

A BRIDE'S JOURNEY **A Devotional Meditation from**

Leviticus 21:1-24:23; Ezekiel 44:15-31; Psalm 110; Ephesians 5:21-33;
Galatians 6:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 7:11-28; Revelation 19:7-10

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Every bride is beautiful, and every bride is unique. Of the many beautiful brides I have seen, one of the most stunning is my niece, Renée. On the day she married Sam, I saw on her face an expression of pure love so profound that it took my breath away. In that holy moment of transformation, Renée bound her identity with that of her beloved, and together they created a new identity that is being revealed day by day.

What makes this memory even more precious is knowing something of Renée's story, and of the victories she won through many trials during her formative years. Renée could have let those things define her, but she chose another path. In a very real sense, this bride had made herself ready for her bridegroom, and together they invited us to join them in a wedding feast of surpassing joy.

This is what comes to mind when I ponder what it will be like at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. That should be what Christians look forward to, of course. We are, as is popularly said, the Bride of Christ, the one for whom He gave His life, which is why we honor Him with reverence and obedience.

But, honestly, do we know what that means?

Like so many words tossed about in church language, the term "Bride of Christ" is firmly rooted in scripture, but few know what it means. Paul and John write about the Bride, but that's only the beginning. The apostles never made up anything out of thin air, but built on what had been revealed to Moses and the Prophets, and lived out by Yeshua our Messiah.

This is why Israel is so important. The Bride of Christ is, in fact, Israel, just as Israel's Redeemer has promised all along. We who are born in the nations come into this Covenant Nation by virtue of our profession of allegiance to Israel's Messiah-King. It's not that the Redeemer has discarded Israel and replaced it with something new, but that He is making the Covenant Nation new by resurrecting it as the Israel of God. All that God taught through Moses, and all that He explained through the Prophets, are the bedrock of His Kingdom coming and His will being done on earth as it is in Heaven.

It's no coincidence that our Messiah-King quotes from Isaiah 61 when He proclaims the beginning of His ministry:

The *Ruach ADONAI* [Spirit of the LORD] is on me,
because He has anointed me

to proclaim Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of *ADONAI*'s favor.

Luke 4:18-19 TLV (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

That's the same chapter where the Redeemer promises to restore scattered Israel, and in which Israel is personified as a bride

For I, *ADONAI*, love justice.
I hate robbery in the burnt offering.
In faithfulness I will reward My people
and cut an eternal covenant with them.
Then their offspring will be known among the nations,
their descendants among the peoples.
All who see them will recognize them,
for they are the seed that *ADONAI* has blessed.
I will rejoice greatly in *ADONAI*.
My soul will be joyful in my God.
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,
He has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness—
like a bridegroom wearing a priestly turban,
like a bride adorning herself with her jewels.

Isaiah 61:8-10 TLV

I take great comfort in being grafted, or adopted, into the Covenant Nation of Israel because of words like "eternal covenant." That means my Eternal Creator God stakes His sovereign reputation on preserving this covenant for all time and beyond. I'm not aware of any similar covenant He has made with any nation other than Israel, and thus when I read that He has made a way for all nations to join in that covenant through Israel's Messiah-King, I rejoice not only in embracing that Hebraic identity, but in learning what that means.

Which brings us back to the question of what it means to be the Bride of Christ, or Bride of Messiah. We know Yeshua is the Messiah-King, but this passage gives us another aspect of His identity: He is the Messiah-Priest of Israel. That's why it says He is the Bridegroom wearing a priestly turban.

But how can He be a priest since He is not a Levite? The priests of Israel were called from the tribe of Levi and family of Aaron, but Yeshua is of the tribe of Judah and family of David.

The answer comes in the fulfillment of the promise walked out by the Aaronic priesthood. David points to it in the Psalms:

ADONAI has sworn, and will not change His mind:
"You are a *Kohen* [Priest] forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Psalms 110:4 TLV

The writer of Hebrews explains at length what this means. Yeshua is, in effect, the High Priest of the Cosmos, of the order of the King of Righteousness, which is what Melchizedek means. This is the Priest-King of Creation to whom we are to be married.

Let that sink in for a moment.

Now think of this: kings don't marry commoners, and priests don't marry women with shady reputations. That's what we learn about the Aaronic priesthood:

They [priests] are to be holy to their God, and not profane the Name of their God, for they present the offerings of *ADONAI* made by fire, the bread of their God. Therefore they are to be holy. They are not to marry women who are defiled as prostitutes, or profane. Neither should they marry women divorced from their husbands, for a *kohen* [priest] is holy to his God. Therefore you are to sanctify him, because he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, *ADONAI*, who sanctifies you, am holy. . . He who is the *kohen gadol* [high priest] among his brothers, upon whose head the anointing oil is poured and is consecrated to put on the garments, is not to let the hair of his head hang loose or tear his clothes, nor should he go near any dead person, defiling himself, even for his father or his mother. He is not to go out of the Sanctuary or profane the Sanctuary of his God—for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him. I am *ADONAI*. He should take a wife in her virginity. A widow, or one divorced, or one who has been defiled as a prostitute, he is not to marry. He is to take a virgin from his own people as a wife, so as not to corrupt his offspring among his people. For I am *ADONAI* who sanctifies him.

Leviticus 21:6-15 TLV

If these are the qualifications for brides of God's earthly priests, how much more exclusive are the qualifications for the Bride of the High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek? And how do any of us possibly measure up to such a holy standard?

Quite simply, we don't. It's impossible to make ourselves ready to be the spotless bride of our Messiah-Priest-King. That's why He had to lay down His life and shed His blood to cover our traumas and shortcomings and rebellious ugliness. That's also why we are identified with Him in His death so that we might be joined to Him in resurrected life. It's only through Him that we can make ourselves ready to be presented to Him as His spotless Bride, but it's our responsibility to make the journey.