

*The*  
REDEMPTION  
*of* THE BRIDE



*God's Redeeming Love for  
His Covenant People*



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# CHAPTER 1

## THE PROPOSAL



*The bridegroom delivered the Torah that is bigger  
Than the earth and broader than the seas.  
The bride consented to the covenant,  
And an everlasting agreement was made.  
As a dowry, the bride brought a heart  
That understands, ears that listen, and eyes that see.<sup>10</sup>*

### IN FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

“I am married to you,” Jehovah reminded Israel as He pleaded with her to remember and return to Him.<sup>11</sup>

When did the marriage between Jehovah and His bride take place? Who is the Bride of Jehovah? Does this title apply only to people of Israelite descent?

Our search for the answers to these questions necessarily takes us to the rocky peninsula that lies between Egypt and Israel, where Jehovah carried His Bride, Israel, as if “on eagles’ wings”<sup>12</sup> to meet with Him at the foot of Mount Sinai, and there enter into a sacred covenant relationship with Him as Lord and Bridegroom.

It’s important to realize that Jehovah did this in fulfillment of a promise made to Abraham centuries earlier. Abraham began to worry as he grew older that he would die without an heir, but the Lord told him that if he would exercise faith in Him and keep his covenants, He would give him as many children as the stars in the heavens, or the sands by the sea. However, looking to the future, Jehovah warned Abraham that his posterity would become slaves and forget their identity as God’s covenant people:

And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. . . . But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again (to the land of promise).<sup>13</sup>

God appointed Moses to bring Abraham’s children, called *Israel*, out from Egypt and back to the foot of Mt. Sinai in fulfillment of His promise. Although Abraham had long been dead, Jehovah was faithful to His promises and intended to

extend those same promises to Abraham's posterity.

Whether from Abraham's actual bloodline, or "adopted Israel" through faith in Jesus Christ, Paul taught: "If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."<sup>14</sup>

This means that just as God was faithful in redeeming Abraham's posterity from Egypt more than 400 years after Abraham died, even so, God will be faithful in remembering His promises regarding each one of us and will carefully gather us to Him, and invite us into the same sacred covenant that Abraham enjoyed.

No other story witnesses to this truth more profoundly than does the allegory of the Bridegroom and the Bride, and this is why it is so important for us to understand and embrace it. Even if we have become lost or enslaved, Jehovah, who is Jesus, knows us by name and feels "married" to us. He is determined to save us.

Will we allow Him to do so?

## **COVENANT PROMISES AT MOUNT SINAI**

While most people recognize that Jews commemorate the Israelites' miraculous deliverance from Egypt each year at *Passover*, many do not realize that the reception of the law at Mount Sinai fifty days later is equally venerated and has its own yearly celebration called *Pentecost*, or *Shavuot*.<sup>15</sup>

We often refer to these ancient holy days as Jewish holidays, yet they were given to all of the tribes of Israel, not just the Jews. Because most of ancient Israel apostatized and was scattered at the time of the Assyrian conquest,<sup>16</sup> those Israelites still faithful to the covenant who remained in the land of Israel joined with the tribe of Judah, thus becoming known to most of history as "the Jews," although not strictly from that tribe.

Jewish Rabbis have long taught that the reception of the law was much more than God just giving His children a set of rules to live by. Many have looked upon the event as the betrothal, or marriage, of Jehovah to His people.<sup>17</sup> With the observance of Shavuot,<sup>18</sup> faithful Jews remember the gift of the law, but many add a further dimension to their celebrations as represented by the following:

During the service, before the Torah reading, Sephardic Jews read from a *ketubah* (a marriage contract) between God and the people, written in the sixteenth century by the mystic poet from Safed, Israel Najara, that reads:

"On the sixth day of the third month, the Invisible One came forth from Sinai. The bridegroom, ruler of rulers, prince of princes, said to his beloved (the people of Israel), who is beautiful as the moon, as radiant as the sun, as awesome as an army with great banners,

"Many days you will be mine and I will be your redeemer. I will honor, support, and maintain you. I will be your shelter and refuge in eternal mercy. I will give you the Torah by which you and your children will live in health and peace and harmony. May the Bridegroom rejoice with the Bride and the bride rejoice with the husband of her youth, while uttering words of praise."<sup>19</sup>

Brant Pitre explains that "from an ancient (Israelite) perspective, the one true God—'the LORD' or 'He Who Is' (Hebrew YHWH) (Exodus 3:15)—is not just the

Creator. From an ancient (Israelite) perspective, the God of Israel is also a *Bridegroom*, a divine person whose ultimate desire is to be united to his creatures in an everlasting relationship that is so intimate, so permanent, so sacrificial, and so life-giving that it can only be described as a *marriage* between Creator and creatures, between God and human beings, between YHWH and Israel.”<sup>20</sup>

A review of ancient marriage customs might help us understand how the events at Mt. Sinai can be viewed as a betrothal of Jehovah to His people.

According to custom, a male emissary was chosen to act as the “friend of the bridegroom” and speak in his behalf to the bride and her parents, proposing marriage. The proposal would include negotiations for a dowry, as well as a bride-price—the “price” or gifts that the bridegroom would provide in order to secure the marriage. If the bride and her parents agreed, a *ketubah*, or contract, would be drawn up and signed, and the betrothal became official and binding.

The prospective bride was free to accept or to reject the proposal. We see this freedom modeled by Rebekah and her parents, when Isaac’s “friend” Eliezer presented Isaac’s marriage proposal to her after she watered his camels at the well.<sup>21</sup>

The friend of the bridegroom would continue in his role until the marriage actually took place—often up to a year following the betrothal. Alfred Edersheim explained that this friend “acted as a kind of intermediary between the couple; at the wedding they offered gifts, waited upon the bride and bridegroom, and attended them to the bridal chamber, being also, as it were, guarantors of the bride’s virgin chastity.”<sup>22</sup>

With this perspective in mind, we can now recognize Moses’s role as the “friend of the Bridegroom,” sent to negotiate with the Bride’s family in the Bridegroom Jehovah’s behalf.<sup>23</sup> In this case, Moses presented the Lord’s proposal directly to the Bride, and when she accepted, he went back to report to his Friend.<sup>24</sup> Suddenly, with this perspective, the Sinai covenant takes on new beauty. The scriptures become songs of love as the Lord proclaims to His Bride: “I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.”<sup>25</sup>

The marriage contract, or *ketubah*, proposed by the Bridegroom Jehovah is generous: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, an holy nation.”<sup>26</sup>

Out of all prospective brides, Jehovah chose Israel. The promise of becoming a “*peculiar* treasure unto me above all people” is taken from the Hebrew word *cegullah*, a feminine word that “signifies ‘property’ in the special sense of a private possession one personally acquired and carefully preserves. Six times this word is used of Israel as God’s personally acquired, carefully preserved, and privately possessed people.”<sup>27</sup> Instead of today’s interpretation of the word *peculiar* as strange or odd, we might think of it in more specific terms, such as “you are my one and only, the one meant for me.”

These terms should be interpreted as a free-will arrangement of intimacy, not ownership. This point is underscored in the proposed *if* of the overture: “*If* ye will . . .”<sup>28</sup>

The fact that Jehovah intended to exalt or lift His Bride, rather than to subject her to some form of slavery, is indicated by the promises contained within the proposal; He proposed that Israel become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In Hebrew the noun *kingdom*, (*mamlakah*), is feminine,<sup>29</sup> embracing both genders in the promise of exaltation.

The covenant promise of a holy kingdom, or a kingdom of priests, was cherished for generations. Several hundred years after Moses, the Apostle Peter urged his listeners to remember: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”<sup>30</sup>

John, in his great vision (the book of Revelation), saw all things come to pass, even unto the end of the world, and exulted that “Jesus Christ . . . hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.”<sup>31</sup>

This promise is not reserved for males alone. “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, this declaration and invitation pertains to all Israel, men and women. If they realize and accept that which Jehovah is proposing, they will be raised to kings and queens, priests and priestesses in His kingdom. Through His grace, they will become joint-heirs with Him<sup>33</sup> while yet recognizing that *He* is the King of kings and Lord of lords.<sup>34</sup>

## **THE BRIDE WAS NOT READY**

At Sinai, while Israel was indeed willing, as attested by her affirmation that “all that the Lord hath spoken we will do,”<sup>35</sup> she was as yet unprepared to meet her Bridegroom:

At dawn, on the fiftieth day since they had left Egypt, there was a long, loud blast of the ram’s horn. The people came out of their tents and saw that every part of Mount Sinai was smoking. God had descended into the mountain. Thunder crashed over their heads. Lightning ripped through the air before their eyes. The ram’s horn grew louder and louder. The people trembled. The mountain shook. Moses said, “It is time to lead the bride to the bridegroom.” As Moses led the people to meet the Shechinah, Mount Sinai in exaltation lifted off the earth and hovered over the people like a wedding canopy.<sup>36</sup>

Israel had spent too long in Egypt. Her experience with Egyptian gods, with their colossal temples and fiery sacrifices, had dulled her faith in and understanding of the Lord Jehovah. Although He had brought her out of Egypt “with a mighty hand, and stretched out arm”<sup>37</sup> and had led her to safety through the Red Sea,<sup>38</sup> she feared an intimate encounter with Him. When He promised to come down from Mount Sinai by degrees, first speaking so that all could hear His voice, and then showing Himself to His people,<sup>39</sup> His Bride responded with fear. “And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. . . . The voice of the trumpet had sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.”<sup>40</sup>

The people were so frightened by the spectacle that they pleaded with Moses: “Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”<sup>41</sup> “For this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?”<sup>42</sup>

They removed themselves and stood afar off.<sup>43</sup>

Such fear of the Bridegroom caused the wedding to be postponed. The Lord retreated to the top of the mountain, and Moses, continuing in his role, went up to meet Him there.<sup>44</sup>

Israel revealed her unreadiness by fashioning a golden calf to worship while Moses met and communed with Jehovah.<sup>45</sup> Ironically, the golden jewels they used that had been “borrowed” from the Egyptians<sup>46</sup> would typically have been used to adorn the hair and clothing of the women in preparation for their betrothal/wedding to the Lord. Anciently, Israelite women “borrowed” precious jewels and ornaments from family and friends in order to be adorned as a queen for their wedding day.<sup>47</sup>

Unfortunately, fearful Israel was too used to viewing herself as a slave of Egypt to even comprehend the invitation being extended to her, and she found it was easier to look at a god of her own making than to behold the face of the faithful Shepherd-Husband who had led her to safety and liberty.<sup>48</sup> In degrading her God to a god/creature made by human hands, she also degraded herself, unable to embrace the truth of her own divine relationship and destiny.

The construction of the golden calf, and the refusal to meet Jehovah in any context, caused the Lord sorrow and even provoked His anger. That day came to be known as *the day of provocation*.

The Apostle Paul, speaking for the Lord in his letter to the Hebrews, urged his readers: “Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.”<sup>49</sup>

Further clarification about what it means to “enter into (the) rest” of God is provided in the scriptures:

Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory.

Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also;

And the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel.<sup>50</sup>

And [the] greater priesthood adminstereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

And without the ordinances thereof, the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh;

For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.<sup>51</sup>

The proposal was extended, but the Bride was not ready. What can we learn from this event? It would seem that God shows us “the big picture” and invites us to partake of it, even when we are like children, not fully understanding what is being offered. We may enter into the covenant of baptism, for example, without fully comprehending the promises that are being made. Yet, the invitation still stands, as does the covenant.

“For he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and 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 all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.”<sup>52</sup>

We can receive as much as we are able to receive, and as much as we are willing to receive.

“Verily thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am; and that I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”<sup>53</sup>

The fact that Jehovah knows we will fall and fail is evident in the plan of salvation. Jesus is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,”<sup>54</sup> meaning that His Atonement was effective even before Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden. He has provided the way for us to repent, recover, and to try again. That truth is illustrated in the story of the Bride of Jehovah. She was not ready, yet He offered the invitation to her anyway. She betrayed Him and sought other gods, yet He would not divorce or abandon her.

The Lord is waiting even now for the Bride to prepare herself to come unto Him and to behold His face.

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10. 16th century Sephardic Marriage Contract by Israel Najara.

11. Jeremiah 3:14

12. Exodus 19:4

13. Genesis 15:13–16

14. Galatians 3:29

15. Exodus 31:18

16. See 2 Kings 17.

17. Wolkstein, *Treasures of the Heart*, 44.

18. Feast of Weeks; Leviticus 23:15–21; Deuteronomy 16:9–10;

Christian Pentecost; see Acts 2.

19. Wolkstein, *ibid.*

20. Pitre, *Jesus the Bridegroom, The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*, 8.

21. Genesis 24:57–58

22. Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, 153.

23. Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, 64; see also John 3:27–30.

24. Exodus 19:5–8; see also Exodus 33:11.

25. Exodus 19:5–6

26. *Ibid.*

27. Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, 195, word 5459.

28. Exodus 19:5–6
29. Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, 161, word 4467, (7C).
30. 1 Peter 2:9
31. Revelation 1:6
32. 1 Corinthians 11:11
33. Romans 8:17
34. Revelation 19:16
35. Exodus 19:8
36. Wolkstein, *Treasures of the Heart*, 51.
37. Deuteronomy 5:15
38. Exodus 14:19–22
39. Exodus 19:9–11, 24:9–11
40. Exodus 19:18–19
41. Exodus 20:19
42. Deuteronomy 5:25–26
43. Exodus 20:18
44. Exodus 24:2
45. Exodus 32:1–6, 21–35
46. Exodus 3:22; 12:35
47. Exodus 12:35; Isaiah 61:10; see Gower, *New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, 66.
48. See Exodus 33:11. Moses spoke with the Lord face-to-face.
49. Hebrews 3:8–11
50. Doctrine and Covenants 84:23–26
51. Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–22
52. 2 Nephi 26:33
53. Doctrine and Covenants 93:1–2
54. Revelation 13:18

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