND SPIRIT FILLED LIFE OF SUBMISSION / THE HAUSTAFEL (5:15-6:9)

Ephesians 5:25-33 — Paul to the CHURCHES —

THE BIBLE'S USE OF METAPHORS — One of the 'issues' (humanly speaking) the Lord must have had with His creation was how to communicate with frail, limited beings in a way that we would understand. One of the greatest means He uses is metaphors: word-pictures of things which are common to us that will illustrate some deep, eternal, often unfathomable truths. We are very familiar with many of these metaphors: Jesus Christ is the 'Lamb' of God; He's the 'Lion' from the tribe of Judah. Let us be silly for a second: is Christ an actual 'lamb' or 'lion'? Of course not; He does not run around on all fours nor does He have fluffy fur or a majestic mane. But from the use of the OT we understand Christ as a 'sacrificial lamb' to take away our sins, and a 'majestic ruler with authority and dominion' as a lion. This lesson will concentrate on one of the most common metaphors found throughout Scripture but before we begin, a couple principles to remember:

- **Any metaphor pressed to extremes produces error.** Again, as a silly illustration, Christ does not have a mane nor fluffy fur, even if some imaginative pastor might use these items to illustrate some so-called truth that he is trying to read into a passage.
- **Metaphors in Scripture must be defined by Scripture.** For example, the 'Lamb of God' is not an illustration of how welcoming and fluffy our Lord may be, but rather we look to the OT and see Him as the 'Lamb sacrificed for our sins.'
- **The Scripture may use the same metaphor to illustrate different truths, depending on context.** Note the key word: context!

'FOUNDATION' — This will become evident as we progress in today's lesson but one example may be found by comparing 1 Cor 3 with Eph 2.

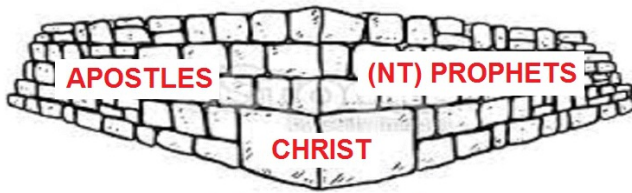
*'For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. **For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.'* (1 Cor 3:9-15)

In this well-known passage, what does the foundation represent? Paul clearly says Jesus Christ, or to be more exact, the teachings of Jesus Christ. What does the building upon the foundation represent? A ministry built upon those teachings of Jesus Christ. What is gained or lost? Rewards, dependent upon the faithfulness and adherence to the teachings of Jesus Christ. This can and has been used for several applications but Paul's original intention was of those who minister in Jesus' name (specifically in 1 Cor 3, Paul, Apollos and others who had ministered in Corinth).

So we can grasp Paul's meaning here without problems, but then note what Paul says in Ephesians:

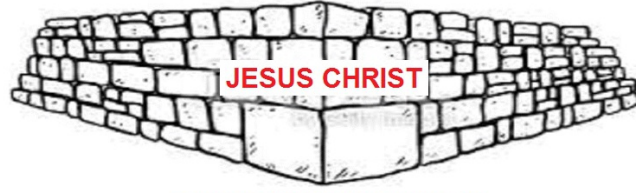
*'Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone**, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.'* (Eph 2:19-22)

NT CHURCHES



EPHESIANS 2:20

CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES



1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15

Here Paul uses the 'foundation' metaphor but this time with a different application. What does the foundation represent? Here it is the teachings of the apostles and the (NT) prophets, or what we would call the teachings of the new covenant (our New Testament). In this metaphor Jesus Christ is not the foundation but rather the 'cornerstone,' that which ensures alignment, structure, accuracy and guidance. ***But it would be an error to force the 'foundation' in this context to be Jesus Christ just because that was how Paul used it in his letter to Corinth. Each is just a metaphor, a word picture giving an illustration, and that illustration does not need to be the same every time it is used. It is better to let each passage say what it says, without us trying to twist or force a meaning.*** (NOTE: I have spoken to some who, in their attempt to force the meaning of 1 Cor 3 into Eph 2, have said the translation is misleading and Paul really did mean that Christ is the foundation. For that reason I have added an appendix of how this verse is translated in multiple English translations. It is obvious from that list there is no other way in which Eph 2:20 may be understood than what I have described above. The problem is not one of translation.)

'FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM' — Another example of a metaphor being used to refer to different objects in different passages was mentioned in class a few weeks ago. John the Baptist used a common metaphor when he was questioned by his disciples:

²⁵ Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. ²⁶ And they [**PROBABLY JOHN'S DISCIPLES**] came to John and said to him, "Rabbi [**JOHN THE BAPTIST**], He [**JESUS**] who was with you [**JOHN THE BAPTIST**] beyond the Jordan, to whom you [**JOHN THE BAPTIST**] have testified — behold, He [**JESUS**] is baptizing, and all are coming to Him [**JESUS**]!" ²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves [**JOHN'S DISCIPLES**] bear me [**JOHN THE BAPTIST**] witness, that I said, 'I [**JOHN THE BAPTIST**] am not the Christ,' but, 'I [**JOHN THE BAPTIST**] have been sent before Him [**JESUS**].' ²⁹ He [**JESUS**] who has the bride [??] is the bridegroom [**JESUS**]; but the friend of the bridegroom [**JOHN THE BAPTIST**], who stands and hears him [**JESUS**], rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's [**JESUS**]

voice. Therefore this joy of mine **[JOHN THE BAPTIST]** is fulfilled. ³⁰ He **[JESUS]** must increase, but I **[JOHN THE BAPTIST]** must decrease. (John 3:15-30)

The metaphor in question is John the Baptist as he refers to himself as *'the friend of the bridegroom'* while Jesus is used metaphorically as *'the bridegroom.'* This is not questioned in the verses above and is used by John the Baptist to refer to his humility and standing in comparison with our Lord Jesus. There are some Baptists however that take this statement along with the New Testament's teaching on the local church to make the application that there is a 'linked succession' (whether by churches 'begetting' other churches or by doctrine) between the ecclesia started by our Lord Jesus to (some of our) Baptist churches today. Those that hold this doctrine are called *'Baptist Briders,'* the sense being that the Lord's churches (i.e., today's Baptists, or rather only some of today's Baptists) are His *'Bride'* while all others will be the *'friends of the bridegroom'* in eternity. I too once held to that doctrine for a few years when I was first exposed to the local church teaching but I now believe that to be a mis-application of the doctrine of the local church.

One of the reasons for my no longer holding to the *'Baptist Bride'* doctrine arose when I compared (I believe by the leading of the Holy Spirit) John the Baptist's statement in John chapter 3 with other places in the gospels where a similar situation occurs:

¹⁴ Then the disciples of John came to Him **[JESUS]**, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your **[JESUS']** disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them **[JOHN'S DISCIPLES]**, "Can the friends of the bridegroom **[JESUS' DISCIPLES]** mourn as long as the bridegroom **[JESUS]** is with them **[JESUS' DISCIPLES]**? But the days will come when the bridegroom **[JESUS]** will be taken away from them **[JESUS' DISCIPLES]**, and then they **[JESUS' DISCIPLES]** will fast." (Matt 9:14,15 || Mk 2:18-20 || Lk 5:33-35)

In the Gospel of John who was the *'friend of the bridegroom'*? Specifically in John 3 the *'friend of the bridegroom'* is John the Baptist, which our *'Baptist Bride'* friends believe to be representative of Old Testament saints and others not part of a Baptist church. The *'bridegroom'* there is of course our Lord Jesus and His *'bride'* would therefore be the churches according to some of our brethren's beliefs. But in the other gospels noted above (Matthew, Mark and Luke) who are the *'friends of the bridegroom'*? – it is Jesus' disciples, those of whom He began His ecclesia according to Matt 16:18. The *'bridegroom'* is once again identified as our Lord Jesus, but the important thing to note is how the metaphor (*'friend of the bridegroom'*) is used of John the Baptist in the Gospel of John but in Matthew, Mark and Luke this same metaphor is identified with a different group, specifically Jesus' own disciples. ***What are we to do with this difference? As stated above, the best way to deal with this is let each passage say what it says, without us trying to twist or force a meaning. We do great harm when we try to 'lock' any metaphor into a single application regardless of the context. If we must 'force' an application to any metaphor, perhaps it would be better to re-evaluate our application rather than force Scripture.***


GOD CONDESCENDS
TO OUR LIMITATIONS,
REVEALING
HIMSELF IN OUR
WORDS WITH IMAGES THAT
GIVE US REAL KNOWLEDGE
ABOUT HIS NATURE.
JOHN CALVIN



(To be fair, there may be those who would argue, “But in the Gospel of John, the metaphor is *‘friend of the bridegroom,’* singular; but in the other gospels it is *‘friends of the bridegroom,’* plural.” I personally believe each of these instances are speaking of the same person / persons, but I will admit they are different phrases and thus it is possible the metaphors are different. I would not argue with those who deny they are the same.)

‘TEMPLE’ — One final example would be the use of a *‘temple’* as a metaphor of the literal, physical temples of Solomon (approx. 1000-586 BC), Zerubbabel (approx. 516-37 BC) and Herod’s temple (approx. 37 BC - 70 AD). Jesus Himself used the temple as a metaphor in the Gospel of John when the Jewish leaders questioned His authority:

“So the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’” (John 2:18-20)

There can be no question as to what Jesus meant when He used this metaphor as the Apostle John adds the following comments:

“But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.” (John 2:21-22)

Paul likewise uses the temple as a metaphor of our bodies:

“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you (plural) not know that your (plural) body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you (plural), whom you (plural) have from God, and you (plural) are not your (plural) own? For you (plural) were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your (plural) body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Cor 6:18-20)

These are well-known verses, often quoted to remind believers that we belong to the Lord and not to ourselves. No one to my knowledge denies the metaphor here relates to individual believers, but a few chapters earlier Paul uses the same metaphor with a different meaning:

*“Do you not know that you (plural) are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you (plural)? If anyone (singular) defiles **[phtheirei]** the temple of God, God will destroy **[phtherei]** him (singular). For the temple of God is holy, which temple you (plural) are.”* (1 Cor 3:16,17; the Greek word phtheirō = ‘destroy, ruin, corrupt, spoil’)

While possibly not immediately obvious, Paul uses a play-on-words that shows he is not referring to individual believers as the *‘temple’* but to our churches. In v. 17 Paul says that *‘if anyone **[phtheirei]** the temple of God, God will **[phtherei]** him.’* But if the *‘temple’* is speaking here of individual believers, that does not make sense: *‘If I destroy me, my body, God will destroy me?!?’* ***But what Paul means here is if any person defiles or destroys the ‘temple of God,’ if any person defiles or destroys a local church, one of the Lord’s ecclesias, God will in like manner defile or destroy that person. It is reflective; in whatever way any person defiles an ecclesia, the Lord in some way will visit that person with the same judgment.*** That is unfortunately hidden in the various versions that uses two different words to translate the same word; e.g., the NKJV quoted above says *‘If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him.’* (1 Cor 3:17a) But quite a

few translations do use the same word when translating this sentence:

'If you destroy God's temple, God will destroy you' (RV)

'If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.' (ESV)

'If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy that person' (NASB)

'if any one the sanctuary of God doth waste, him shall God waste' (YLT)

I particularly like the Amplified Version:

'If anyone destroys the temple of God [corrupting it with false doctrine], God will destroy the destroyer' (AMP)

This might be new to some reading this; allow me to quote others with the same opinion. Note this is not to marshal numbers to prove my interpretation is correct; scriptural truths are not dependent upon how many people agree or disagree. But I do believe Paul is speaking here of our local churches and I would like to show the comments of good, conservative Bible scholars who also agree with this understanding:

“Since v. 5 Paul has been trying to correct the Corinthians’ false view of church leadership, by redirecting their focus from the teachers themselves to God, who owns all and whose alone they are. At the same time he must correct their understanding of the nature of the church itself. Thus the argument now takes another slight turn, in which he carries the imagery of vv. 9b-15 a step further by specifying the kind of building that he and the others have been erecting, namely God’s temple in Corinth. With this imagery he does two things: (1) he tries to help the Corinthians to see the nature and significance of their being God’s people in Corinth, and (2) by picking up the imagery of judgment from vv. 13-15, he sternly warns those who are in process of destroying the church by their divisions. ***Thus he presents us with remarkable imagery describing the nature of the local church, as well as with the strongest warning in the NT against those who would take the church lightly and destroy it by worldly wisdom and division....*** This passage has endured a long history of unfortunate interpretation in the church. Because the imagery of the temple is reapplied in 6:19-20 to the individual Corinthian who was going to the prostitutes, many have read that usage back into this passage as though it were a word of warning to individual Christians as to how they are to treat their bodies or live out their individual Christian lives. ***Both the context and the grammar disallow such interpretations, even by ‘extended application.’ This is all the more unfortunate because this is one of the few texts in the NT where we are exposed both to an understanding of the nature of the local church (God’s temple indwelt by his Spirit) and where the warning of v. 17 makes it clear how important the local church is to God himself.***” [Gordon D. Fee, *NICNT: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids MI) 145f, 149]

“The AV greatly mars the effect by translating the verb first ‘defile’ and then ‘destroy.’ The same verb is purposely used to show the just working of the *les talionis* in this case: one destruction is requited by another destruction. The destroyers of the Temple are those who banish the Spirit, an issue to which the dissensions were at least tending. ***Here the reference is to unchristian faction, which destroyed, by dividing, the unity of the Church: a building shattered into separate parts is a ruin.... The sinner destroys by corrupting what is holy and good, and for this God destroys him....*** [This verb must not] be watered down to mean mere physical punishment. The exact meaning is nowhere revealed in

Scripture; but terrible ruin and eternal loss of some kind seems to be meant.” [Archibald Robertson & Alfred Plummer, *ICC: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, Scotland) 1982, 67]

“Paul switches to direct address and a third metaphor that now depicts the church as God’s temple.... Since this community building is the temple of God, where the Spirit of God dwells, Paul introduces a new, more serious threat. While some builders may do a lousy job of building on the foundation and their work will be consumed, some work moves beyond mere shoddiness and becomes destructive.... It is a severe warning. He has real destruction in mind and those who destroy God’s temple will also be destroyed. There is no narrow escape from this sin.” [David E. Garland, *BECNT: 1 Corinthians* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids MI) 2003, 119ff]

“With the repetition of the words *if anyone*, v. 17 intensifies v. 12. According to vv. 12-16, *‘if anyone builds the church in a certain way, they will receive a reward if their work endures.’* In v. 17, the stakes are raised, and not only is their reward in jeopardy, but their very person: *If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person....* What is clear in v. 17 is that the punishment fits the crime: if anyone destroys the temple, ... God will destroy that person. The measured appropriateness of God’s judgment is a constant and comforting theme in the Bible to anyone concerned about the justice of God. The reason God will destroy anyone who destroys the church concerns the holy status of the church: *for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.* To call the church ‘holy’ is a way of underscoring its value to God; it is special because it belongs to him and is put to such valuable use as bringing him glory.” [Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *Pillar NT Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids MI) 2010, 160f]

‘READ THE BIBLE FORWARD, NOT BACKWARD’ — Prior to getting to the main thrust of this lesson, allow me to borrow an applicable point from a future lesson (we will see this again in a few weeks). This quote speaks of an excellent point gleaned from John Gill: ***“If we spent more time with the OT Hebrew prophets than our favorite eschatological writer, then our eschatological views might change.”*** Chip Thornton [John Gill and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb; G3 Ministries, written Sep 21, 2022; <https://g3min.org/john-gill-the-marriage-supper-of-the-lamb/>] says this concerning John Gill: ***“I appreciate how Gill reads the Bible forward, not backward. Again, he commented on every verse in the OT before he came to the NT. Few, if any, eschatological writers have done that. They jump into the book of Revelation with an uninformed understanding of the prophets. Often, we see later revelation imposed on and even altering earlier revelation without any NT writer’s authentication. I prefer John Gill’s style: Read the Bible forward, not backward. Revelation’s author, John, was Jewish. John’s heritage, too, was steeped in the OT prophets. What’s more, God revealed Scripture to mankind progressively. Before we spend years studying the book of Revelation, we should spend double that time studying the OT Hebrew prophets.”*** I believe that to be a proper introduction to this lesson. We must remember that ***when the Apostles wrote, there was no New Testament. The only Bible Jesus and the Apostles used is what we call today the Old Testament.***

THE MARRIAGE METAPHOR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

(main points gleaned from Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians*, 384f; see also J. Paul Sampley, *'And the Two Shall Become One Flesh'* [Cambridge University Press; London, 1971]; *Ephesian commentaries* by Ernest Best, Andrew Lincoln, Harold Hoehner, Peter O'Brien; *Ezekiel commentaries* by Leslie Allen, Daniel Block)

THE PENTATEUCH — As early as the Mosaic law, man's rebellion against the Lord has been illustrated in terms of 'adultery' and 'prostitution;' for example:

*'Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, **and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.**'* (Exod 34:12-16)

*'And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, **and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.** And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God.'* (Lev 20:5-7)

*'And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, **and that you may not follow the harlotry** to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.'* (Num 15:39,40)

*'And the Lord said to Moses: "Behold, you will rest with your fathers; **and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.**"'* (Deut 31:6)

These verses may be multiplied many times over throughout the OT. It is also worth noting this 'spiritual adultery' is presented as cavorting with the demonic realm:

*'**They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot.** This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.'* (Lev 17:7)

This is significant as we consider Ephesians since Paul will emphasize the purity of believers by resisting the evil principalities and powers (Eph 6:10-13). ***So while Moses does not explicitly use the term 'marriage,' obedience is described as faithfulness and rebellion is described in terms of adultery and harlotry.***

POETICAL BOOKS AND THE SONG OF SOLOMON — While the marriage metaphor of 'adultery' may be found in a few of the Psalms (e.g., 106:39), the most extensive use of this metaphor in the poetical books is the Song of Solomon. There the love of the king could be understood in a more spiritual sense between the Lord and His people, and in that sense the book in its entirety could be one long metaphor.

THE PROPHET HOSEA — What was hinted at throughout the Pentateuch and applied spiritually in the Song of Solomon is specifically developed by the prophets. It is here where God's love, sanctifying care and commitment to His people is explicitly expressed in the metaphor of a marriage relationship. Perhaps the best known is Hosea where the prophet's relationship with his own wife portrays God's relationship with Israel:

*'And it shall be, in that day, says the Lord, **That you will call Me "My Husband,"** and no longer call Me "My Master," for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more. In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, to make them lie down safely. **I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness,** and you shall know the Lord.'* (Hos 2:16-20)

We are all aware of the tragedy that develops: in spite of Hosea's faithfulness and love, his wife betrays him with a series of adulterous relationships. But the Lord used this as an object lesson for Israel, for in similar manner they were forsaking their God in favor of giving their devotion to idols. They had a 'spirit of prostitution' in their hearts:

*'My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff [diviner's rod] informs them. **For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray'*** (Hos 4:12).

*'They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God, **for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst,** and they do not know the Lord.'* (Hos 5:4)

In spite of their adultery, the Lord remained faithful to Israel and made the following promise of their future:

'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him.' (Hos 14:4)

So in Hosea we see the faithfulness of the Lord as the Husband, the unfaithfulness of Israel as His bride, and the promise of future restoration. Note the identity of the wife in this extended metaphor is the nation of Israel (both saved and unsaved Jews), although it may be argued that at least some of the times it refers only to the Northern Ten Tribes of Israel (Ephraim).

THE PROPHET ISAIAH — Isaiah also uses the marriage metaphor to portray the Lord's loving relationship to Israel:

*'**For your Maker is your husband,** the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.'* (Isa 54:5)

Israel as expected continues in her unfaithfulness, but the Lord promises to eventually prove Himself to be faithful to His faithless bride. He will heal her, clothe her with garments of salvation, and bestow righteousness on her as the object of His unfailing love:

*'For the Lord has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused, says your God. For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. **With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,** says the Lord, your Redeemer.'* (Isa 54:6-8)

*'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, **as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.**'* (Isa 61:10)

'And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.' (Isa 62:5b)

So in Isaiah we again see the faithful Husband, the unfaithful wife, and the promise of future restoration. The wife in these metaphors is national Israel (both unsaved and saved Jews), either the entire nation or the tribe of Judah.

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH — Jeremiah likewise speaks of Israel as the Lord's Bride, then laments over the way she has cheated on her husband. In her 'youth' as a 'young bride' she loved the Lord and followed Him:

*'Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'I remember you, the kindness of your youth, **the love of your betrothal**, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.'"*' (Jer 2:2)

The Lord elsewhere plainly says He is married to Israel:

*"'Return, O backsliding children,' says the LORD; **'for I am married to you.** I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.'* ... ***'Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,'** says the LORD."* (Jer 3:14, 20)

Yet now the Lord mourns her unfaithfulness:

*'They say, "If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man's, may he return to her again?" Would not that land be greatly polluted? **But you have played the harlot with many lovers;** yet return to Me, says the Lord. Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: **where have you not lain with men?** By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness; **and you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness.** Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; you refuse to be ashamed.... The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, **and there played the harlot.**"'* (Jer 3:1-3, 6)

As a warning to the southern tribe of Judah, the Lord even continues the metaphor in terms of divorce:

*'And I said, after she [northern Israel] had done all these things, "Return to Me." But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. **Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.** So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense, says the Lord.'* (Jer 3:7-10)

So the Lord clothes the destruction of the northern kingdom in terms of ‘putting her away for her adultery’ and ‘divorce.’ Heavy terms. ***But important for our purposes is the ‘bride’ in Jer 3 is not all Israel but the Northern Ten Tribes (Ephraim). We know that because there is a distinction made in these verses between ‘Israel’ being put away and ‘her sister Judah.’***

THE PROPHET EZEKIEL — While there are more extensive developments of the marriage metaphor in Hosea and the Song of Solomon, the passage which appears to have been the most influential in Ephesians is found in Ezekiel. This passage contains so many conceptual and verbiage similarities with Paul’s passage in Ephesians that some believe Paul was intentionally echoing the language of Ezekiel as he used marriage as a metaphor of Christ and His churches (at least the Ezekiel passage gives a viable explanation to some of the difficulties found in Eph 5:26,27). We will take a few more moments here than the other passages for that reason.

“The whole oracle of judgment is shaped as a sort of allegory. It is dominated by the metaphor of Jerusalem as a girl who, rescued from death and richly blessed by her benefactor-husband, repays him with infidelity and must lose her life.... The foundling’s abandonment to death (vv 3-5) is reversed by Yahweh’s gift of life (vv 6-14). His love (vv 6-14) is repaid by ungratefulness and unfaithfulness (vv 15-34). She takes off her clothing for her lovers (vv 15-34), while in reprisal they strip it off by force (vv 35-43).” [Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19: Word Biblical Commentary*; Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville; 1994; pg. 233f]

Ezekiel first presents Jerusalem as an exposed female infant upon whom the Lord had compassion, took her in, cleansed her and raised her:

‘Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: “Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.”’
(Ezek 16:1-3)

Jerusalem’s background had been completely pagan, a bad omen for its future history. Jerusalem had paganism in its blood.

‘As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born.’ (Ezek 16:4,5)

Some historical background of the treatment of newborn babies among the peasants in Arab countries: “As soon as the navel is cut, the midwife rubs the child all over with salt, water and oil, and tightly swathes it in clothes for seven days; at the end of that time she removes the dirty clothes, washes the child and anoints it, and then wraps it up again for seven days – and so on till the fortieth day.” While the purpose of rubbing the infant with salt is not clear, the practice continues to this day by Arab mothers. But Ezekiel says these things were not done; these omissions are interpreted as a lack of kindly compassion, which by implication had to await Yahweh’s intervention to materialize. Exposure of unwanted babies, especially girls, was common in the ancient world. This one was abandoned, still attached to the placenta, and left to die. In the ancient Near East, washing, cleaning, and clothing the newborn child had the force of legitimation on the parents’ part. By failing to do so they had relinquished all rights to the child. But Yahweh intervenes for good, rescuing this ‘little savage’ from certain death and ordaining for her abundant life.

'And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, "Live!" Yes, I said to you in your blood, "Live!" I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare.' (Ezek 16:6,7)

God's seeing reverses the lack of a kindly 'eye' in v. 5. Now at last the baby finds kindness and help. The gory mess in which the newborn was left to wallow has the connotation of ritual uncleanness. The divine intervention, preparing and preserving it for its destiny, refers to Yahweh's providential guidance watching over the pagan city-state. The creative command turned into fact, and the baby grew into adolescence and sexual maturity.

'When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine, says the Lord God.' (Ezek 16:8)

The onset of menstruation strikes a somewhat negative note that will not be resolved until the washing in v. 9, while the nakedness will receive symbolic resolution in v. 8 and an actual one in v. 10. What was not done at birth or in the years that followed would eventually be made good when Yahweh had direct dealings with Jerusalem. David would eventually become king and would reign in Jerusalem, and this union is celebrated as a marriage rite. For a man to spread the hem of his garment over a woman (v. 8) was a symbolic gesture that constituted a proposal of marriage. He thus extended over her both his authority and his willingness to support her (here the word usually translated 'covenant' primarily means 'marriage pact'). The final clause, 'and she became mine,' evokes the solemn wording of the marriage pact as found in ancient Jewish marriage contracts.

*'Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. **You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,** says the Lord God.'* (Ezek 16:9-14; the highlighted words have special reference to Eph 5)

Rather than focusing on the marriage ceremony itself, the focus is upon how Yahweh discharged His commitment to be responsible for His new wife. She is cleansed of her ritual and natural impurity with water and oil, to make up for the deprivation that marked her newborn state (v. 4). The one who lacked swathing bands and grew up naked (vv. 4,7) is now dressed in the best of clothes, headgear, and footwear. Her royal rank is indicated by the multicolored robe, worn by the royal bride in Ps 45:14. A complete set of jewelry is lavished upon her, culminating in a royal diadem, along with food typically supplied to royalty (1 Kings 4:22). Under Yahweh's care, she blossomed into a peerless beauty, one worthy of being a queen. The closing note (v. 14) stresses the debt that the foundling-wife owed to her patron-husband; all was of grace.

But as is written in the other prophetic writings, Israel is unfaithful and repeatedly engages in acts of adultery and prostitution. In fact, in Ezek 16 LXX the various words for 'sexual immorality'

appear twenty-four times in this chapter (πορνεύω – porneuō, “commit fornication”; ἐκπορνεύω – ekporneuō, “to engage in illicit sex”; πορνεία – porneia, “fornication”; πόρνη – pornē, “prostitute”).

“You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband. Men make payment to all harlots, but you made your payments to all your lovers, and hired them to come to you from all around for your harlotry. You are the opposite of other women in your harlotry, because no one solicited you to be a harlot. In that you gave payment but no payment was given you, therefore you are the opposite.’ ... For thus says the Lord GOD: ***‘I will deal with you as you have done, who despised the oath by breaking the covenant.’***” (Ezek 16:32-34, 59)

But the Lord again is faithful to His marriage commitment, in spite of the great difficulty of demonstrating love to someone who has betrayed Him time and time again. He at times is jealous, angry, and full of wrath (Ezek 16:38, 42) but His love and faithfulness to His bride persists. He promises:

‘Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.... And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done, says the Lord God.’ (Ezek 16:60, 62, 63; the highlighted words have special reference to Eph 5)

EZEKIEL, EPHESIANS AND THE BRIDE OF CHRIST — For many, Eph 5:25-27 is Paul’s Christological interpretation of the prominent OT metaphor of the covenant between Yahweh and His people expressed through the marriage relationship, with Ezekiel especially in mind:

- The covenant relationship between God and his people is still expressed in terms of a marriage bond in Ephesians, the metaphor of marriage now being used to illustrate Christ and his churches.
- This is still a marriage initiated by God with a people who are filthy and undeserving. Just as there was nothing that Israel did to merit God’s attention and favor (in fact, Israel was like an exposed child that lay in a field kicking about in its own blood; Ezek 16:6), so also the new covenant people were once “dead in [their] transgressions and sins” (Eph 2:1).
- God continues a work of cleansing his dirty and unlovely bride. In fact, Ezek 16:9 explicitly says that God *“bathed you with water”* (ἐλούσα σε ἐν ὕδατι [elousa se en hudati]) – an equivalent expression to what Paul says that Christ has done for the churches, *“by the washing of water,”* Eph 5:26 (τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος [tō loutrō tou hudatos]).
- As the prophets refer to a two-stage cleansing and sanctifying work (the initial cleansing when He makes them His bride, but because of their rebellion God will perform an additional cleansing and atoning work on His bride in the future), so Paul speaks of Christ sanctifying and cleansing the bride when He makes them His own, but this process is ultimately completed in the future when He restores all things (Eph 1:10; 4:30).
- Finally, under both covenants, God is faithful to the end and makes his bride glorious and beautiful (Ezek 16:13,14; Eph 5:27).

As we consider the OT marriage metaphors, note the initiator in these metaphors is always the

Lord, illustrated as the wronged but faithful husband. The identity of the bride in the OT however appears to be a fluid thing, something which may change from passage to passage:

- We are able to identify the bride of Yahweh as being all Israel, only the Northern Ten Tribes (Ephraim), only Judah, or even just the city of Jerusalem. Some might say, 'Whether Ephraim or Judah, the OT bride is still God's people.' But the point is that the metaphor *does* change and is not restricted to the same identity throughout the OT Scriptures! For example, Jeremiah speaks of the bride as all Israel (Jer 2; 3:1-5) but in the following verses uses the Northern Kingdom as an example to Judah, with the bride being the Northern Kingdom that the Lord puts away (Jer 3:6-7) and Judah being in contradistinction as the bride's sister. Then almost immediately the bride is Judah (Jer 3:8-10), committing harlotry against her husband. Jeremiah (or the Lord through Jeremiah) has no problem making the identity of the bride a fluid thing that changes dependent upon the context. The prophets flow from one to the other often without making distinction.
- Looking at the OT through the eyes of the NT we could also say Yahweh's 'bride' is both the 'saved' and 'lost' within Israel; we know that because the 'bride' is described as one who rebels and rejects the 'husband,' playing the harlot with idols and foreign deities, ultimately totally becoming apostate, something the 'remnant' (the saved) would not do.

How are we to reconcile this fluidity of the identity of the bride? ***This is key: we do not have to reconcile these differences!! The marriage metaphor is not something cast in stone, rather it is a word picture used to make an illustration which is context dependent.*** Some of the prophets such as Isaiah and Ezekiel will use it to make their point, and if the Lord through Jeremiah changes that metaphor a little to make a different illustration, that is acceptable. ***As we consider the marriage metaphor in the NT in our next lesson, we would do well to remember not to over-emphasize something which is merely a metaphor to explain great, eternal truths.***

APPENDIX: Ephesians 2:20 in different versions

above builded on the fundament of apostles and of prophets, upon that highest corner stone, Christ Jesus; (Wycliffe Bible, 2001, originally published 1382)

And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, (1599 Geneva Bible; KJV, King James Version; JUB, Jubilee Bible 2000)

And you are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the head cornerstone, (NMB, New Matthew Bible, 2016)

As God's household, you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (CEB, Common English Bible)

because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (NET, New English Translation, 2017)

being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; (WEB, World English Bible)

being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; (ASV, American Standard Version)

being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being chief corner-[stone], (YLT, Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone, (Darby Bible, 1890)

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (ESV, English Standard Version; LEB, Lexham English Bible)

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself, (Mounce Reverse Interlinear NT)

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (NIV, New International Version)

built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (CSB, Christian Standard Bible; HCSB, Holman Christian Standard Bible)

built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (RSV, Revised Standard Version, 1946, 1971; and RSVCE, Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition)

Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone: (Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition)

built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. (NABRE, New American Bible, Revised Edition, last revised 2010)

built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (NRSVA, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised; NRSVACE, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition; and NRSVCE, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition, 2021; NCB, New Catholic Bible, 2019)

Firmly beneath you in the foundation, God's messengers and prophets, the actual foundation-stone being Jesus Christ himself. (J. B. Phillips New Testament)

God's family is like a house and you are part of the building. The apostles and prophets are like the lower walls of the house and you are the building on this foundation. Jesus Christ is the big stone at the corner. (WE, Worldwide English New Testament)

having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, (NASB, New American Standard Bible, 1995; LSB, Legacy Standard Bible)

having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, (NKJV, New King James Version)

having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the Messiah Jesus himself being the cornerstone. (ISV, International Standard Version)

having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the [chief] Cornerstone, (Amplified Bible)

having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets— Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, (DLNT, Disciples' Literal New Testament)

having been built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone. (RGT, Revised Geneva Translation; MEV, Modern English Version, 2014)

He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. (MSG, The Message)

This family is built on the teachings of the missionaries and the early preachers. Jesus Christ Himself is the cornerstone, which is the most important part of the building. (NLV, New Life Version, 2003)

Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. (NLT, New Living Translation, 2015)

What a foundation you stand on now: the apostles and the prophets; and the cornerstone of the building is Jesus Christ himself! (TLB, Living Bible 1971)

Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, (21st Century KJV)

You are a building that is built on the apostles and prophets. They are the foundation. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone in the building. (NIRV, New International Reader's Version)

You are being built on a solid foundation: the message of the prophets and the voices of God's chosen emissaries with Jesus, the Anointed Himself, the precious cornerstone. (The Voice, 2012)

You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with King Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (NTE, New Testament for Everyone, 2011)

You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Yeshua himself is the cornerstone. (NOG, Names of God Bible, 2011)

You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself the chief Cornerstone. (Amplified Bible, Classic Edition)

You are like a building that was built [...having been built] on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone [cornerstone; or capstone; Is. 28:16; 1 Cor. 3:11] in that building. (Expanded Bible)

You are like a building that was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone in that building, (NCV, New Century Version, 2005)

You are like a building with the apostles and prophets as the foundation and with Christ as the most important stone. (CEV, Contemporary English Version)

You believers are like a building that God owns. That building was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone in that building. (ICB, International Children's Bible)

You believers are like a building that God owns. That building was built on the foundation that the apostles and prophets prepared. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone in that building. (ERV, Easy-to-Read Version)

You have been built on the foundation made up of the emissaries and prophets, with Messiah Yeshua Himself being the cornerstone. (TLV, Tree of Life Version, by the Messianic Jewish Family Bible Society, 2015)

You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone. (EHV, Evangelical Heritage Version)

You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself. (GNT, Good News Translation)