

The Ancient Hebrew Marriage Covenant Is Symbolic of the Everlasting Covenant

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If you have already begun or completed your study of the doctrine of Christ in [The Doctrine of Christ Study Guide](#), you will appreciate and understand the amazing parallels between the Everlasting Covenant and the ancient Hebrew marriage customs. I invite you to ponder and understand the beauty of this Covenant that was given “even that which was from the beginning” (Moses 5:1-15; D&C 22:1; 49:8-14; 101:38-39; 66:2:1:10-24; 76:101: 133:57: 45:1-14). When we understand the parallels between the Covenant and the Jewish marriage, the scriptures come alive with beautiful imagery.

When we see the scriptures through the lens of the marriage covenant something extraordinary begins to happen. Suddenly, we understand that the Covenant describes an intimate, loving and fruitful relationship. This is the covenantal relationship that is offered to each of us (the Bride) by the Bridegroom (the Lord), who invites us to take His name upon us and to share eternal life.

The following article is not mine. It is derived from a series of articles written by Larry Barkdull in 2012 as a contributor to LDS Magazine (then Meridian Magazine). In it, Brother Barkdull does a magnificent job of teaching the Hebrew marriage custom. I am sharing this because it is so rich in symbolism. So rich that it is characteristic of an available reality to any and all—for God is no respecter of persons:

“...he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God.”

I invite you to personally ponder both the symbolism and the reality encompassed in this teaching of the Hebrew marriage custom. Pay close attention to the detailed symbols, timeframes, purposes, principles, and people involved in this special custom.

The Reality of the Marriage Covenant Symbolism (Part 1)

How the Beautiful Hebrew Marriage is Symbolic of Our Covenant

In this article, we will discuss how the bride and bridegroom prepare for each other during the betrothal period, which can last up to one year.

The New and Everlasting Covenant Compared to Jewish Marriage

Throughout the scriptures, the marriage metaphor is used to describe our covenantal relationship with the Lord. He is the Bridegroom¹ and the Church is the bride.² By extension, we, individually, are his bride: “For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”³

We are to prepare ourselves for the time the Bridegroom comes to receive us:

“Wherefore, be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom—For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that I come quickly.”⁴

We are to become prepared and beautiful for him: “adorned as a bride.”⁵

That the Lord chose marriage to describe the New and Everlasting Covenant should summon our solemn contemplation. Marriage is the summit of gospel covenants, the relationship that is the most intimate, most enduring and the most loving of unions.

Marriage is the relationship in which the power of God to create is manifest; children spring from this union; multiplication, replenishment and fruitfulness become possible. The metaphor of marriage suggests the abandonment of selfish interests, profound loyalty and complete sacrifice.

Marriage requires the entire consecration of one’s time, talents and resources to his or her companion, the totality of all that one is and all that one has. Marriage is a

¹ See Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34; John 3:29

² See Revelation 21:2, 9-10; 22:17

³ Isaiah 62:5

⁴ D&C 33:17; see also D&C 88:92; 133:10, 19

⁵ D&C 109:74

covenantal lifestyle that results in oneness, a relationship wherein the partners are no longer “twain, but one flesh,” joined together by God, and intended to endure beyond man’s attempts to put asunder.⁶

If marriage is to be successful, it requires losing one’s life in selfless service to and the loving of one’s spouse; then, in return, marriage leads to finding one’s life in a more exalted purpose.⁷

Marriage urges the best of behavior in the partners: “and they shall mention the loving kindness of their Lord, and all that he has bestowed upon them according to his goodness, and according to his loving kindness, forever and ever.”⁸

Marriage is yoking together to ease one another’s burdens,⁹ and the mutual sharing of each other’s challenges: “In all their afflictions he was afflicted...and in his love, and in his pity, he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them all the days.”¹⁰ By purpose and by design marriage is eternal,¹¹ the highest order of celestial living,¹² the ultimate source of happiness,¹³ and significantly the highest order of the Priesthood.¹⁴

Conversely, disloyalty to the marriage covenant is a grievous sin, “most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost.”¹⁵ Clearly, the Lord takes seriously the New and Everlasting Covenant and expects us to do the same.

In the foreword of Donna B. Nielsen’s excellent work, *The Beloved Bridegroom*, Dr. Robert J. Norman wrote, “The wedding ceremony was a metaphor often used by Christ and the Old Testament authors. A study of the Jewish marriage customs yields a wealth of spiritual understanding and deeper insight into the teachings of Jesus and the Biblical prophets.”¹⁶ Donna Nielsen explained, “A knowledge of Biblical marriage imagery can greatly enrich our understanding of how God relates to us through covenants.

Biblical covenant marriage imagery encompasses principles as diverse as Sabbath observance, the Atonement, temple worship, and missionary work. It literally begins with Adam and ends with Zion.”¹⁷ Let us, therefore, examine the New and Everlasting

⁶ Matthew 19:6

⁷ See Matthew 10:39

⁸ D&C 133:52

⁹ Matthew 11:30

¹⁰ D&C 133:53

¹¹ D&C 88:94-95, emphasis added

¹² See D&C 131:2

¹³ See David O. McKay, *Man May Know for Himself: Teachings of President David O. McKay*, compiled by Clare Middlemiss, p.235

¹⁴ See Bruce R. McConkie, “Patriarchal Order,” *Mormon Doctrine*, p.559

¹⁵ Alma 39:5

¹⁶ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p. iii

¹⁷ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p. 2

Covenant by contrasting it with the Jewish marriage tradition. In advance, we thank Donna B. Nielsen for her generous support in providing access to her research.

Born to Marry

Elder John A. Widstoe stated that marriage is “the most important event between birth and death,”¹⁸ and certainly the Jewish people agreed. We cannot overstate the importance of marriage in Jewish society. Marriage was clearly linked to the covenant God made with Israel; in fact, we might say that children were born with the purpose of marrying.

Donna Nielsen stated that an infant male “was often affectionately called the little bridegroom.’ This reflected one of three great hopes that parents had for their children, namely that their children would: study Torah (study the scriptures), be under the wedding canopy (marry in the covenant), and do good deeds (live righteous lives).”¹⁹

Immediately, we see the connection between marriage and the New and Everlasting Covenant. From the moment of birth, our life’s purpose should be to learn about and prepare for the Bridegroom, enter into a Covenant with the Bridegroom, and do the works of the Bridegroom. As much as Jewish children were born to marry, we are born to enter into the Covenant.

Because marriage was the goal of life, husbands and wives married at an early age. No later than eighteen was the norm, and most often they married years before that. A boy became a Son of the Law by age thirteen, and technically one month later he was considered of marriageable age. Girls were eligible at twelve years and one month.²⁰

In today’s culture, we might have difficulty imagining Joseph and Mary, two teenagers, taking on the heavy responsibility of marriage and caring for the Savior of the world. Also, we might struggle with the concept that Jesus could have been married for 12-15 years and had children before he began his ministry at age thirty. But according to Jewish custom, these facts probably hold true. Marriage was the focal point of Jewish life, and we might imagine that Joseph and Mary, and later Jesus, followed the prevailing tradition by marrying in their teens.

¹⁸ John A. Widstoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, p.297

¹⁹ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p. 4

²⁰ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p. 2

The Parents' Responsibility and the Bride's Choice

Marriages were thought to be too important to be left to chance. Fathers and mothers made these decisions for their children. Who else loved the child more? Who else had the child's best interests in mind? Who else wanted the child's happiness more than the parents?

Today, we might cringe at this ancient custom, but Jewish children expected their parents to advocate for their happiness. Despite the fact that the parents were expected to prayerfully deliberate then introduce their children to their intended spouse, the children owned the ultimate choice. Their agency was never violated.

Today, of course, parents do not formally choose their child's mate, but the similarity to the ancient custom is clear: Parents have the responsibility to introduce their children to Christ. Fathers, by virtue of their holding the priesthood, have the responsibility to take their children into the waters of baptism and help them to enter into the New and Everlasting Covenant with Jesus. Now the children are given over or married to Christ by Covenant, and taking upon them his name, they begin a relationship with him that will end up in the mansions of his Father.²¹

Love for each other was expected to be cultivated after the marriage, not necessarily before.²² We note that after Isaac married Rebekah he grew in his love for her.²³ This reversal of order might seem strange to us, but the implication is intriguing: Covenant people grow together in love as they remain true to each other. When we enter into the New and Everlasting Covenant, we do so without a full appreciation for or love of the Lord.

These things take time. But as we live together in the Covenant and as we have experience with the Lord, we grow to love him more and more. "The Semitic root word for love' is haw or hav. It means to warm' or to kindle,' to set on fire.'"²⁴ Over time, our love for the Bridegroom grows from an ember to a blazing fire until love becomes as perfect as the God of love,²⁵ who "dwells in everlasting burnings."²⁶

²¹ See Enos 1:27; Ether 12:32-37; D&C 59:2; 98:18

²² See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.13

²³ See Genesis 24:67

²⁴ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.13

²⁵ See 1 John 4:8

²⁶ Isaiah 33:14-15

Requirements to Legalize the Covenant

The marriage covenant “had serious implications. There were three parts that were vital to a completed marriage contract in Biblical times. These were money, writ, and sexual relations. All three of these conditions had to be met for a marriage to be recognized as legal.”

The groom was expected to pay a bride price for his beloved. Then he was to offer her a marriage contract, a writ or ketuba, whereby he consecrated himself to his bride. Finally, the marriage had to be consummated; that is, he must know his wife through sexual relations. This last condition fulfilled the requirement that blood be shed to complete the covenant.²⁷

Thus, in both marriage and in the New and Everlasting Covenant, we (the bride) are:

1. “Bought with a price.”²⁸
2. United by covenant according to the Law of Consecration, which is “the law of the celestial kingdom.”²⁹
3. Known, or “made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.”³⁰

When we consider these conditions, we begin to understand the price that Jesus was willing to pay to draw us to him, redeem us and secure our eternal affections. Marvin Wilson wrote:

“...the joining of a man and a woman is a reenactment or replica of God’s eternal covenant relation to his chosen. To understand Biblical marriage is to understand the Biblical concept of covenant. In Hebrew to make a covenant’ is literally to cut a covenant’....The shedding of blood dramatically ratified and sealed the covenant (Genesis 15:9-18; Jeremiah 34:18-20). If one attempted to break the covenant, the blood served as a powerful visual lesson that one’s own blood would be shed. In brief, it was a solemn oath to be kept on pain of death. It was thus inviolable and irrevocable.”³¹

²⁷ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p. 18

²⁸ See 1 Corinthians 6:20

²⁹ D&C 105:4

³⁰ D&C 76:69

³¹ Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, p.205. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989

Initiating the Marriage Proposal

The bridegroom initiated the process of offering the covenant of marriage to the bride. When we consider this action in light of the New and Everlasting Covenant, we see something tender and loving about the character of the Savior. We are immediately impressed by the fact that he, not us, invites us into the New and Everlasting Covenant. Clearly, “we love Him because he loved us first.”³²

When we are baptized, we often miss the fact that Jesus was the one who reached out to us and bade us enter into an eternal covenantal relationship with him. We sometimes mistakenly think that we were the ones who instigated the process, but according to the Jewish marriage tradition, that is not true.

In advance of every baptism is Jesus’ implied invitation. This fact speaks to his adoring love for us. He is the Bridegroom and we are his potential bride. He is the one who begins the covenant-making process. He does this through the Holy Ghost and through his authorized representatives: fathers, Home Teachers, bishops or missionaries.

The occasion of the marriage proposal often happened at the harvest season, suggesting a bounteous relationship and a fruitful future.³³ Likewise, when we join with the Lord in the Covenant, we glorify both him and his Father and we “bear much fruit” together.³⁴ The proposal procedure began by the bridegroom’s going to the house of the bride. He was accompanied by his father or a close friend(s). We immediately envision a small entourage, a companionship, two or more witnesses like missionary companions, on an important mission to convey an invitation of infinite worth to the intended bride.

In her presence, the bridegroom would make the covenantal offer while his friend(s) would support him and bear witness of the event. This was the beginning of holiness, for truly, upon her acceptance of the marriage covenant, the bride would effectively ascribe holiness unto the Lord,³⁵ her new husband.

Donna Nielsen wrote: “The collective term for all that broadly comprises a Jewish marriage is Kiddushin, which literally means sanctities.’ This concept includes the ideas of being devoted irrevocably, being sanctified and set apart, and being consecrated.”³⁶ Clearly, the Jewish marriage is the perfect metaphor for the New and Everlasting Covenant.

³² 1 John 4:19

³³ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.14

³⁴ See John 15:8

³⁵ See Exodus 39:30

³⁶ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.18

Entering into the Covenant

The Bridegroom's proposal to us includes sacred rituals that consecrate him to us (the bride), and our accepting his proposal consecrates us to him. We hear overtures of the Law of Consecration in this. Other symbolisms of the New and Everlasting Covenant become evident as the betrothal ceremony unfolds. In the Jewish marriage, the groom offered the bride's father a bride price-she was "bought with a price."³⁷ Then the bridegroom presented his potential bride a written covenant of marriage that he had prepared.

Then he offered her a "gift of value," which represented a "token" of his promise and an "emblem" of his love. With the token he recited a pledge to irrevocably bind and consecrate himself to her forever.

Then, in the presence of two witnesses, he placed before his beloved a cup of wine. If she drank of the cup, the contract of marriage was ratified or sealed, and the betrothal period began. Moreover, by drinking of the cup, she indicated her willingness to take upon herself her husband's name. At that point, the couple, along with their guests, shared a covenantal meal.

Thus, by these rituals that were rich in imagery, the bridegroom and bride entered into the eternal covenant of marriage. When the ceremony was complete, the only question that remained was would the rituals that represented the marriage covenant translate into life-long acts of devotion and consecration? That is, would the couple's covenant become royal by their subsequent loyalty, patience, sacrifice and love? Or would the Covenant remain a set of symbols and a piece of paper upon which promises had been made but never enacted?

Next Time (Part 2): In the next segment of this three-part series, we will examine the beautiful rites that were associated with the Jewish custom of betrothal that initiated the marriage and preceded the wedding—all of which point to the New and Everlasting Covenant.

The Reality of the Marriage Covenant Symbolism (Part 2)—Waiting and Preparing for the Bridegroom

In this segment [Part 2], we will examine the events that occur during the waiting period-the time between the betrothal and the wedding. We will examine the calling,

³⁷ See 1 Corinthians 6:20

symbolic clothing, the responsibility of the friend of the bridegroom, and the importance of the bridegroom and the bride's preparing for each other.

The Father's Announcement

Immediately after the betrothal ceremony, the bridegroom's father made the first of two announcements of the marriage of his son. This announcement, or calling, is proffered to close friends, family, and others who were invited to the wedding.³⁸ The scriptures inform us that "many are called"³⁹ to the wedding because of their relationship with the father and the son.

By covenant, if the invited people accepted the father's invitation, they were dutybound to honor their commitment; that is, they must agree to come to the wedding when it was eventually announced, regardless of the inconvenience of the hour. Donna Nielsen explained, "The initial acceptance obliged the guest to respond to the summons at the hour of the banquet.' Only those who accepted the first invitation would receive the final invitation when the feast was ready."⁴⁰

The Bride's Veil

Maidens, who were not yet spoken for, could be seen in public with unveiled faces. But once they had entered the betrothal or engagement period-that is, when they had entered the Covenant-they veiled their faces in public. This custom, of course, is reminiscent of temple worship. Once the young woman had accepted her beloved proposal of marriage, she was considered set apart, consecrated and holy. Therefore, she wore the veil as an indication that she belonged only to her husband and that no one else had the right to appreciate her beauty except him.

As a symbol of consecration, the bride would forevermore "wear a veil over her hair whenever she was in public. This would indicate her status as a betrothed woman and signal that she was not available to anyone else. She would wear a veil over her hair for the remainder of her life as a symbol of her devotion and faithfulness to her husband.

Properly understood, her veil hid only that which was too precious for the common, careless gaze." This was not a sign of inferiority, but rather of glory. Her beauty was to

³⁸ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.40

³⁹ See D&C 121:40; Matthew 22:14

⁴⁰ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.41

be “enjoyed exclusively by her groom. In fact, only those things which were treasured and glorious were veiled.”⁴¹

Sometimes in scripture Christ becomes the Bride, who beckons us to receive him. As the Bride, he also symbolically becomes the “veil,”⁴² as indicated by the author of Hebrews. This term, veil, seems to signify that we go through him to return to the Father. In this light, other scriptures connecting Christ and the veil begin to take on added meaning. For example, “Sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you will see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will.”⁴³

Only the bridegroom was allowed to look upon the bride’s beauty that remained hidden behind the veil. Just so, it is our unique honor to part the veil and gaze upon the glory of the Lord: “And again, verily I say unto you that it is your privilege, and a promise I give unto you that have been ordained unto this ministry, that inasmuch as you strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and humble yourselves before me, for ye are not sufficiently humble, the veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am.”⁴⁴

Clearly, that which is most holy is hidden behind the veil. We recall that Moses veiled his face after he returned from speaking with the Lord. His face was filled with so much glory that the people could not endure his presence.⁴⁵ That same idea of veiling that which is most holy was represented in the tabernacle and later in the temple of Solomon: a first veil concealed the inside of the temple and a second veil concealed the Holy of Holies.⁴⁶

As we have mentioned, the bride became a temple to her husband; therefore, in symbolism, she wore the veil to indicate that by covenant her beauty and her loyalties belonged exclusively to her husband. Likewise by covenant, we “veil ourselves” from the things of the world and allow no unhallowed hand or glance to remove us from the Bridegroom to whom we give exclusively the beauty of the temple of our souls.

By covenant, we “come unto Christ (the Bridegroom)...and deny [ourselves] of all ungodliness,” and we love him with all our “might, mind and strength.”⁴⁷ Symbolically, we hold sacred those things about ourselves that only the Bridegroom might cherish.

⁴¹ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.16, 31

⁴² See Hebrews 10:20

⁴³ D&C 88:68, emphasis added

⁴⁴ D&C 67:10, emphasis added

⁴⁵ See Exodus 34:29-35

⁴⁶ See Hebrews 9:1-7

⁴⁷ Moroni 10:32

“Like a temple,” wrote Donna Nielsen, “the woman was now set apart’ for holiness-the greatest holiness of all.”⁴⁸

The Friend of the Bridegroom

After the bridegroom had paid the bride price, offered his beloved the marriage covenant, given her a token or emblem, consecrated himself to her and pledged his enduring devotion, then after the bride had indicated her agreement to enter into the marriage covenant by drinking the cup of wine in the presence of witnesses from a cup, and finally, after the two had shared a covenantal meal together, the bridegroom left to prepare a place for her in his father’s house. The bridegroom and the bride would not see each other again for about a year. Then on an unspecified night, he would come suddenly for her and whisk her away.

Until then, the friend of the bridegroom, who had been a witness of the couple’s covenant, would act “as liaison between the bride-to-be and the groom during the betrothal period...[he would become] the guarantor of the bride’s virgin chastity until the consummation took place...[later he acted as the] governor at the marriage feast, and finally, his last obligation was announcing to the assembled guests that the full marriage was successfully completed.”⁴⁹

In this tradition, we see the obvious role of the Holy Ghost, who witnesses the initial covenant-making process.

Thereafter, as we wait and prepare for the Lord, the Holy Ghost conveys messages between the Bridegroom and us (the bride). Additionally, he prepares us for the Bridegroom, encourages us to remain faithful, and ultimately, when we are finally brought to the wedding, the Holy Ghost justifies us to the Bridegroom and bears testimony of our worthiness. Thus, he oversees the entire proceedings from start to completion, and in the end he declares the covenantal process is finished. Then the Bridegroom’s friend hands us over to the Bridegroom and the friend’s job is completed.

Preparing for Each Other

During the preparation period, which might approach one year, the bridegroom and the bride busied themselves with the primary thing on their minds: their coming wedding. As we have mentioned, the young woman was now considered a bride, so she wore a veil over her hair in public as a token of her new status.

⁴⁸ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.31

⁴⁹ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.19

Whereas she had belonged to her mother and father, she now belonged to her husband; therefore, she set aside all former relationships in favor of the relationship with her husband, which would define her forevermore: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”⁵⁰

For the bride to be separated from her beloved for a year was an exercise in longsuffering and patience. As she prepared for her wedding, she wondered when her bridegroom would come for her. Her not knowing the day or hour is a theme of the Second Coming that is widely rehearsed in scripture. For example, “...the hour and the day no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor shall they know until he comes.”

⁵¹ Because the bride did not know the time, she had to live her life in constant anticipation and readiness.

Her faithfulness is reminiscent of the five virgins whose lamps were trimmed and filled with oil when the bridegroom came.⁵² Her example also hearkens to the chosen few, those handful of faithful saints among the many who were called to the marriage of the king’s son. Only those people were actually allowed to attend the wedding.⁵³

The apostle Paul applied the imagery to a woman who was now about to give birth: “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”⁵⁴

Commenting, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Paul’s illustration here is perfect. The Second Coming is compared to a woman about to give birth to a child. She does not know the hour or the minute of the child’s arrival, but she does know the approximate time. There are signs which precede and presage the promised arrival. And so it is with our Lord’s coming. He shall come as a thief in the night, unexpectedly and without warning, to the world, to those who are in spiritual darkness, to those who are not enlightened by the power of the Spirit. But his coming shall not overtake the saints as a thief, for they know and understand the signs of the times.”⁵⁵

On difficult days, the bride might have even despaired, wondering if her bridegroom would ever come. Likewise, we might become discouraged when the Lord delays his

⁵⁰ Genesis 2:24

⁵¹ D&C 49:7

⁵² See Matthew 25:1-13; D&C 45:56-59

⁵³ See Matthew 22:1-14

⁵⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4

⁵⁵ Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, vol.3, p.54

coming to our aid. Nevertheless, we are counseled to watch, pray and not faint while waiting.⁵⁶ We are to “seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls, and ye shall have eternal life.”⁵⁷

In every difficulty, the Lord will eventually come for us. Even if the time is protracted, he will come. The Lord told Isaiah, “Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come...he will come and save you.”⁵⁸ We are assured that “he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all.”⁵⁹ “Ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.”⁶⁰ Most certainly, the Bridegroom will come; it is not a matter of if but when.

To comfort and help the bride endure his absence, the bridegroom left in her possession reminders of his promise to return—“I go away and come again unto you”⁶¹—which symbolize his enduring love for her. These reminders, which she holds close to her heart, are the bride price, the marriage contract, and the token.

When he left her, he knew her wait would be difficult. His pledge was reminiscent of his words to us: “Let not your hearts be troubled; for in my Father’s house are many mansions, and I have prepared a place for you; and where my Father and I am, there ye shall be also.”⁶² And at another time, “I go to prepare a place for you.”⁶³

It is important here to realize that during the separation period the bridegroom was preparing for his bride; she was not preparing alone. Additionally, although he would be physically absent, he had arranged to provide for her safety and her comfort. He assigned his trusted “friend” or “comforter” to watch over her until he returned. We recall that when Jesus announced his imminent departure, he said to the apostles, “I will not leave you comfortless.”⁶⁴ As we have mentioned, the Lord’s “friend” is the Holy Ghost.

During the protracted betrothal period, the bridegroom spent his time building his beloved a bridal chamber within the confines of his father’s house or estate. After the wedding, the chamber would become their home. Donna Nielsen explained:

The new home was built under the direct personal supervision of the groom’s father. In that culture, a son is considered to be a representative of his father, and everything that

⁵⁶ See Matthew 26:41; Luke 1:18

⁵⁷ D&C 101:38

⁵⁸ Isaiah 35:4

⁵⁹ Mosiah 27:30

⁶⁰ Mosiah 24:14

⁶¹ John 14:28

⁶² D&C 98:18

⁶³ John 14:2

⁶⁴ John 14:18

the son does reflects either favorably or unfavorably on the father... With such close identification between a father and his son, the father wanted everything regarding the bride's new home to be as beautiful and perfect as it could be... The father of the groom was the sole judge of when the preparations were complete...When the father determined everything was ready, he gave permission for the son to claim his bride. No one knew when that permission was forthcoming... only the father knew.⁶⁵

The bride would not see her bridegroom until the night he came for her, which time was hidden from her view. Thus, the bride spent the betrothal period preparing for the time that her bridegroom, who was also preparing, would finally receive his father's commission, suddenly appear with little warning then whisk her away to the "mansion" that he had prepared for her.

The Serious Nature of Preparing

The subjects of preparing for the Bridegroom's return and receiving an inheritance in his Father's kingdom occupy chapter 25 of Matthew.

This chapter describes who and what we are preparing for, how we must prepare, and how the principle of stewardship assists us to prepare. Here the Lord gives three parables-The Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Kent P. Jackson wrote:

These allegories seem to form a progression, teaching different aspects of readiness that Jesus encouraged of His listeners and readers. The Joseph Smith translation of verse 1 places the story of the ten virgins clearly in the context of the Second Coming.... (Matthew 25:1-13) Preparation is a necessary precaution because "ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh." This parable...ends with the admonition, "Watch!"

In the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the master, traveling to "a far country," leaves different quantities of his goods in the hands of three servants, to each "according to his several ability." Two of the servants doubled their master's resources that had been entrusted to them. The third, however, hid his allotment for safekeeping. To the two who magnified their investment, the master said upon his return, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." The final servant returned the master's talent to him, yet he did not

⁶⁵ Donna B.Nielsen, Beloved Bridegroom, p.34-35

receive his lord's praise but rather his condemnation: "Thou wicked and slothful servant." This is not a parable about the uncertain timing of Christ's return but about what we are to do with the gifts He has entrusted to us while we were waiting. As Joseph Smith taught, we should "improve upon all things committed to [our] charge." This parable...ends with the unprofitable servant's intense sorrow, "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The final parable, that of the Sheep and the Goats (see Matthew 25:31-46), again addresses what people do with the blessings entrusted to them-but in a different way. The setting...is a judgment scene: "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory...and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." Those placed on his right hand will receive an inheritance in His kingdom, whereas those on his left hand will be sent off to "everlasting fire." Jesus explained in some detail the criteria for the King's just judgment. Those worthy of an inheritance of glory will be those who fed Him when he was hungry, gave Him drink when he was thirsty, took Him in when He was a stranger, clothed Him when He was naked, visited Him when He was sick, and came to Him when He was in prison. Those who will be condemned will be the ones who had the same opportunities but did none of those worthy things.⁶⁶

The burden of stewardship is intrinsically linked to our preparation for the Lord's Second Coming. In this context, we are both the bride and the steward. First, as the bride, we must anticipate the Bridegroom's arrival in an attitude of constant readiness, as would a betrothed bride prepare and watch as she waited for the promised return of her beloved. She would "always remember him."⁶⁷ Just so, during our wait, we are to remain absolutely loyal to the Bridegroom. We are not to divide our affections with another. Our entire attention is to prepare for the coming wedding when we will be more surely joined with the Bridegroom and live with him forevermore.

The one who helps us to prepare and who comforts us so that we can endure the wait is the Bridegroom's "friend," the Holy Ghost. We are also comforted by holding in our possession the price that the Bridegroom paid for us, the Covenant he made with us, and the token (his wounds) that he gave to us.

In our dual roles of bride and steward, we receive from the Lord both gifts and stewardships to help us endure the wait and prepare: 1) as the "bride," we receive from the Lord gifts to help us remember him and his promise to return; 2) as the "steward,"

⁶⁶ Kent P. Jackson, "The Olivet Discourse," *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ: From the Transfiguration through the Triumphant Entry*, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, eds, p.342-43

⁶⁷ D&C 20:77

we receive from the Lord stewardships as sacred trusts to manage his property and resources until he returns.

As both the bride and the steward, we are to anticipate the Lord's return and actively prepare for it. As the steward, we are to magnify our stewardships during the wait. We do so by using the resources and surpluses of the stewardship to bless the Lord's children. As the steward and the bride, we have covenanted to take upon us his name, and therefore we belong to him. As his bride, his children become our children, and we share in his efforts to take care of them.

Both the loyal bride and the faithful steward are "accounted worthy to inherit the mansions prepared for him of my Father."⁶⁸ But, as both the bride and the steward, if we do not prepare for the Bridegroom, if we do not remain loyal to him, if we do not listen to his friend, if we are ashamed of the gifts he has given us or hide or misuse our stewardships or do not use them as he instructed (to bless the lives of others)-if we do any of these things, he will say to us when he comes that he does not know us: "Depart from me."

Then sadly we will have forfeited the marriage. In that miserable state, we will be cast away to where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." We will find ourselves on the Lord's left hand, the place that is called "cursed," and described as "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."⁶⁹

Clearly, the Bridegroom expects his bride to hold his name in high regard, always remember him, and remain loyal to their marriage covenant. To the extent that the bride remains faithful, she will have the Bridegroom's friend to attend, comfort, instruct and prepare her for the Bridegroom's coming and the wedding.

The Bride's Final Preparations

As we have mentioned, the bride did not know the exact day and hour of the bridegroom's coming, but her relationship with the bridegroom's friend would have provided her signs of the bridegroom's coming. As the approximate time approached, she intensified her preparations. She kept herself adorned.

She practiced applying wedding make-up, and she paid special attention to her fingernails, hair, and skin so that she would appear as attractive as possible for her new

⁶⁸ D&C 72:3-4

⁶⁹ See Matthew 25:12, 30, 41

husband. Also from the time of the bridegroom's departure, she had kept a lamp burning in her window; she would keep it burning bright until he came for her.⁷⁰

As the time of the wedding drew closer, the young girl anxiously awaited her groom's arrival. By custom, it would be sudden, with an element of surprise, and often late at night. She invited her sisters, cousins, and friends to join her vigil and be supportive at this time of joyous anticipation.... Night after night, they would strain to hear the shouts of the bridegroom and his friends.⁷¹

This custom is reminiscent, of course, of Jesus' parable of the ten virgins.

We recall that the vigil had gone on a long time, and the bridegroom had "tarried." Then late in the night, "at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."⁷² Intrinsic in the New and Everlasting Covenant is the stipulation that we, the bride, "watch." That is, we must live in a state of happy anticipation and preparation, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

⁷³

In the last days before her wedding, the bride would submit to a ritual washing and anointing, because she was about to become royalty. At her wedding, she become a queen and presented to a king.⁷⁴ In a special pool called a mikvah, the bride immersed herself completely in "living waters."

Her life and her body were to be the gift of a living sacrifice to her husband, and to be pure without spot or blemish was a condition required of sacrifices (Ephesians 5:27; Romans 12:1).... The Jewish bride did not immerse herself because of uncleanness, but in preparation for holiness, to fulfill God's commandment to be fruitful and multiply.... After her immersion in the mikvah, the bride's friends would help her anoint herself as part of the preparation for marriage."⁷⁵ This ceremonial immersion in living water symbolized, among other things, "a preparation for holiness." Additionally, "it also represented a separation from an old life to a new life—from life as a single woman to life as a married woman."⁷⁶

As part of the New and Everlasting Covenant, we are also to go into a holy place (the temple) "to prepare...for the ordinances and endowments, washings and anointing."⁷⁷

⁷⁰ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.36, 38

⁷¹ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.39

⁷² Matthew 25:5-6

⁷³ Matthew 25:13

⁷⁴ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.38

⁷⁵ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.37-38

⁷⁶ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.125

⁷⁷ Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p.308

The visual image of washing hearkens to the process of purification, which is to eliminate impurities, contaminants and pollutants.⁷⁸ We are washed or purified in preparation to be anointed and thus sanctified. The idea of anointing⁷⁹ speaks to the process of changing the purpose of something or someone.⁸⁰

By ceremonially washing and anointing her body, the bride avowed that she was clean and ready for her life's purpose to change; she was now ready to be endowed with the fulness of the marriage covenant and thus become a queen in Israel. By the rituals of washing (purification) and anointing (sanctification), the bride demonstrated her willingness to become totally consecrated to her husband and yield to the transformation of her life's purpose. Now, all was in order so that she could join with her husband, who would be her king.⁸¹

Of interest, the bridegroom, although not required, usually submitted to washing in the mikvah to purify himself in preparation for the wedding. This voluntary washing reminds us the Savior's submitting to baptism, although he was sinless. His purpose was to enter the New and Everlasting Covenant by fulfilling all righteousness.⁸²

Later, at the end of his life, he also submitted to voluntarily sanctify himself so that he might better help others to become sanctified so that they could become one with him: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.... That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."⁸³

Thus we see Jesus submitting to the processes of purification and sanctification to prepare himself to become one with those whom he loved. It is said that Jesus Christ is our Mikvah-Israel, which means "hope of Israel."⁸⁴

In the last article in this series (Part 3), we will examine the events leading up to the actual wedding: the father's giving his son permission to go and claim his bride; the father's issuing his second and final call to the wedding; the wedding processional; the bridegroom's coming as a thief in the night, whisking away his beloved, and conveying her as a queen to the place he has prepared for her. Then the wedding takes place; the bridegroom and his bride are finally together, never again to be parted.

⁷⁸ See Isaiah 4:4; Psalm 51:2

⁷⁹ See Leviticus 8:10-12

⁸⁰ See D&C 20:77

⁸¹ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.44

⁸² See Matthew 3:15

⁸³ John 17:19, 21

⁸⁴ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p. 125, quoting a rabbi from the first century

The Reality of the Marriage Covenant Symbolism (Part 3)—As a Thief in the Night—The Bridegroom Cometh

In this segment [Part 3], we will examine the events that led up to the actual wedding. These events began with the father's giving his son permission to go and claim his bride. At that point, the father issued his second and final call to the wedding. Then the wedding processional began. The bridegroom came as a thief in the night and whisked away his beloved bride and conveyed her as a queen to the place that he had prepared for her. Then the wedding took place; the bridegroom and his bride were finally together, never again to be parted.

Invitation to the Wedding

When the bridegroom completed the “little mansion or bridal chamber”⁸⁵ for his bride, and when the groom's father finally declared that the construction and preparations met with his approval, the father finally gave his son permission to go and claim his bride. Immediately, the bridegroom began to organize a wedding procession by calling and gathering his close associates. In this we remember the reference to the Lord's coming with “all the holy angels with him.”⁸⁶

While the bridegroom was thus engaged, the father sent his servants to make the second announcement or in other words “for the last time.”⁸⁷ We recall that the first announcement or calling happened at the time of betrothal. At that time, the invited guests covenanted to come to the wedding whenever the father announced that the wedding, feast and festivities are about to commence.⁸⁸

We must keep in mind that the chosen ones had promised that they would remain in readiness and attend the marriage of the son. To reject the invitation now would be nothing short of a monumental insult and a serious offense. Jesus spoke about the second announcement and the seriousness of following through on our initial covenant:

A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

⁸⁵ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.33

⁸⁶ Matthew 25:31

⁸⁷ See Jacob 5:62-64; D&C 24:19; 39:17; 43:28; 88:84; 95:4; 112:30

⁸⁸ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.40

And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.

And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I can not come.

So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.⁸⁹

Notice that the chosen guests who did not attend the wedding used as excuses property, possessions and family concerns. It is sad but true that many of the chosen ones will step aside from their covenant: “Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men.”⁹⁰

For an invited guest to place anything above his commitment to attend the wedding or for an invited guest to be unprepared, as were five of the ten virgins, are insults that will summon the Father’s indignation. To not respond to the Bridegroom’s advent will most certainly result in such individuals’ being shut out from the wedding and the Bridegroom’s denying knowing them.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Luke 14:16-24

⁹⁰ D&C 121:34-35

⁹¹ See Matthew 25:1-13

The Wedding Processional

The bridegroom led a procession to the bride's home to claim her. He was decked out in regal attire, often wearing a crown, dressed in garments "scented with frankincense and myrrh," and appearing in every way like a king. This joyous occasion was one of "singing, dancing and merriment." Now the bridegroom's long-awaited purpose and the object of his sacrifice were about to be rewarded.⁹² The clamorous late-night procession wound through the streets with their torches beaming and their trumpets blaring, awakening everyone along the way.

The scriptures inform us that "the Son of Man shall come, and he shall send his angels before him with the great sound of a trumpet." Those in the procession beckoned others to join them: "...and they shall gather together the remainder of his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."⁹³

When the procession neared the bride's home, "a messenger was sent ahead to give the shout, The bridegroom cometh!" At that point, the bride had about half an hour "to make final preparations" before the shout was given again and the bridegroom claimed her.⁹⁴ "And he [the angelic messenger] shall sound his trump both long and loud, and all nations shall hear it. And there shall be silence in heaven for the space of half an hour; and immediately after shall the curtain of heaven be unfolded, as a scroll is unfolded after it is rolled up, and the face of the Lord shall be unveiled."⁹⁵

Claiming the Bride

The Jewish marriage is filled with the imagery of the New and Everlasting Covenant. When we entered into the Covenant with the Bridegroom through baptism, we recognized the fact that he had paid a price for us. In the covenantal agreement, he promised to provide for us, redeem us, and to live with us in a loving relationship. Then he presented us with tokens (his wounds) representing his love and devotion. He did all of this in the presence of witnesses.

He vowed to prepare a place for us in the mansions of his father, and he promised to one day return for us: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."⁹⁶ When at last he would finally come for us, we together would make

⁹² Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.41

⁹³ JS-Matthew 1:37

⁹⁴ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.42

⁹⁵ D&C 88:94-95, emphasis added

⁹⁶ John 14:2-3

the marriage complete and he would seal us his.⁹⁷ This is an interesting phrase, given our understanding of the temple. Conversely, if we neglect or reject our covenant with the Lord, “the devil doth seal [us] his.”⁹⁸

The hour had finally come for the loyal and long-suffering bride. Having made all preparations, having waited faithfully and patiently for the bridegroom’s return, having heard the trumpet and the shout, having gathered all together during the last half hour, and having heard the final shout, the bride now gave herself willingly to the bridegroom as he burst through the door of her home to claim her. By this action, the bridegroom suddenly elevated his bride to the stature of a queen.

The New and Everlasting Covenant provides for such regal unity: “[The Bridegroom] hast made us unto our God kings and priests [and queens and priestesses]: and we shall reign on the earth.”⁹⁹ Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

This unity among all the saints and between them and the Father and the Son, is reserved for those who gain exaltation and inherit the fulness of the Father’s kingdom. Those who attain it will all know the same things; think the same thoughts; exercise the same powers; do the same acts; respond in the same way to the same circumstances; beget the same kind of offspring; rejoice in the same continuation of the seeds forever; create the same type of worlds; enjoy the same eternal fulness; and glory in the same exaltation.¹⁰⁰

Immediately, the bride was lifted up into a special chair—a throne—“and carried to her new home. The four strong men,” who conveyed the bride, were “given the honorary title, Giborei Yisrael, or heroes of Israel.”¹⁰¹ In this regal setting, the bride appeared stunningly beautiful without spot or blemish. Moreover, she was beautiful within, having prepared during and faithfully endured the wait.

Similarly, the apostle John saw latter-day Zion “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”¹⁰² The psalmist wrote, “The king’s daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king’s palace.”¹⁰³

⁹⁷ See Mosiah 5:15

⁹⁸ See Alma 34:35

⁹⁹ Revelation 5:10

¹⁰⁰ Bruce R. McConkie, “Unity,” *Mormon Doctrine*, p.814

¹⁰¹ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.43

¹⁰² Revelation 21:2

¹⁰³ Psalms 45:13-15

Now the bridegroom brought her to the place he had prepared for her. Donna Nielsen explained:

The most important period of the marriage festivities was when the bride entered her new home. The bride and groom were sometimes crowned with real crowns or with garlands or roses, myrtle, or olive leaves.... The couple was treated like royalty during this time. The new husband was literally considered a king and priest in his own home, with his wife as queen.¹⁰⁴

How glorious is the Covenant that exalts us and makes us equal with the King of Heaven!

The Wedding

A number of symbolic events occurred when the guests entered into the father's home. These events hearken to blessings that attend the New and Everlasting Covenant. For example, each guest had his feet and hands washed, then he was anointed, embraced and kissed. These gestures were evidences of reconciliation; no hard feelings would be allowed in the father's house on such a joyous occasion. We might expect to be thus treated when we regain the Father presence.

"Another Jewish custom was to wear a wedding garment." These garments were supplied to the guests by the bridegroom's father. They were white, "a color associated with royalty." Moreover, the white garments represented light. If someone were found not wearing a garment, such as the guest mentioned in Matthew 22:11, he would be cast out. His action would be interpreted as disdain for the father's generosity.

While the guests were dressing, greeting and conversing, the bridegroom and the bride dressed in their white wedding clothing, which was symbolic of "purity, forgiveness of sins, and solemn joy."¹⁰⁵ Isaiah exulted, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."¹⁰⁶

At this point, the bride would be anointed with sweet olive oil. We remember that this sanctifying act signified her joy and her willingness to transform her life from a single woman to a queen to her husband. This change of status was shared by both the bride

¹⁰⁴ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.44

¹⁰⁵ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.51-54

¹⁰⁶ Isaiah 61:10

and the bridegroom. “Each groom at the time of his wedding and later in his own home was to be considered as a king and a priest.”

The act of clothing the couple in royal wedding robes signified among other things that they were now consecrated to become fruitful and bear children.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the Covenant clothes us “with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace.”¹⁰⁸ Our purpose changes from profane to holy, and joined with the Lord we become fruitful.¹⁰⁹

Now the time of the wedding was at hand. The place of making the covenant was under a canopy, a square piece of cloth held up by four poles. The canopy was open on all sides, reminiscent of the hospitality Abraham and Sarah showed guests in their open tent. The canopy was usually positioned outside so as to be under the stars.

Symbolically and among other things, it represented “God’s sheltering love” and also the covenant that God made with Abraham, promising that his children would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens.¹¹⁰ Likewise, when we marry in the temple, we are sealed together in the presence of the luminaries of heaven and blessed with all the blessings of Abraham, including “a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.”¹¹¹

After the bridegroom had been escorted to the canopy by his parents, the bride was brought to the canopy by hers. At that point, the “officiator faced the couple and read the Psalm of Thanksgiving (Psalm 100). A goblet of wine was raised, and a blessing was said over the wine. This was called the Cup of Joy.’ Both the bride and the bridegroom drank from the same cup, indicating they would share the joys of life together.” Likewise, we are yoked to Jesus in the New and Everlasting Covenant.¹¹² Our Bridegroom covenants to share with us all the joys and sorrows of life; by covenant, we will never be left alone.

Then the bridegroom places a ring, which represents eternity, on the bride’s right index finger. It was the right hand that was used for making covenants. At that point, the bridegroom “lifted the bride’s veil and placed the corner of it on his shoulder. This was a proclamation to everyone present that the government of his bride now rested on his shoulder,” an image that Isaiah used to describe the Savior’s relationship to us.¹¹³ Then the marriage contract was read aloud for all to witness, which reading was followed by

¹⁰⁷ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.52, 54-55

¹⁰⁸ D&C 88:125

¹⁰⁹ See John 15:5-8

¹¹⁰ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.55-56

¹¹¹ D&C 132:19

¹¹² See Matthew 11:29-30

¹¹³ See Isaiah 9:6

the officiator's reciting blessings. Similarly, the Lord pronounces blessings upon those whom he seals together:

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them—Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection...and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths...and if ye abide in my covenant, and commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood, it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.¹¹⁴

Next, the officiator offers a second cup of wine to the couple. “This cup was called the Cup of Sacrifice’ and the Cup of Salvation.’ They would have to share sacrifices in life, but eventually those sacrifices would be a source of salvation for both of them.”¹¹⁵ Again, in the Covenant, the Bridegroom vows to walk the path of life by our side. Against all odds, he is determined to drink of the Cup of Sacrifice for our salvation: “...the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”¹¹⁶

Our life together is one of mutual sacrifice that most assuredly will lead to mutual salvation. In the Covenant, we counsel and make decisions together; we love together; we hurt together. What he wants, we want. We share in our hopes, desires and dreams, and we also share in our sorrows. We are one.

Drinking from the Cup of Sacrifice or the Cup of Salvation is vividly described in the Savior's own words: “For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I

¹¹⁴ D&C 132:19-20

¹¹⁵ See Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p.57-60

¹¹⁶ John 18:11

might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.”¹¹⁷

The Bridegroom’s Plea

No doctrine is more glorious than the New and Everlasting Covenant. Significantly, the Bridegroom initiates the invitation to join with him in a covenantal relationship that is as holy, loving, intimate, fruitful, trusting and enduring as an eternal marriage. Equally significant is the fact that in inviting us to enter into a covenant relationship, the Lord essentially pleads with us that we will have mercy on him that we might agree to join with him. Hosea 6:6 states, “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice....” This is an interesting twist considering the fact that we are ever pleading for his mercy.

We begin to understand this gospel irony when we note that the Hebrew word for mercy is *hesed*, which “refers to the deep spiritual and emotional bond that exists between two very close people such as husband and wife. Immediately, one perceives that God wants us to be as emotionally and spiritually close to him in thought and action as a devoted husband and wife would be.... It is a humbling moment when we realize that such a powerful, loving, and kind God wants this type of a relationship. Such knowledge inspires one to grow up’ spiritually and to think more about the impact his life has on God.”¹¹⁸

That the Lord would literally beg us to enter into a covenantal relationship with him evokes tender images. At the end of his earthly ministry, we recall that Jesus lamented over proud Jerusalem, the bride whom he had courted for so long, the bride whom he would have gathered to him so many times in protective and loving care, and yet she would not give him her love.¹¹⁹ That image evokes the vision of a prospective groom, who has loved a woman for a very long time, and finally has managed to gather enough to pay a substantial bride price by sacrificing his all.

Now he hands her a document written on fine parchment which contains his covenantal promises: He will provide for her, redeem her, love her and give her his name. Then he offers her a token or a gift of value, a representation of his promises, and in the presence of witnesses, he recites a pledge to irrevocably bind and consecrate himself to her forever. Now he places a cup of wine before her...and waits. Will she drink of the cup or will she refuse him?

¹¹⁷ D&C 19:16-19

¹¹⁸ Donna B. Nielsen, *Beloved Bridegroom*, p. iv

¹¹⁹ See Matthew 23:37

How we respond to the Bridegroom's invitation will determine our eternal future. A great and divisive decision lies before us. Those who neglect or reject the Lord's proposal to enter into the New and Everlasting Covenant will find themselves on his left hand, symbolically the hand of disdain to the Jewish mind. Conversely, those who accept the Lord's proposal and thereafter live faithfully in the Covenant will find themselves on his right hand, the hand of covenant making, the hand on which the bride accepts her husband's ring.¹²⁰

Jesus commented on this reality in words of stark imagery: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth [his] sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. "

¹²¹

May we respond to the Lord's plea and accept his invitation to join him in the New and Everlasting Covenant. Then may we, like the bride, stand forever on the Bridegroom's right hand and there exult as did Jeremiah, "This is the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts."¹²²

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¹²⁰ See Donna B. Nielsen, Beloved Bridegroom, p.57

¹²¹ Matthew 25:31-34, 41

¹²² Jeremiah 15:16

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