

6 Surprising Ways Scripture Says Jesus Is Your Bridegroom

One of the most profound truths presented in Scripture is that Jesus Christ is a groom. His bride is the church. This is very good news as it suggests that the degree of intimacy, dedication, care and commitment Jesus offers His followers is that of a faithful husband to His beloved wife.

Although some passages display this marital imagery explicitly, like Ephesians 5:31-32 and Revelation 21:2-3, in other verses it often goes unnoticed. Here are six such examples:

- “[The Magi] saw the young Child with Mary, His mother ... they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matt. 2:11).
- “I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:29).
- “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, you may be also” (John 14:3).
- “Concerning that day and hour no one knows ... but My Father only” (Matt. 24:36).
- “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:10).
- “Fill the water pots with water ... Now draw some out, and take it to the master of the feast” (John 2:7-8).

Betrothal During Biblical Times

To see how these verses might relate to marriage, we have to understand how couples got betrothed during biblical times.

As I outline in my book *In Love: The Larger Story of Sex and Marriage*, a young Jewish man would propose betrothal by offering a young woman a cup of wine. He would say, "This cup represents a covenant in blood," and she would accept the offer by taking a sip. They would not drink from that same cup again until their wedding night. At this point, the groom would typically give the bride a betrothal gift, perhaps in the form of a ring.

The two would then depart and not see each other for up to a year. He would return to his father's homestead and build a room, or huppah, that would become the residence for the new couple. The father had to approve the completion of the huppah before the wedding took place. Thus, during this time, whenever he was asked about his exact wedding day, the young man would respond, "Only my father knows."

When the room was ready, the groom and his family and friends would travel to the young woman's house to claim her as his bride. The groom typically would dress in the same manner as a priest, wearing a seamless tunic that was sprinkled with frankincense and myrrh and, if he could afford it, a gold crown upon his head.

Once back at the groom's father's house, the couple would once again sip from that same cup of wine, and they would consummate the marriage. Wedding guests, if dressed appropriately, were invited to take part in a seven-day celebration, culminating in a grand feast. The groom was responsible for providing his guests with food and wine during this time.

Several New Testament passages refer explicitly to this betrothal tradition. For example, the parable of the 10 virgins describes the bridesmaids who watch for the arrival of the groom as he comes to claim his bride (Matt. 25:1-13) and Matthew 22:11-12 mentions the necessity of wedding guests to wear the appropriate clothes.

Reading in a New Light

With this Jewish betrothal tradition in mind, we can perhaps also read the six verses mentioned above in a new light.

- Upon Jesus' birth, wise men bring Him gold, frankincense and myrrh, which are items that would have been worn by a Jewish groom on his wedding day.
- During the Last Supper, Jesus offers his disciples a cup of wine, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25b). He tells them He will not drink again from that same cup until He does so with them in His Father's kingdom (Matt. 26:29).
- Jesus then declares that He is about to depart from them; He is returning to His Father's house, which has "many dwelling places," where He will "prepare a place for you" (John 14:2-3).
- When His disciples ask Jesus when his second coming will take place, he responds, "No one knows ... but my Father only" (Matt. 24:36b). This is the response a groom would give when asked about the timing of his wedding day.
- Also like a new groom, Jesus gives His bride a betrothal gift, although His gift comes in the form of living water. He approaches a woman at Jacob's well—which, in ancient Israel, was a common setting for finding a bride as Jacob himself did with Rachel—and talks to her about husbands. He then offers this Samaritan woman "living water" as "the gift of God," indicating that God wants to betroth not only Jews but also Gentiles (John 4:6-26).
- At the wedding in Cana, when Jesus tells a servant to take water He'd turned into wine to the master of the feast, He exercises the role of a groom, who was responsible for providing the guests wine (John 2:1-11).

Each of these verses can bear multiple layers of meaning. Noting their connection with the Jewish betrothal tradition helps illumine the intimate, covenantal relationship Jesus has

formed with His people. By understanding this ancient process of entering marriage, we can see with fresh eyes the kind of commitment and care that Christ offers to us. In short, the larger story of Scripture can be read as a love story with marital form.

“Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9b). {eoa}

Dr. Ryan Messmore *is the founding executive director of the Millis Institute, a liberal arts program housed within Christian Heritage College in Brisbane, Australia. Originally from the U.S., Messmore received a Bachelor of Arts from Duke University, master's degrees from Duke Divinity School and Cambridge University and a doctorate in political theology from Oxford University. He has also served as a research fellow at The Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC. His latest book is entitled In Love: The Larger Story of Sex and Marriage. Visit .*