



LIFE SCHOOL
INTERNATIONAL

UNDERSTANDING THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

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Session 1

The Kingdom Is Like a Wedding

This session covers:

- Pursuing Jesus as a Bridegroom
- The bridal paradigm in Scripture
- The eternal purpose in creation
- Living in bridal identity

This session corresponds to:

- Session 1 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

Pursuing Jesus as a Bridegroom

1. The Christian life is all about loving God with our entire being.

- Wanting to test Jesus, a certain lawyer asked Him what the greatest commandment was in the Law. Jesus' answer was simple. He said to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength (Matt. 22:34-40). These simple yet profound words have motivated the church ever since.
- The gospel is so much more than a pre-paid ticket to heaven. It is a love relationship with God.
- *The first commandment is about pursuing Jesus as a Bridegroom and loving Him as a bride.*

2. Pursuing Jesus as a Bridegroom is all about love.

- In studying the bride, many become enamored with the theological issues surrounding this bridal relationship. They want to know: Is every believer the wife of Jesus? How will this bridal relationship impact my life? And how will this affect me in eternity?

- While all of these are very important questions, we must be careful not to overlook the most important point of all—*our bridal relationship with Jesus is all about love*.
- It is about much more than our preparation, an eternal reward, and an interesting theological truth. It is about a lovesick God who burns with great affection for His bride. It is about a romance between weak and broken human beings and their Maker. It is about Jesus, our Bridegroom God, longing to be one with us and waiting with great anticipation as we make ourselves ready.
- The Great Lover of the universe is in love with us and He is gently wooing us to Himself, that we might be His for all eternity.
- The Bible says that we love Jesus because *He first loved us* (1 John 4:19). This is the key to living in a bridal relationship with Him. As we understand the passionate affection that Jesus has for us, we are empowered to love Him in response, and we are motivated to make ourselves ready (Rev. 19:7).
- The journey of becoming a worthy bride for Jesus begins as we experience God's steadfast affection, passionate love, and fervent desire for us (Eph. 3:18-19). As this revelation penetrates every part of our being, love for God begins to grow within us and leads us to respond with love and obedience.
- Our bridal relationship with Jesus is all about love—His love for us and our love for Him.

3. Our heavenly Father is preparing a worthy Bride for His Son.

- In our study of the bride of Christ, two verses stand out:

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and *His bride has made herself ready* (Rev. 19:7).

And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and *those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast*; and the door was shut (Matt 25:10).

- The revelation is clear: Jesus is a Bridegroom, we are His cherished bride, the kingdom of God is like a wedding, and *we must make ourselves ready for Him*.
- Currently, few believers in the church are actively and purposefully making themselves ready as the bride of Christ.
- The Bible is clear: The eternal wife of Jesus will make herself ready. This is not something that God does for us in His sovereignty. It is something that we do in cooperation with the Holy Spirit and reliance upon His grace.
- The purpose of this class is to inspire believers to make a *personal decision* to actively make themselves ready as a worthy bride for Jesus.

The Bridal Paradigm in Scripture

1. The bridal paradigm views the kingdom of God as a romance between Jesus the Bridegroom and us as His cherished bride.

- A paradigm is an example or model that helps explain a complex concept.
- In the gospels, the kingdom of God is compared to a seed sown in a field, leaven that spreads imperceptibly, hidden treasure that must be discovered, a pearl of great price that has been purchased, and a king who came to settle accounts.
- Central to the theme of this class, Jesus also said that “the kingdom of heaven is like...a wedding” (Matt. 22:2, NIV). Among the many metaphors of the kingdom, we see that the kingdom of God is also like a marriage arranged by our heavenly Father for His Son.
- Hosea said, “In that day,” declares the LORD, “you will call me “my husband”; you will no longer call me “my master”” (Hos. 2:16, NIV).
- The bride of Christ is much more than a picture defining certain traits of the church. The kingdom of God really *is* like a wedding. Jesus really is a Bridegroom and we really *are* His bride. We really are called to be married to Him forever.
- Once you realize that you are the bride of Christ, an amazing thing happens when you read the Bible. You begin to see how frequently the Scriptures allude to weddings, brides, bridegrooms, wedding feasts, wedding attendants, and the bridal paradigm of the kingdom.
- The Scriptures are filled with references to the marriage that will take place between Jesus and His church. Even the order of these references speaks of their importance.

2. On many occasions, the bridal paradigm is presented as a first.

- In God’s *first* interaction with man, He provided Adam with a wife—which Paul said was a “reference to Christ and the church” (Gen. 2:18-25; Eph 5:32).
- Jesus’ *first* miracle took place at a wedding in Cana when He turned water into wine (John 2:1-10). This miracle was much more than ensuring that there was enough wine for the celebration. Jesus was making a powerful prophetic statement about His wedding at the end of the age. Just as He did in Cana, Jesus has saved His best wine for last (John 2:10), and in these end times, the Holy Spirit is preparing a worthy bride for Jesus from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.
- When Jesus was *first* introduced to the nation of Israel, John the Baptist presented Him as a Bridegroom (John 3:29).
- Jesus *first* revealed how his servants should minister when He referred to them as “friends of the bridegroom” (Matt. 9:15, NKJV).
- Jesus’ *first* message to the seven churches of Asia Minor was a call to return to your first love (Rev. 2:1-7).

3. On many occasions, the bridal paradigm is also presented as a last.

- In Jesus' *last* public message, He told a parable about the Father's eternal plan to have a wedding for His Son (Matt. 22:1-14). Through this parable, we see that God's eternal purpose is to prepare a suitable wife for Jesus. God's *last* message to the world was critical—a wedding is coming and we must get ready.
- In one of Jesus' *last* messages to His followers, He said that "the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom" (Matt. 25:1, NIV).
- In one of Jesus' *last* prayers, He prayed that we would be with Him forever, see His glory, be one with Him, love Him with the same love that the Father has for Him, and that He would live inside of us (John 17:22-26). This is an up close and personal look at the burning desires in the heart of Jesus. He wants a bride who will see His beauty, be intimate with Him, and love Him with Spirit-empowered passion.
- In the *last* book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, John is shown the marriage supper of the Lamb and he sees the New Jerusalem "coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 19:7-10, 21:2).
- In the *last* chapter of the *last* book of the Bible, we see how the bride will urge her beloved Bridegroom to return. At the end of the age, the Spirit-empowered church will cry, "Come" (Rev. 22:17).
- The *last* theme of the Bible is a lovesick bride—not a servant, a minister, a soldier, or a son—crying out for her Bridegroom to return.
- The Bible starts and ends with a wedding! God reveals what is closest to His heart by what He does first and last.

4. The bridal relationship between Jesus and His church is also woven throughout the Bible in types, shadows, allegories, prophecies, and eternal truths.

- Esther is a picture of how the bride of Christ will be prepared for the King and how we can partner with God through intercessory prayer to overthrow the antichrist kingdoms of this world.
- Ruth is a picture of how the bride of Christ will mature in bridal love as we transition from the ways of the world into the harvest fields of our Kinsmen-Redeemer.
- The Song of Solomon is more than a natural romance between Solomon and the Shulammite maiden. It is an allegory of the bride of Christ's journey into deep intimacy and partnership with Jesus, her beloved Bridegroom.
- In the book of Ephesians, Paul said that Jesus will present the church to Himself in all of her glory (Eph. 5:27). In the words of Paul, the bride of Christ will be without "spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:27). Paul made this statement while teaching that the leaving and cleaving of marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church (5:28-32).
- In 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul said, "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I *betrothed* you to one husband, that to Christ I

might present you as a pure virgin.” When we receive Jesus as Savior and are born again, we are betrothed to Him as His bride. A biblical betrothal was much deeper than engagements are today. Legally, betrothed parties were like a married couple and unfaithfulness was considered “adultery” (Deut 22:23; Matt 1:19).

- From Genesis to Revelation, we see weddings, brides, bridegrooms, wedding feasts, and wedding attendants.

The Eternal Purpose of Creation

God’s eternal purpose in creation is to give His Son an equally-yoked bride that will partner with Him for all eternity.

1. Adam and Eve’s marriage foreshadows our bridal relationship with Jesus.

- The first two chapters of Genesis describe the creation account. Chapter one reveals *what* God did in creation: He created man and woman in His image. The last few verses of chapter one and chapter two reveals *why* He did it, which also explains why He created the world and its inhabitants.
- On the sixth day, God created Adam, put him in the garden, and gave him free access to the beauty and provision of Eden. God told him to freely enjoy all of His creation except for the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. He then instructed Adam to watch over the garden, to keep it, to cultivate it, and to expand it. Adam was to take dominion over the entire earth.
- But one thing was missing. Adam needed a helpmate suitable for him. The Lord said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him” (Gen. 2:18). How would God do this? He put Adam into a deep sleep, took a rib from his side, and fashioned a woman from it. Eve—Adam’s perfect companion who would help him take dominion over the earth—was created (Gen. 1:28). In the words of Adam, Eve was “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23).
- Paul said that Adam was a “type” or a foreshadowing of Christ (Rom. 5:14). He also said that Eve foreshadowed the church’s relationship to Christ (Eph. 5:31-32). Just as Eve was made from Adam’s side, the church was birthed out of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. And just as it was with Eve, we are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh through the Holy Spirit.
- We are Jesus’ perfect helpmate. We are called to partner with Him as He takes dominion over the earth.
- When we understand that Adam foreshadows Christ and Eve foreshad-

ows His betrothed bride, we begin to see *why* the Father created the heavens and the earth.

- More than any other reason, it was to provide Jesus with a suitable helpmate—a wife and an eternal companion—with whom He could take dominion over the earth.

2. Five key phrases found in the Genesis account reveal more about God's eternal purpose for creation.

- These phrases are contained in the following two passages:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18).

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:24-25).

- *First, God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone."*
 - Something was woefully missing in Adam's life. He was lonely and lovesick for a wife.
 - In the same way, as hard as it is for us to grasp, Jesus is lovesick for His bride. He burns with passionate love and affection for us.
 - He longs to be with us, to be one with us, and to partner with us to take dominion over the earth. He waits in anticipation for the Father to say, "Son, go and get your bride."
- *Second, God said, "I will make him a helper suitable for him."*
 - The Hebrew word for *helper* means one who assists another to reach complete fulfillment.¹
 - The dictionary defines *suitable* as one who is of the right type or quality for a particular purpose or occasion.²
 - Though many find this hard to accept, we are that suitable helper. We are the ones who are of the right type and quality to help our Bridegroom reach complete fulfillment. Even in our weaknesses, we complete Jesus. The longing in His heart cannot be fulfilled without our love and obedience.
 - We are His suitable helper.
- *Third, Adam was to be "joined to his wife."*
 - In the same way, Jesus will leave His Father's house, return to earth for us, and we will be joined to Him forever.
 - Even though we have a relationship with our Bridegroom now, we will have a much greater intimacy and partnership with Him following His return.
 - Paul explained it this way: "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12a).

- Just as a husband and wife are to leave their father and mother and cleave to one another, we are to leave all other loves and cleave to the Lord Jesus. As His bride, we are to be fully joined to Him.
- *Fourth, Adam and Eve were to "become one flesh."*
 - Likewise, we are to become one spirit with Jesus. Paul said, "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (1 Cor. 6:17). This means that we are to be intimate with Jesus and to take on His nature.
 - The bride that will be presented to Jesus will be without spot or wrinkle. She will have taken on the nature of the One she loves. She will become bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh.
 - On that day we will be like Him.
- *Fifth, Adam and Eve were "naked and were not ashamed."*
 - Similarly, the Holy Spirit will produce transparency in the bride that will lead to greater intimacy with Jesus.
 - We will feel so secure in His love that we will have confidence to share our hearts with Jesus, and we will learn to listen to what's on His heart. Paul says, "then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12b).
 - There will be nothing that is hidden between us. We will truly become one with our Bridegroom.

3. God's eternal purpose for creation is to provide a worthy bride for His beloved Son.

- Jesus, who burns with affection for His beloved bride, longs to be with us because we are His perfect helpmate.
- We have been taken from His side and created in His image to be His eternal companion. We have been called to an intimate relationship with Jesus now that will only grow richer throughout eternity.
- Together with our beloved, we will take dominion over the earth.
- This is the eternal purpose of creation and the ultimate reason why the Father placed man in the garden. Paul Billheimer, in his classic book *Destined for the Throne*, writes:

It [the Bride of Christ] is one thing and one alone: the Eternal Companion of Jesus Christ, wholly God and wholly man. The final and ultimate outcome and goal of events from eternity to eternity, the finished product of all the ages, is the spotless Bride of Christ, united with Him in wedded bliss at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and seated with her heavenly Bridegroom upon the throne of the universe—ruling and reigning with Him over an ever increasing and expanding Kingdom. He entered the stream of human history for this one purpose, to claim His Beloved....Creation has no other aim. History has no other goal. From before the foundation of the world until the dawn of

eternal ages God has been working toward one grand event, one supreme end—the glorious wedding of His Son, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.³

Living in Bridal Identity

1. As Jesus' betrothed bride, we are His inheritance.

- This was revealed to John in Revelation when he saw the four living creatures and the 24 elders worshiping in the throne room. They were singing:

Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

- Simply put, Jesus has purchased a bride with His blood from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, and she will reign with Him for all eternity.
- Through his death and resurrection, Jesus purchased us for His Father, that we might be God's special treasure and unique possession. God was so pleased that Jesus willingly left the glory of heaven, put on a coat of humility, and gave His life to redeem us that God, in turn, gave the church back to Jesus as His inheritance.
- In Ephesians 1:18, Paul prayed that the saints might comprehend "the riches of the glory of *His* inheritance in the saints." The "saints"—and more specifically the bride—*is* Christ's inheritance.
- As His betrothed bride, we are Jesus' inheritance and He takes great joy in us. This is our identity as born-again believers. We are no longer just a sinner who has been saved, a servant who attends to his master, or even a follower doing the works of his leader.

2. Knowing that we are Jesus' sought-after, eternal companion should revolutionize our identities.

- We are Christ's beloved bride who is being prepared for our wedding day with the King of the universe. This is our *identity*.
- Embracing this identity inspires a fresh excitement in our relationship with Jesus and gives us the courage to allow the Holy Spirit to make us ready.
- We are a beloved bride who is being sought after and made ready for a wedding to our loving God.
- The following quote from Mike Bickle summarizes this idea:

One of the greatest foundational truths about God and His people is that Jesus Himself is the eternal Bridegroom and we, as the Bride of Christ, are the ones chosen by God to be His eter-

nal partner. Understanding this gives us insight into how we were formed and our reason for existence. Before the creation of the world, the Father wanted His Son to have a Bride. All of history—from the fall of man to the cross of Christ and every instance of repeated sin and offered redemption—builds toward the great climatic event called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-8).⁴

- To be made ready as a worthy bride, we must live in our bridal identity.
- We must see ourselves as a betrothed bride who is greatly desired by our Bridegroom.
- We must imagine ourselves celebrating with Him as His eternal partner at the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- We must recognize that most of our life experiences have been perfectly designed by our loving Creator to prepare us for that day.
- Make no mistake about it—Christianity is much more than a set of facts and ordinances that keep us out of hell. The gospel is a romance between Jesus and broken humanity. Jesus is a Bridegroom God who has burning passion and wholehearted affection for us.

The Father created us so that He might share His eternal pleasure in His beloved Son with us. Our greatest purpose in life is to love Jesus with the same passion that has burned in the Father before the foundation of the world (John 17:26). We are on a journey to mature, bridal love. So let's begin that journey today!

Notes

1. Charles Swindoll, *Strike The Original Match* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 19.
2. Suitable, *Encarta Online Dictionary*, Microsoft Word, 2003.
3. Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975), pp. 25-26.
4. Mike Bickle, *The Seven Longings of the Human Heart* (Kansas City, MO: Forerunner Books, 2006), p. 11.

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. Pursuing Jesus as a Bridegroom is all about love.
- _____ 2. The bridal paradigm views the kingdom of God as a romance between Jesus the Bridegroom and us as His cherished bride.
- _____ 3. There are only a few scriptural references to the wedding that will take place between Jesus and His church..
- _____ 4. Jesus is filled with affection for His bride and longs to be with her.
- _____ 5. To be made ready as a worthy bride for Jesus, we must grow in our identity as ministers of the gospel.
- _____ 6. When the Scriptures mention the marriage between Jesus and His bride, it is a metaphor that illustrates the Son's love for His church; it is not a reference to an actual wedding.
- _____ 7. God's eternal purpose in creation is to give His Son an equally-yoked bride that will partner with Him for all eternity.
- _____ 8. Our heavenly Father is actively preparing a worthy bride for His Son.
- _____ 9. Because Jesus loves us so much, every believer is automatically ready for His coming the moment they are born again.
- _____ 10. The bridal relationship between Jesus and believers illustrates one dimension of the first and foremost commandment.

Fill in the Blank

11. The journey of becoming a worthy bride for Jesus begins as we experience God's _____ for us.
12. In the Old Testament, the Prophet _____ said that God's people will call Him their Husband.
13. Two parables in the book of Matthew record great insights about the bride of Christ and the eternal wedding feast. These are found in chapters _____ and _____.
14. Jesus first miracle took place at a _____.

16 Understanding the Bride of Christ

15. When Jesus was *first* introduced to the nation of Israel, John the Baptist presented Him as a _____.

From the list to your right, choose the corresponding letter that best matches the phrase on the left.

- _____ 16. The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt. 22)
- _____ 17. Esther
- _____ 18. The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25)
- _____ 19. The wedding at Cana
- _____ 20. The Spirit and bride say, "Come"

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. One of Jesus' last messages to His followers
- b. A picture of the end-time bride of Christ
- c. The last theme of the Bible
- d. Where Jesus performed His first miracle
- e. One of Jesus' last public messages

Session 2

The Jewish Wedding System and the Bride of Christ

This session covers:

- An overview of the ancient Jewish wedding system
- How the ancient Jewish wedding system relates to our call as the bride of Christ
- How the Holy Spirit is moving to prepare a bride for Jesus

This session corresponds to:

- Session 2 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

The Bridegroom Is Coming

1. Jesus is returning for His bride.

- As the shout of the archangel and the sound of the trumpet fill the air, the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven. Graves will open up and the dead in Christ will rise from their tombs. Others who are alive at His coming will begin to defy gravity and head toward heaven.
- We get a glimpse of this glorious scene in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

- Most likely, the parable of the ten virgins reveals the meaning of this shout and accompanying trumpet blast. It reads: "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him'" (Matt. 25:6).
- Jesus is coming back to judge the nations. He is returning to establish His kingdom and to rule the earth. But He is also coming back as a Bridegroom for a bride.

The Bible reveals that Jesus' second coming will be similar to ancient Jewish wedding customs.

Ancient Jewish Wedding Customs

1. The ancient Jewish wedding system paints a beautiful picture of the coming wedding between the Lord Jesus Christ and His bride.

- According to Jewish wedding customs at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, the bridegroom came at a day and hour that his bride did not know. As he came, the friend of the bridegroom went before him and shouted, "Behold, the bridegroom comes."
- This shout would be accompanied by the blowing of a shofar—a trumpet made from a ram's horn. As the shout was heard, the bridegroom would get his bride and take her back to his father's house, where the ceremony and celebration would take place.
- These customs sound a lot like Jesus' description of His second coming from the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13).
- To really understand the Lord's second coming and our calling as the bride of Christ, let's look back in history to see the Jewish wedding customs during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry.
- Five customs comprise the traditional Jewish wedding system. These are:

1. The arrangement of marriage
2. The betrothal ceremony
3. The preparation period between the betrothal and the wedding
4. The wedding ceremony
5. The wedding feast

2. The arrangement of marriage was the first custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- The arrangement, called the *Shiddukhin*, was the first step in the process and refers to the arrangements that were made prior to the legal betrothal.¹

- The arrangement was the time of matchmaking, often decided upon between the father of the groom and the father of the bride. Often, the couple did not know each other before the arrangement. In some cases, they would not have even *seen* each other before the betrothal ceremony.²
- Though this was the case, the bride-to-be was normally required to approve the marriage before the families agreed to a betrothal ceremony.³
- Once the selection had been made, the parents prepared the *ketubah*. The *ketubah* was normally a written contract that depicted the terms and conditions of the marriage arrangement, the price to be paid by the groom, the responsibilities and obligations of both parties, and the dowry to be offered by the bride.⁴

3. The betrothal ceremony was the second custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- Once the arrangement was made and the *ketubah* agreed to by both parties, the couple would move on to the betrothal (*eyrusin*) ceremony.
- To prepare for this, the bride and groom would take part separately in a ritual immersion in water, which symbolized a spiritual cleansing.⁵ The ceremony would include vows promising to be married, the exchange of rings or something else of value, and the sealing of the agreement by sharing a cup of wine.⁶
- After this ceremony, the couple was legally married even though they did not live in the same house or have sexual relations.
- Instead, the groom and bride maintained separate dwelling places, both remaining under their fathers' roofs.⁷
- Because a betrothed couple was legally married, a separation or parting of ways for any reason would require a legal divorce.
- The Jews used to refer to the act of betrothal as "taking a wife" by using a form of a Hebrew word that meant "purchase." The betrothal ceremony was considered an act of purchasing or acquiring a wife for the purpose of marriage.⁸
- The betrothal ceremony would end with a feast to celebrate the occasion, and following the feast, each party would return to his or her parent's house.⁹

4. The preparation period was the third custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- During the betrothal period, the groom remained at his father's home and prepared a place for the two to live. This was normally done by adding a room to his father's house.
- While the groom was busy building, the bride was preparing herself for the upcoming wedding. This usually involved three things.
- First, the bride was observed for her purity. This custom required at least a full nine months to pass in order to ensure that the bride was not pregnant and to attempt to assure that she was a virgin.¹⁰

- Second, the bride consecrated herself. She examined everything in her life and changed whatever was necessary in order to be ready for the holy covenant of marriage.¹¹ In fact, Jewish leaders began to use the term *mekadesh* (consecrated) for the act of betrothal. During the betrothal ceremony, the groom would often say to his bride that you are *mekudeshet* (consecrated) unto me.¹² Therefore, the bride made sure that she was totally set apart from all other relationships and activities and that she was completely separated for her groom.
- Third, the bride made her own wedding garments. Ancient Jewish women did not have the luxury of going to the nearest bridal shop and purchasing a premade dress. They had to spend hours and hours making their wedding garments and adorning them with the special touches to make them beautiful.¹³

5. The wedding ceremony was the fourth custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- Toward the end of the yearlong betrothal period, the bride waited with great expectancy for the groom to come and for the ceremony to take place. Even late in the evening, the bride and her wedding party would keep their oil lamps burning in case it was time for the wedding to take place.
- The day of the ceremony was a surprise to both the groom and the bride.¹⁴ When the bridegroom was asked the date of the wedding, he could only say something like, "No man knows except my father."¹⁵
- When the time was right, the groom's father would issue the approval for the ceremony to begin. The groom and his wedding party would leave the groom's house to go get his bride. The friends of the bridegroom would shout, "Behold, the bridegroom comes!" and then they would blow the shofar. The groomsmen would lead the wedding party through the streets and bring the bride back to the groom's home where the wedding canopy or *huppah* awaited.
- The wedding ceremony, or the *nissuin*, was performed under the *huppah*. The vows made during the betrothal ceremony were completed in the marriage ceremony. The ceremony was once again sealed with a cup of wine to indicate the great joy that would accompany the festive celebration. After the ceremony, the couple consummated the marriage with sexual relations and lived together as husband and wife from that point forward.¹⁶

6. The wedding feast was the fifth custom of the ancient Jewish wedding system.

- The wedding feast was the highlight of the wedding ceremony. It was much more extensive than what Westerners are accustomed to today. It consisted of seven full days of food, music, dance, and celebration.¹⁷
- The primary purpose of the wedding feast was to honor the groom. All of the guests were expected to compose poems or sing songs to the groom.

- Now that the blessed bridegroom had received a wife, he was supposed to display her beauty and grace to all who were present.
- To honor the groom, the bride would put on her beautiful wedding garments that she made during her year of preparation and would display her beauty to the bridegroom's friends, and the attendees, in return, would show her respect and admiration.¹⁸
- Following the wedding feast, the bridegroom and the bride would live together as husband and wife for the remainder of their lives.

The Jewish Wedding System and the Bride of Christ

The parallels between the ancient Jewish wedding system and the wedding between Jesus and His bride are amazing.

1. Jesus' first coming was like the arrangement of marriage in the Jewish wedding system.

- If you are a born-again believer, you are the recipient of an arranged marriage. Your heavenly Father so loved the world that He arranged a marriage between His Son and mankind.
- He sent Jesus to explain the terms and conditions of a life with Him. He offered a heavenly *ketubah*, or marriage contract, to describe what marriage to Him would include.
- Jesus, the Bridegroom, gave His life on the cross to purchase His bride.
- The heavenly Father also sent His matchmaker, the Holy Spirit, to invite us to become the bride of Christ by saying "yes" to His invitation.

2. Every born-again believer is betrothed to Jesus as His bride.

- For all who have said "yes" to the Holy Spirit's invitation to be the bride of Christ, a betrothal ceremony has taken place. Paul said, "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Cor. 11:2).
- As His betrothed bride, we have also partaken of a ritual bath similar to an ancient Jewish bride. Our baptism symbolizes our spiritual cleansing, our separation unto our Husband, and our vow to be prepared for our future wedding.
- When we entered the New Covenant with Jesus, we exchanged vows with Him as our Husband and we sealed the agreement with a cup of communion wine.¹⁹ In fact, each time we partake of the bread and the wine, we look back with joy to our betrothal ceremony and, at the same time, look forward to our upcoming wedding.

3. While we wait for the Bridegroom to return, we live in the period of preparation.

- Jesus has gone back to His Father's house to prepare a place for us. Jesus said:

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:3).

- We are called to wait expectantly for His return, to make ourselves ready, to prepare our wedding garments, and to be consecrated as we look forward to our life together with our Bridegroom, as seen in these Scriptures:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless (Eph. 5:25-27).

But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?" And the man was speechless (Matt. 22:11-12).

And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut (Matt. 25:10).

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God" (Rev 19:7-9).

4. The preparation period is coming to an end and the wedding celebration will take place soon.

- Sometime in the near future, we expect the Father to say to His Son, "Go and get Your bride. Consummate your marriage."
- At that time, the friends of the Bridegroom will be shouting, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes," the shofar will sound, and the bride will be caught up in the air to be with Him.

- The Bible says:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

- The wedding ceremony will be held under the *huppah* and the marriage supper of the Lamb will commence. Look at these Scriptures:

In that day [in the Millennial Kingdom] the Branch of the LORD [Jesus] will be beautiful and glorious....then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion [in Jerusalem] and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; *for over all the glory will be a canopy [chuppah]* (Isa. 4:2-5).

Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God" (Rev. 19:9).

The Days of Elijah

1. The question that naturally arises is, "Will we be ready when He comes?"

- Soon the midnight shout *will* come and the trumpet of God *will* sound, calling the bride who *has made herself ready* to go with her Bridegroom.
- When this happens, will we be living in expectancy with sufficient oil in our lamps (Matt. 25:8-10)?
- Will we have made our wedding garments (Rev. 19:8)? Will we have made ourselves ready (Rev. 19:7)?
- Will we be a worthy bride for Jesus (Rev. 3:4)?

2. The good news is that the Holy Spirit is moving throughout the earth to prepare a worthy bride for Jesus.

- The book of Malachi asks the question, "Who can endure the day of His coming?" (Mal. 3:2). Malachi is referring to Jesus' second coming. Because Jesus will come as a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap, Malachi wants to know who can survive this intense period of history.
- As troubling as this sounds, Malachi offers us some good news. He tells us that God will send a messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord's return (Mal. 3:1-5).
- Later in the book, Malachi reveals that this messenger is Elijah. He will come before the great and terrible Day of the Lord to turn people back

to God—much like Elijah did in his confrontation with the prophets of Baal (Mal. 4:4-6; 1 Kings 18).

- At Jesus' first coming, John the Baptist partially fulfilled Malachi's prophecy (Matt. 17:10-13). John, operating in the spirit and power of Elijah, functioned as a friend of the Bridegroom and was a forerunner who prepared the way for Jesus' earthly ministry. The Bible says about John:

It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

3. We live in the days of Elijah when God is raising up forerunners to prepare the bride of Christ for the Lord's return.

- Like Elisha and John the Baptist, who were anointed with the spirit of Elijah (2 Kings 2:9), these forerunners will also be anointed with the "spirit and power of Elijah" to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord."
- In the days preceding the second coming, the Holy Spirit is unlocking ancient mysteries of the bride of Christ and revealing these secrets to forerunners who will be used to prepare the bride of Christ.
- These modern-day John the Baptists will function as "friends of the bridegroom" (John 3:29; Matt. 9:15) to prepare a worthy bride for Jesus.

By God's grace, our willing cooperation, and receiving from ministries who function as friends of the Bridegroom, we can be made ready as a worthy bride for Jesus. Just as an ancient Jewish bride had to make herself ready for her wedding, the Holy Spirit is calling us to make ourselves ready for our Bridegroom.

Notes

1. Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs* (Baltimore, MD: Messianic Jewish Publications, 1996), pp.48.
2. Mendell Lewittes, *Jewish Marriage, Rabbinic Law, Legend, and Custom* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994), pp. 41.
3. Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, pp.49.
4. Ibid, pp. 49, 51-56.
5. Ibid. pp.49.
6. Ibid. pp. 50.

7. Ibid. pp. 50.
8. Lewittes, *Jewish Marriage, Rabbinic Law, Legend, and Custom*, pp. 67.
9. Ibid. pp. 73.
10. Ariel Ministries, www.ariel.org/ffruit.htm#top, *The Jewish Wedding System and the Bride of Christ*, referenced May 12, 2009.
11. Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, pp. 51.
12. Lewittes, *Jewish Marriage, Rabbinic Law, Legend, and Custom*, pp. 67
13. Lewittes, *Jewish Marriage, Rabbinic Law, Legend, and Custom*, pp. 83-84.
14. Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, pp.51.
15. John Hagee, *The Final Dawn Over Jerusalem* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), pp.184.
16. Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, pp.52.
17. Ibid, pp. 52.
18. Hagee, *The Final Dawn Over Jerusalem*, pp. 186.
19. See my book *Understanding Your Inheritance in Christ* for more details of our covenant relationship with Jesus.

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. In many aspects, the Jewish wedding system is very similar to our relationship with Jesus and His second coming.
- _____ 2. In the days that Jesus walked the earth, very few Jewish people entered into an arranged marriage.
- _____ 3. There are two customs that comprise the Jewish wedding system.
- _____ 4. Jesus' first coming was like the arrangement of marriage in the Jewish wedding system.
- _____ 5. While we wait for the Bridegroom to return, we live in the period of preparation.
- _____ 6. The betrothal ceremony closely parallels the events surrounding the Lord's second coming.
- _____ 7. The betrothal ceremony is also called the time of matchmaking.
- _____ 8. The *ketubah* was a written contract that depicted the terms and conditions of the marriage arrangement.
- _____ 9. During the preparation period, the groom went to his father's house to prepare a place for the couple to live while the bride waited patiently for him with no real duties to perform.
- _____ 10. Once a couple was betrothed, they were legally married and could consummate the marriage and live as husband and wife.

Fill in the Blank

11. The _____ took place after the approximate year-long betrothal period.
12. When we are _____, we are betrothed to Jesus as His bride.
13. While we wait for the Bridegroom to return, we live in the period of _____.
14. The wedding ceremony was performed under a canopy called a _____.

15. As we compare the Jewish wedding system to the bride of Christ, the _____ is the heavenly matchmaker.

From the list to your right, choose the corresponding letter that matches the Scripture reference on the left.

- _____ 16. 2 Cor. 11:2
- _____ 17. Matt. 22:1-14
- _____ 18. Matt. 25:1-13
- _____ 19. Rev. 19:7-9
- _____ 20. Mal. 4:4-6

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. Behold, the Bridegroom comes.
- b. I am going to send you Elijah.
- c. The bride will make herself ready.
- d. Believers are betrothed to Jesus.
- e. Wedding clothes are needed for the marriage supper.

Session 3

Unrelenting Love

This session covers:

- The power of God's love
- The Father's love for the Son
- The Father's love for the bride
- The Bridegroom's love for His bride

This session corresponds to:

- Session 3 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

The Power of God's Love

1. We respond in love when we know and experience love from another.

- The Scriptures describe a very powerful principle of unconditional love. This simple yet profound truth is found in 1 John 4:19: "We love, because He first loved us."
- Love comes naturally when we *know* that we are loved.
- This principle applies to our relationships with others, but *especially* to our relationship with God.

2. The heavenly Father loves us greatly.

- God's great love for us is expressed in 1 John 4:16-19. Read it in *The Living Bible Translation*:

We know how much God loves us because we have felt his love and because we believe him when he tells us that he loves us dearly. God is love, and anyone who lives in love is living with God and God is living in him. And as we

live with Christ, our love grows more perfect and complete; so we will not be ashamed and embarrassed at the day of judgment, but can face him with confidence and joy because he loves us and we love him too. We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us. *So you see, our love for him comes as a result of his loving us first* (1 John 4:16-19, TLB).

- God's perfect love casts out all fear. God loves us so much that we don't have to fear the day of judgment.
- God is love, and the more we know and experience God's love for us, the more we love Him in return.
- When we think about the future, we can have joy and confidence because God loves us, wants the best for us, and desires an intimate relationship with us.

3. Jesus also loves us with great passion.

- Jesus, our Bridegroom King, also loves us passionately, longs to be with us, and waits eagerly for our relationship with Him to be eternally consummated.
- Jesus is not waiting in heaven with anger, looking forward to judgment day so that he can punish us for every sin and shortcoming. Rather, He is longingly waiting in heaven to be united with us in much greater intimacy.
- Jesus enjoys and desires us, and His love is unrelenting and unchanging.
- When we experience Jesus' personal affection for us, our heart is awakened and we begin to love Him in return. When we are secure and confident in God's love for us, loving Jesus is our natural response.
- With this foundation of love in our hearts, our confidence grows, and we can willingly submit to His preparation process. Our love for Jesus matures until "many waters cannot quench it, nor will rivers overflow it" (Song. 8:7).

4. To mature as a worthy bride, we must be rooted in God's love.

- For us to be transformed into a worthy bride, we will likely go through a preparation period that will require major changes in our hearts and lifestyles.
- Because some of these dealings of God will be intense, we need to be confident in God's unrelenting love for us.
- In fact, the most important key to making ourselves ready as a worthy bride is knowing God's love at a deep level (Rev. 19:7; Eph. 3:16-19). Therefore, to grow in our love for Jesus as a Bridegroom, we must grow in the knowledge of God's love.

- That is why, in this session, we will examine God's love from the following three perspectives:
 1. The Father's love for the Son
 2. The Father's love for the bride
 3. The Son's love for His bride

The Father's Love for the Son

1. The Father loves Jesus with burning passion and fervent pleasure.

- John the Baptist said, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand" (John 3:35).
- The Father's love for the Son is not an obligatory, distant love with little emotion. Rather, the Father loves the Son with great fervency.
- He loves Him because Jesus did not regard equality with the Father as something to be grasped, but willingly emptied Himself, left the glory of heaven to become a bond-servant, and died on the cross for the sins of mankind (Phil. 2:5-11).
- The Father loves the Son because of His beauty, majesty, and glory. As Jesus was transfigured on the mountain before Peter, James, and John, His face shone like the sun and His garments became white as light. As the three men looked on in amazement, the Father spoke these words from heaven, "This is My *beloved* Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!" (Matt. 17:5). You can hear in His words the voice of a proud dad speaking over his cherished son. Jesus is the Father's dearly beloved.
- Speaking of His love for Jesus, the Father said, "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights" (Isa. 42:1).
- The Father's love for the Son is much more than a disciplined decision or a cold obligation. Deep within His soul, the Father loves Jesus with burning passion and fervent pleasure.

2. The Father's love for the Son stems from the unique intimacy they enjoy.

- The Father loves the Son because their partnership has existed in eternity past and will continue into eternity future. Jesus revealed this when He prayed, "For You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). While praying this, Jesus must have reflected on their co-existence as the eternal God, working together as they created the heavens and the earth.
- Jesus must have recalled their close friendship as they progressively redeemed mankind. He must have focused on their joint decision for the Son to leave heaven to become the Savior of the world.
- The only begotten Son and the eternal Father are closer than any two on earth.
- Their understanding of one another is unique.

- Their relationship is deeper than anything we can imagine. Notice how Jesus described their intimate relationship: "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27).
- Their intimacy with one another is unprecedented—almost indescribable.

3. Because of the Father's great love for the Son, He is committed to giving Jesus a worthy bride.

- The Father is committed to giving Jesus a bride who loves Him with the same love that the Father has for Him (John 17:26).
- Out of the Father's great love for His Son, He is determined to give Him a wife worthy of His majestic splendor and great sacrifice.
- Jesus paid the ultimate price to redeem mankind from sin and darkness. He voluntarily left the glory of heaven, wrapped Himself in human flesh, lived a sinless life, and died on a cross. Because of the price that Jesus paid, the Father will not relent until He can present Jesus with a bride who is worthy of His great love and sacrifice.
- We see this so clearly in the parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-14). This parable describes a father of royal lineage giving a wedding feast for his son. The father, who loves his son dearly, was determined to have worthy participants at his son's wedding celebration.
- Only those who said "yes" to the invitation were allowed to enter the wedding hall. However, saying "yes" was not enough. Only those who put on wedding clothes were allowed to remain and enjoy the celebration as worthy participants in the marriage of his son.
- In the same way, out of love for His Son, the Father will only give Jesus the very best. He will only give Him a bride who is worthy of Him.

The Father's Love for the Bride

1. The Father loves us just as much as He loves Jesus.

- The most familiar verse in the Bible, John 3:16, is just as true today as when we first learned it: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."
- We just saw the depth of the Father's love for the Son. But Jesus said that the Father loves us just as much as He loves Jesus.
- Jesus prayed, "That the world may know that You sent Me, and *loved them, even as You have loved Me*" (John 17:23). Did you catch that? Jesus said that the Father loves us just as much as He loves Jesus. Amazing!

2. The Father loves us so much that it pleased Him to crush His Son.

- The Prophet Isaiah illustrates the magnitude of the Father's love for His people when he foretold Jesus' death on the cross. Isaiah stated,

"But the LORD [the heavenly Father] was pleased to crush Him [Jesus], putting Him to grief" (Isa. 53:10).

- It *pleased* the Father to crush His only begotten Son—the One He loves so dearly—because of His great love for us.
- It pleased the Father to allow Jesus to become a man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3).
- It pleased the Father to allow Jesus to be despised by men (Isa. 53:3).
- It pleased the Father for His beloved Son to bear our grief, sorrow, pain, and sickness (Isa. 53:4-5).
- It pleased the Father for the Son to become a guilt offering for our sins (Isa. 53:10).
- Why? Because God loves us so much. It pleased the Father to allow these horrible things to happen to His beloved Son because of His deep love for us.

3. The Father delights and rejoices in us.

- Isaiah said:

You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. It will no longer be said to you, "forsaken," nor to your land will it any longer be said, "desolate"; but you will be called, "My delight is in her," and your land, "married"; for the LORD delights in you, and to Him your land will be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you (Isa. 62:3-5).

- Even though this passage was written to Israel, we know that the Father feels the same way about the Gentile Bride.
- God delights and rejoices in us as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.
- In his book, *The Seven Longings of the Human Heart*, Mike Bickle expands upon this idea:

Our culture does not understand a God who enjoys people. God has been portrayed in a variety of ways, but usually as a grumpy old man who looks down stiffly on fun-loving humans. While the Bible gives us an accurate picture of God as righteous Judge of the Earth, most people have misinterpreted this and pictured God as being the God of Punishment. They've concentrated on the judgment while ignoring the righteousness that demands it. Many believers are not entirely sure that God ever even thinks of them, and figure if He does, He's probably disappointed, if not downright angry. Nothing could be further from the truth. What we must lay hold of is that God rejoices over us exactly like a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.¹

- God enjoys us! He's not up in heaven waiting to catch us in a sin so He can zap us. God is love. Understanding the Father's love for us gives us great confidence to surrender to Him and make ourselves ready.

4. Luke 15 presents three parables about the Father's unconditional love for us.

- The parable of the lost sheep shows that the Father is a good shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to go after the one who is wayward. When he finds it, he puts it on his shoulders, brings it home, and those around him rejoice and celebrate its return.
- The parable of the lost coin describes one who has lost a coin and searches until they find it (Luke 15:8-10).
- Neither parable suggests that the Father is mad or angry. Instead, both parables speak of the unrelenting love that God has for His people.
- The third parable describes the Father's love in greater detail (Luke 15:11-32). In this parable, a young man squanders his inheritance but finally comes to his senses and returns home. Not expecting the same privileges he had before, he is surprised when his father runs to him, embraces him, and kisses him. The father then gives him the best robe, puts a ring on his hand, sandals on his feet, and kills the fattened calf so the family can feast together with great joy.
- What a wonderful picture of our heavenly Father's attitude toward us! Our Father is not waiting to rebuke us. He is there to put His robe of righteousness around our shoulders and invite us back home.
- We might believe that our failures are too terrible to allow us to feast in His house. But the Father feels differently. He invites us to celebrate and feast with Him at His banquet.

5. The Father is our greatest encourager.

- The Bible says, "For God [the Father] did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17). The Father loves us unconditionally. Jesus did not come to pour His wrath out on us—He came to save us.
- Father is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness, and steadfast in His faithfulness (Ex. 34:5-6).
- In Isaiah 62:3-5, God does not call Israel forsaken but delighted in. He does not call them desolate but married. Even though their past had been characterized by apathy and compromise, He said that Israel will be a crown of beauty and a royal diadem in His hand.
- In the New Testament, Paul wrote, "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus" (Rom. 15:5). The Father is the One who "gives...encouragement."
- No matter what trial you are encountering or what difficult place you find yourself in, know that your Father is encouraging you from heaven, reassuring you that you are His and that you can do it!

6. The Father loves to adorn us with spiritual beauty.

- Ezekiel 16 illustrates how the Father beautifies His children. When Jerusalem was abandoned at birth, the Lord took notice and spoke life into her. He caused her to multiply like the plants of the field.
- When it came time for love, He covered her nakedness and entered into a covenant with her that she might become His. He washed her, anointed her, and beautifully adorned her.
- He said to her, "So you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you" (Ezek. 16:13-14).
- As the story goes, even though Israel turned away from God's love, the Lord promised to remember, forgive, and restore (Ezek. 16:60-63). In the same way, our heavenly Father loves to adorn us with beauty.
- Remember the story of Eliezer searching for a bride for Isaac (Gen. 24)? Abraham sent Eliezer with gifts for Isaac's future wife. The Bible says that he took ten camels loaded with a "variety of good things," including a gold ring and bracelets, other articles of gold and silver, and clothing (Gen. 24:10). No doubt Rebekah came to Isaac wearing these gifts.
- An interesting observation revolves around the ten camels Abraham sent with his servant. Quite possibly, Eliezer rode one camel while the others carried the father's gifts. Perhaps this alludes to the nine gifts of the Spirit and the nine fruits of the Spirit that adorn us with spiritual beauty (Cor. 12:8-10; Gal. 5:22-23).
- In His love, our Father takes us in our immaturity, loves us, and adorns us with great beauty for our Bridegroom.

7. The Father loves us enough to discipline us when we veer off track.

- Through Hosea, the Lord told Israel that in spite of their spiritual harlotry, they will come trembling to the Lord in the last days and will call the Lord their Husband (Hos. 2:16). In this powerful message to Israel, there is also an encouraging word to all who follow Jesus.
- When the Lord spoke this to Hosea, Israel was enjoying a time of prosperity and growth, but their hearts had been seduced into moral corruption and spiritual adultery. The people were enmeshed in the sinful culture of the land. They had embraced Baal worship, along with its cult prostitution and other sensual practices.
- Israel was "playing the harlot" and had forgotten the Lord. It was in this context that the Father told Hosea, whose name means "salvation"², to marry a prostitute named Gomer as a prophetic demonstration of Israel's unfaithfulness.
- Just as Hosea had to marry Gomer, Jesus is betrothed to us while we are a spiritual harlot, entangled in the world and in bondage to sin.
- Just like the message of Hosea, the Father will not allow us to remain in this condition. He loves us too much. As Hosea 2 describes, the Lord will hedge us in from other lovers who provide us with sustenance and pleasures (Hos. 2:2-7).

- He will lead us to the wilderness where He will speak kindly to us (Hos. 2:11-14). There, we will begin to sing as in the days of our youth, separate from idolatry, and call Jesus our Husband (Hos. 2:15-23).
- In this powerful message, we once again see the Father's determined love for His children. He will not leave us in our current condition. He will transform us through His loving discipline so that we can be a worthy bride for His beloved Son.

8. In our journey of becoming a worthy bride, we must be confident in the Father's love for us.

- Why? Because we have to embrace our own cross to be transformed and made worthy. Jesus said, "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:38).
- As we take up our cross, we will go through similar experiences as Jesus. We will go through seasons where we are despised and forsaken by men. At times, we will feel abandoned by God and encounter intense spiritual warfare.
- As we experience the fellowship of Jesus' sufferings, we will wonder if God loves us, cares for us, or even knows we exist.
- But, if we are rooted and grounded in the Father's love, we will know with certainty that He has not forgotten or abandoned us. Instead, we will know that in His great love, He is taking us through a season of preparation.

The Bridegroom's Love for His Bride

1. Whereas the Father has affection for us as His children, Jesus is passionate for us as His betrothed bride.

- The author of Hebrews wrote that Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before Him" (Heb. 12:2). Certainly, the joy awaiting Him was multifaceted; however, much of His joy centered on purchasing a bride with His very own blood from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.
- Jesus said, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you" (John 15:9). Amazingly, Jesus loves us with the same love the Father has for Him.
- Now, as He waits for His bride to make herself ready, Jesus longs to have greater intimacy and partnership with us. He is lovesick for us.
- With great emotion and passion, He desires us. Jesus is not a stoic who waits passively in heaven, indifferent to His wedding day. He is a passionate Bridegroom who longs to be joined to His bride for all eternity.

2. The Song of Solomon reveals Jesus' emotions for us in a unique way.

- More than a natural romance between Solomon and the Shulammite maiden, the Song of Solomon is an allegory of the bride of Christ's

journey into deep intimacy and partnership with Jesus, her beloved Bridegroom.

- As we read through this eight-chapter love song, we see the passionate love that Jesus has for us and how we are to respond to His love. Jesus says to His bride:

You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you....You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! (Song. 4:7-10, RSV).

- Seeing these verses, we can imagine how Jesus feels about us. When we express our love for Him, it touches Him deeply.
- Even a glance of our eyes toward Him ravishes His heart. The word "ravish" means to overwhelm with deep and pleasurable feelings or emotions. As a maturing bride, when we express our love for Jesus, He is moved deeply with almost overwhelming emotion. Jesus is passionately in love with us.
- As the bride matures, she says, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me" (Song. 7:10). In her maturity, she knows that her Bridegroom greatly desires her. It is not too hard imagining Jesus desiring His *mature* bride. What is much harder to comprehend is that He loves us deeply even in our *immaturity*.
- For example, at the beginning of her journey toward mature love, she says, "I am black but lovely" (Song. 1:5). She sees the darkness of her heart, but she knows that she was still lovely to her Bridegroom.
- The Bridegroom sees her differently than she even sees herself. He describes her as "most beautiful among women" and even compares her to Pharaoh's choice mares (Song. 1:8).
- In those days, Egypt had the best chariots pulled by the strongest and most beautiful horses. Pharaoh's horses were the top of the line. In this statement, the Bridegroom was saying that his bride was unique, like the best horse in the stable.
- He also calls her beautiful in multiple passages (Song. 1:15, 2:10, 2:13, 4:1, 4:7, 4:10, 6:1, 7:1, 7:6).
- So, whether we are at the beginning of our journey or further along in the process, Jesus is passionately in love with us.

3. Jesus longs to be intimate with us.

- The bride says, "Draw me after you and let us run together! The king has brought me into his chambers" (Song. 1:4). In her request to have intimacy and partnership with the King, notice that he immediately brings her into his chambers—to the place of intimacy.
- Jesus wants to be intimate with us. Not like the physical intimacy that is shared between husband and wife. *Spiritual* intimacy. He wants us to be one with the Word and the Spirit.

- Later in the song, the King takes her to the place of intimacy again. He brings her to the banquet hall, where they feast together to satisfy their lovesickness (Song. 2:4-5).
- In the same fashion, Jesus desires intimacy with us. He is not put off by our immaturity. He longs for time with us. He wants to hear our voice. He yearns for us to draw close so that He can draw near to us.

4. Jesus yearns for His bride to mature in love.

- Though Jesus loves us fervently in our immaturity, He doesn't want us to remain immature. He wants an equally-yoked bride who loves Him like He loves her.
- As the bride matures in love, the Bridegroom once again expresses His love for her (Song. 4:1-15). But this time, He not only speaks of her beauty, He also speaks of how *her love* moves Him to love her more deeply (Song. 4:7-10).
- He tells her that she ravishes His heart, and He says, "How beautiful is *your love*, my sister, my bride!" (Song. 4:10). *As we mature, both His love for us and our love for Him deepens.*
- We see this cycle repeated as the journey toward maturity continues. The King initiates a new dimension of love, and the bride responds to His advance. With each season, His love for her deepens, and her love for Him matures.
- Finally, toward the end of the book, we see how her mature love is characterized: "Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it" (Song. 8:6-7).

We are in the hands of a Father who loves His only begotten Son so much that He is determined to prepare a worthy bride for Him. We are in the hands of a Father who loves us without condition. And we are in the hands of a Bridegroom God who is waiting on us, longing to be united face to face. As the Son waits for the Father to give the signal to come and take us to the marriage supper of the Lamb, we can rest in the fact that we are sought after, loved, and longed for by the Lord of the universe.

Notes

1. Mike Bickle, *The Seven Longings of the Human Heart* (Kansas City, MO: Forerunner Books, 2006), p. 28.
2. *The Online Bible Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* (Ontario, Canada: Woodside Bible Fellowship and the Institute for Creation Research, 1993), s.v. "Howshea`," referenced from PC Study Bible v3.2 (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. We love Jesus because He first loved us.
- _____ 2. Love comes naturally when we *know* that we are loved.
- _____ 3. To mature as a worthy bride, we must be rooted in God's love.
- _____ 4. The heavenly Father loves us almost as much as He loves Jesus.
- _____ 5. The heavenly Father is our greatest encourager.
- _____ 6. Even though the glorified Jesus does not love with great emotion, He is still committed to us as His betrothed bride.
- _____ 7. Jesus longs to be intimate with His bride.
- _____ 8. Because the love between the Father and the Son is a great mystery and is difficult to comprehend, the Bible does not describe this relationship in great detail.
- _____ 9. Because of His love, the Father is determined to give Jesus a worthy bride.
- _____ 10. The Father loves us so much that it pleased Him to crush His Son.

Fill in the Blank

11. As we _____, Jesus' love for us and our love for Him deepens.
12. The Father loves us enough to _____ us when we veer off track.
13. Because of the Father's great love for the Son, He is committed to giving Jesus a _____.
14. The Father is committed to giving Jesus a bride who _____ Him with the _____ love that the Father has for Him (John 17:26).
15. God's love for us never ceases, for it is _____.

Each of the following phrases pertains to one of the three dimensions of God's unrelenting love. Place an "A" beside the ones that apply to the Father's love for the Son, a "B" next to the ones that apply to Father's love for the bride, and a "C" next to the ones that apply to the Son's love for the bride.

- _____ 16. Loves us as much as He loves Jesus
- _____ 17. Is committed to giving Jesus a worthy bride
- _____ 18. Was pleased to crush Jesus on the cross
- _____ 19. Longs to be with us as His bride
- _____ 20. Loves to adorn us with spiritual beauty

Session 4

Esther and the Bride of Christ

This session covers:

- Esther as a picture of the end-time bride
- The story of Esther
- The types and shadows in the book of Esther
- The bride of Christ in the end times

This session corresponds to:

- Session 4 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

A Picture of the End-Time Bride

1. The book of Esther is a magnificent allegory that describes the end-time bride of Christ.

- Esther is more than an amazing story of a young Jewish girl who saved her people. This book reveals the mighty call that the Lord has granted to His end-time bride, the rewards of pursuing this glorious relationship, and the preparation that is required to partner with Jesus in the end times.
- In this session and the next, we will use the book of Esther as the lens through which to view the call, purpose, preparation, position, and role of the end-time bride of Christ.

2. Before we begin, we need to understand a few important truths about allegorical interpretations.

- An allegory is a story in which people, things, and events have a hidden or symbolic meaning. Allego-

ries are often used for teaching or explaining moral principles and spiritual truths.

- The word *allegory* is used only once in the Bible: when Paul says that Hagar and Sarah “are an allegory” of the old covenant and the new covenant (Gal. 4:23-24, KJV).
- Despite only being mentioned by name once, allegories abound in Scripture. Paul, for example, showed that the marriage relationship was a picture of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-32). And most scholars believe that the Song of Solomon is an allegory of Jesus and His bride.
- The primary way to interpret the Bible is through the historical grammatical approach that takes Scripture at face value. Even so, allegories can be very helpful in interpreting the Scriptures as they make complex truths simpler to understand, but you need to be cautious when interpreting them, lest you add meaning to God’s Word that was never intended.
- Whenever we interpret a passage allegorically, however, we must make sure that the truth we are establishing is clearly revealed elsewhere in the Bible.
- Because characters in an allegory are often filled with flaws and sinful behavior, they are never a perfect representation of spiritual truths or of the Lord Himself.
- For example, in the book of Esther, King Ahasuerus is an unrestrained, self-indulgent, immoral world ruler who sought pleasure at any cost. He is a poor moral representation of King Jesus.
- However, when you disregard King Ahasuerus’ character flaws and instead view him simply as a king who is searching for a bride, he becomes a symbol of Jesus’ quest to find a worthy bride.

The Story of Esther

1. The book of Esther begins with King Ahasuerus hosting two banquets.

- In 483 B.C., after Persia overthrew Babylon and before many of the deported Jews had returned to the land of Judah, King Ahasuerus, the king of Persia, gave a banquet lasting 180 days—a full six months—for the leaders of the 127 provinces of his kingdom.
- The king used this lengthy feast with his leaders to plan an upcoming invasion of Greece.
- At the end of the 180 day banquet, Ahasuerus gave another banquet for all of the people who lived in the capital city of Susa.
- On the seventh and last day of this banquet, Ahasuerus called his bride, Queen Vashti, to come before the princes and all the people to display her beauty.
- She refused and the king was enraged. Because of her rebellion, Ahasuerus issued an unbreakable edict that prohibited Vashti from ever coming into his presence again, stipulating that her royal position be given to another “more worthy than she” (Est. 1:19).

2. King Ahasuerus searched for a bride more worthy than Vashti.

- After some time passes and his anger subsides, Ahasuerus began searching for a new bride—one more worthy than Vashti.
- His attendants looked throughout the land for beautiful young virgins to bring to Susa so that the next queen might be selected from among them.
- As the king's law dictated, each of the candidates was required to go through 12 months of preparation: six months of myrrh baths and six months of spices and cosmetics.
- When the preparation was complete, each young girl would be evaluated by the king, and the one who pleased him the most would be chosen as his queen.
- Esther, a Jew, was one of the candidates. Mordecai, her uncle who raised her after her parents died, carefully watched over Esther during the preparation process.
- In the king's harem, Esther had great favor with Hegai, the king's eunuch, and he gave her the best that the palace had to offer.
- After completing the 12 month preparation process, Esther, along with the other virgins, went in for her night with the king.
- After this evaluation, each young lady was sent to a second harem to wait and see if she had pleased the king. She would not appear before the king again unless he took pleasure in her and requested her by name.
- As the storyline goes, Esther pleased the king so much that he chose her as his queen.

3. Esther rescued the Jews from certain annihilation.

- Some time later, Ahasuerus promoted Haman—who was from the royal family of the Amalekites, Israel's ancient enemy—to second in command.
- To honor Haman, the king required that everyone in the kingdom bow before Haman and pay homage to him.
- Mordecai, an observant Jew, would not bow down to him. Thus, Haman detested Mordecai and initiated a plot to kill him—and all of his people, the Jews.
- Haman sent a letter to all the provinces authorizing the people to kill all of the Jews in the land.
- As you would expect, the Jews were terrified and began to cry out for deliverance.
- Mordecai asked Esther to intercede to the king for the Jews' deliverance.
- Though she did not recognize the threat at first, Esther finally realized what was at stake. If she did not act, her people would be annihilated. Perhaps she had "attained royalty for such a time as this" (Est. 4:14).
- Determined to act, yet knowing the consequences of not receiving the king's favor, Esther uttered her now-famous words, "If I perish, I perish" (Est. 4:16).

- After a three-day fast, Esther approached the king to request that he spare the Jews. To her great relief, Ahasuerus extended his golden scepter, asked what was troubling Esther, and granted her up to half his kingdom.
- Esther's intercession ultimately led to deliverance for the Jews and death for Haman and his 10 sons.

4. The Jews celebrated their deliverance and were exalted in the land.

- Following Haman's and his 10 sons' death, Mordecai was placed over Haman's house, many of the Persians converted to Judaism, and dread of the Jews fell upon the leaders of the kingdom.
- Filled with joy and gladness, the Jews feasted and celebrated their great victory. Because of Esther, the Jews escaped certain annihilation and were exalted in the land.
- The book ends with this enlightening verse:

For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews and in favor with his many kinsmen, one who sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation (Est. 10:3).

- God used Esther in unprecedented ways to deliver the Jews from the wicked schemes of the enemy.

The Types and Shadows in the Book of Esther

A type or shadow is a person, thing, or event that symbolizes something else, especially something that is expected to take place in the future. The following is a brief description of the six main characters in the book of Esther and how they foreshadow the end-time Bride of Christ.

1. King Ahasuerus represents Jesus.

- Though Ahasuerus is far from a perfect type of Him, Jesus, like Ahasuerus, is a King, and He will rule a worldwide kingdom.
- Jesus will also search for a worthy bride to be His queen and He will display her beauty to the world.

2. Vashti represents that part in all of us that is independent, self-willed, rebellious, and unwilling to submit to authority.

- Vashti means beautiful woman or one who is desired.¹ Vashti was so beautiful that King Ahasuerus wanted to display her beauty to everyone in his worldwide empire.

- Vashti was of royal blood. She was a Persian princess by birth, identified by some as the daughter of King Alyattes of Lydia.²
- Vashti held all of the right credentials to be queen; she came from a royal line and was very beautiful. But she was also independent, self-willed, rebellious, and refused to submit to authority.
- When we are born again, all of us are like Vashti. We are betrothed to Christ as His bride and are partakers of a royal bloodline, but we have an independent, self-willed nature that has not been broken by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 11:2; 1 Peter 2:9).
- For those who want to be a worthy bride like Esther, we must be willing to change. We must submit to the Holy Spirit's work in our life, and we must overcome the traits of independence and rebellion that plagued Vashti.

3. Mordecai represents the Holy Spirit.

- Like the Holy Spirit, Mordecai was Esther's guide and counselor (John 14:26). He oversaw her preparation to be the wife of the king, and he told her to intercede for the Jews' deliverance (Est. 2:11, 4:13-14).
- Mordecai was Esther's adopted father (Est. 2:7). The Bible says that we have received "a spirit of adoption [the Holy Spirit]...by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom. 8:15-16).

4. Haman and his 10 sons symbolize the Antichrist coming to power in the end times.

- In Haman, we see the demonic power that will motivate the Antichrist and his kingdom in the end times.
- Haman was an Agagite from the line of the Amalekites. From the beginning, the Amalekites hated Israel and pursued them with unrelenting spite (Ex. 17:16; Deut. 25:17-19). Consequently, Israel came close to exterminating them on several occasions (1 Sam. 15:8, 30:17; 2 Sam 8:12; 1 Chron. 4:43).³
- A survivor of this family line would instinctively hate Israel and every Jew, just as Haman did. In fact, the Lord told Moses that He would war against Amalek from generation to generation (Ex. 17:16).
- Haman planned to destroy Mordecai and all of the Jews in Persia because Mordecai refused to bow down and worship him (Est. 3:5-6). Though this plot was established in the first month of the year, it was not scheduled to take place until the end of the year (Est. 3:12-13).
- Likewise, we know that Satan's strategy to destroy mankind—especially the Jews—has been planned from the beginning but will not be fully released until the end times.
- Just as Haman had 10 sons, the Antichrist will partner with 10 kings to conquer the world and annihilate God's people—both Jews and Christians (Rev. 17:12-14).

5. Esther is a beautiful picture of the worthy bride of Christ.

- Esther is a Persian name whose root *aster* means "a star." By implication, it was a star of good fortune, a star of hope, a star of joy, or a

star of superiority.⁴ Furthermore, Jewish rabbis believe that Esther means “to hide.”

- Esther’s original Hebrew name was *Hadassah*, meaning “myrtle.”⁵ The myrtle has dark green, scented leaves, delicate starry white flowers, and dark-colored berries. The myrtle was one of the choice plants of the land. Isaiah wrote, “Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree; and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree” (Isa 55:13). The myrtle tree is a prophetic picture of God’s promised blessings.⁶
- Thus, Esther portrays one who is hidden in obscurity and arises to prominence and power, much like a beautiful myrtle tree rising from the thorns, or as a star rising in the night sky.
- Esther pictures the bride of Christ who consents to being made ready, who pleases the King in the secret place, and who is given authority to rule and reign with Jesus to destroy the Antichrist and his kingdom.
- The Holy Spirit wants to transform all of us from the proud, rebellious nature of Vashti into people who are humble, meek, and selfless like Esther. Esther represents those who willingly submit to the Holy Spirit’s preparation process to become a bride worthy to partner with Jesus in the end times and for all eternity.

6. Hegai the eunuch, along with the other overseers, add significant meaning to this end-time allegory.

- The overseers in all the provinces who gather the virgins to the capital city symbolize pastors in the nations who are going to the highways and byways to invite people “to the wedding feast” (Matt. 22:9).
- Hegai, the king’s eunuch responsible for the preparation of the virgins, symbolizes several things. First, he is a picture of the Holy Spirit’s assignment to prepare a worthy bride for Jesus.
- Second, he is a picture of God’s work of grace that is released on all who say “yes” to be made ready. Just as Esther found favor with Hegai and he quickly provided her with all that she needed, the Holy Spirit provides us with all that we need to please our King.
- Third, Hegai can also represent those are called as a friend of the Bridegroom like John the Baptist. Hegai symbolizes those who operate in the spirit and power of Elijah—whose ministry is to make ready a worthy bride for Jesus (Luke 1:17).

The Bride of Christ in the End Times

1. In the book of Esther, we see a glimpse of the preparation required to make the bride ready for the end times and eternity.

- Just as Ahasuerus held an extensive and elaborate banquet to display the beauty of his bride, the Father’s eternal purpose, even before the foundation of the world, was to have a worthy bride for His Son and to display her beauty to all of the world, as well as to every angel, demonic ruler, and principality in the heavenly realm.

- For this to happen, an unprecedented work of the Holy Spirit is required—a work that will prepare the bride to be worthy of this great honor and to train her to reign with Jesus now and for all of eternity.
- The Holy Spirit, our Mordecai, along with the king's eunuchs and helpers, must remove the "Vashti" from our hearts. Our pride, independence, rebellion, and stubbornness must be replaced by humility, brokenness, meekness, and love.
- In our day, God is sending His leaders out to gather believers, known as young virgins in the book of Esther, to the harem so that they can be prepared as a worthy bride for Jesus.
- The Father is looking for those who will eagerly say "yes" with their whole hearts to be made ready. For those who surrender to this call, unprecedented grace and favor will be extended to make them ready.
- Like Esther, they will be given myrrh baths of embalming oil that is bitter to the taste but releases a beautiful fragrance. This work of the cross will crucify the Vashti-like nature. Then, after the cross has broken their independent natures, they will be beautified by the internal work of the Holy Spirit as He produces love, joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, kindness, gentleness, and self-control within them.
- Through this long and extended preparation process, the Holy Spirit will heal the wounds of rejection, break demonic strongholds, and liberate the bride to enjoy Jesus like never before.
- Even in the difficult times of preparation, these "Esthers" will know that their Mordecai will direct and protect them. When their season of preparation is over and they are presented to the King, they will be selected as a bride more worthy than Vashti.

2. In the book of Esther, we see a glimpse of how the bride will partner with Jesus in the end times and for all eternity.

- After overcoming every test in their wilderness of preparation (Est. 2), these "Esthers" will be ready to partner with Jesus in end-time events.
- As the modern-day Haman is promoted in the land and the world moves toward a one-world government, religion, and economy (Rev. 17-18), the prepared bride will be ready to take action.
- She will not sit idly by waiting for the rapture; instead, she will be poised to act.
- Realizing that she was born "for such a time as this," she will go before the King and intercede for her people—both Jews and Christians.
- Because she has pleased the King in the secret place and knows Him deeply, she will be granted the golden scepter—the rod of authority. She will use this authority in spiritual warfare to liberate her people from the forces of evil that are increasing their attacks in the land.
- As she partners with Jesus, she will release judgments against the Antichrist and his kingdom (Rev. 5:8, 8:1-6).
- She will be a prime reason why sin is judged, the devil is bound, and the end-time harvest breaks out in the land.
- After engaging in intense spiritual warfare at the end of the age, the bride of Christ will feast and celebrate at the marriage supper of the Lamb and will partner with Jesus for all eternity.

After seeing these types and shadows of the end-time bride of Christ, let's embrace the rigorous preparation process so that, like Esther, we can be transformed into a bride who is worthy of the King.

Notes

1. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1995-1996), s.v. "Vashti," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001) and *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), s.v. "Vashti," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
2. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), p.165.
3. Andrew Robert Fausset, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1998), s.v. "Haman," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
4. Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, pp. 52.
5. Ibid, pp. 52-54.
6. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1995-1996), s.v. "Myrtle," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. The book of Esther is a magnificent allegory that describes the end-time bride of Christ.
- _____ 2. Esther is a beautiful picture of the worthy bride of Christ.
- _____ 3. In this allegory, Haman represents the Holy Spirit.
- _____ 4. Esther portrays one who is hidden in obscurity and arises to prominence and power, much like a beautiful myrtle tree rising from the thorns, or as a star rising in the night sky.
- _____ 5. Vashti is a picture of the bride who has been granted authority to reign with the King.
- _____ 6. Mordecai and the eunuchs represent those who are given the responsibility to prepare the bride for the King.
- _____ 7. Like Esther, the bride will be granted great authority in the end times because she is intimate with the King.
- _____ 8. Because he lacks character, integrity, and morality, King Ahasuerus cannot be used to represent King Jesus.
- _____ 9. Myrrh baths represent a work of the Holy Spirit that is bitter to endure but releases a beautiful fragrance.
- _____ 10. Esther is a picture of how the bride of Christ will partner with Jesus to release judgments against the Antichrist and his kingdom.

Fill in the Blank

11. The book of Esther is a magnificent allegory that describes the _____
_____ bride of Christ.
12. In the allegory of Esther, Mordecai represents the _____.
13. King Ahasuerus represents _____.
14. _____ represents that part in all of us that is independent, self-willed, rebellious, and unwilling to submit to authority.

15. Haman and his 10 sons symbolize the _____ coming to power in the end times.

Match the picture from Esther on the left with the corresponding truth on the right.

- _____ 16. Myrrh baths
- _____ 17. Vashti removed from the king's presence
- _____ 18. Mordecai and the eunuchs prepared Esther for the king
- _____ 19. Esther received the scepter from the king
- _____ 20. Esther pleased the king in his chambers

Matches for 16-20

- a. The Holy Spirit and those called as forerunners preparing the Bride to be used in the end times.
- b. The worthy bride being granted authority to battle the spirit of antichrist in the end times.
- c. The preparation process of the worthy bride.
- d. Intimacy with Jesus as a necessary component to being used in power in the end times.
- e. Going free from all traits of rebellion, independence, and self will.

Session 5

Five Characteristics of the Bride of Christ

This session covers:

- How the end-time church will be glorious and prepared
- How the end-time church will have intimacy with Jesus and exercise great authority
- How the end-time church will receive eternal rewards

This session corresponds to:

- Session 5 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

1. The End-Time Church Will Be Glorious.

1. King Ahasuerus' two banquets picture God inviting His creation to enjoy His glory in eternity past and throughout human history.

- Esther 1:3-4 states that King Ahasuerus held a banquet and displayed the glory of his kingdom for 180 days.
- This feast pictures eternity past, when God displayed the fullness of His glory to every angel and to every created being—even to the angelic beings who would eventually rebel against Him.
- The king's second banquet is a picture of God revealing His glory throughout human history. Esther 1:5-8 states:

When these days were completed [the 180 day banquet], the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. There were hangings of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine

purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, and couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones. Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty. The drinking was done according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person (Est. 1:5-8).

- The king's second banquet, given at the end of the first, lasted seven days and was for everyone.
- All the people in the kingdom were invited to experience the riches of his palace and garden and to drink freely from the king's bounty. "There was no compulsion," for the king allowed everyone to "do according to [their] desires."
- This seven-day feast symbolizes human history from Adam until now. As Peter wrote, a day to God is like a thousand years to man (2 Peter 3:8). Most prophecy scholars believe that there will be 6,000 years from creation to the second coming of Jesus.¹ Thus, six days of the banquet, or 6,000 years, refers to the time of Adam to Jesus and from Jesus through the entire Church Age. The last day of the banquet, therefore, relates to the Millennial Kingdom, the 1,000-year period when Jesus will rule the world from Jerusalem (Rev. 20:6).
- During this banquet, the king honored the free will of his people. He valued their right to choose or reject the bountiful provisions of his kingdom.
- The picture here is inescapable. Throughout history, God has invited everyone to come to Him, to fully partake of the divine pleasures of His kingdom, and to enjoy the pleasures of heaven for eternity. But there is no compulsion. People are free to enjoy all of God that they desire or to reject His kindness and grace.

2. In the end times, Jesus will display His glorious bride to the entire world.

- It is interesting to note that the seventh day of the banquet was different than the first six. Esther 1:10-11 states:

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful (Est. 1:10-11).

- Even though Vashti rebelled against the king's request, this event still depicts the Lord's desire to display His bride's beauty during the Millennial Kingdom.

- The heavenly Father is calling the bride He has chosen for His Son to come forth in glory in the end times. As we transition from the Church Age to the Kingdom Age, Jesus will display His beautiful bride to the entire world so that all creation might see her glory.
- Before the Lord returns, the Holy Spirit will prepare a glorious bride *in the earth* that He will present to Jesus at His second coming (Eph. 5:27).
- Even now, the Holy Spirit, through His servants, is inviting all nations to become a worthy bride and to join the wedding feast. Those that reject this invitation will be without excuse when Jesus returns as Judge.
- Jesus' great desire is to display His bride's beauty during the seventh day of the feast so that all creation will give glory, honor, and praise to God.
- Every angel and demon, ruler, principality, and power in heavenly places will see the beauty of Jesus' bride in the end times.

2. The End-Time Church Will Be Prepared.

The end-time church will go through a God-ordained preparation process before partnering with Jesus in the end times, partaking in the marriage supper of the Lamb, and ruling and reigning with Jesus for all eternity.

1. Those who willingly and eagerly cooperate in the preparation process will be granted great favor to be made ready.

- For Esther, it all started with her saying "yes" to the preparation process. Esther 2:2-3 states:

Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king. Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given them" (Est. 2:2-3).

- As King Ahasuerus searched for a worthy wife, many beautiful young ladies were brought to the king's palace to be *prepared* for this privilege.
- We can only guess at what was going through their minds as they approached the palace. Some were probably filled with hope at the idea of a new life. Others may have been taken against their will; perhaps

they were already betrothed to someone else—someone they loved deeply.

- We can imagine that many of these young ladies were eager to exchange a life of poverty for life in the palace, where they could wear the finest clothes and eat the king's delicacies.
- But Esther was different. She wanted to please the king. And she was willing to do whatever was necessary to be prepared for him.
- The Bible says that Esther pleased Hegai, the king's eunuch, and found favor with him (Est. 2:9). In other words, Esther was in hearty agreement with the preparation process.
- Because Esther wanted to please the king and be prepared for him, Hegai quickly provided her with cosmetics, provisions, and seven choice maids to assist her. Then, he moved her to the best place in the harem.
- In the same way, we must say "yes" to the Holy Spirit's preparation process.
- Knowing that our "yes" will lead to many uncomfortable myrrh baths as our self-centered nature is crucified, we must yield to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to make us ready.
- It was not until Esther pleased Hegai—that is, until she said "yes" to the preparation process—that favor was granted to make her ready. Likewise, we must give the Holy Spirit permission to make us ready.
- As many Bible teachers have rightly said, the Holy Spirit is a gentleman and will not force Himself on us. Giving the Holy Spirit permission to work is an absolutely necessary part of the preparation process.
- Saying "yes" is not a one-time decision. We must say "yes" in every season.
- In these critical days, God is looking for people who are determined to allow the Lord to work in their lives—both in the good and difficult times.

2. The preparation process involves "myrrh baths" that produce meekness in our lives.

- Like all of the young maidens who were auditioning to be the king's wife, Esther went through a full year of preparation.
- For the first six months, Esther had to bathe in myrrh (Est. 2:12).
- Myrrh comes from a tree in the Middle East and it had many uses in ancient times. It was used as a burial spice; it was an ingredient in the anointing oil used by the priests; it was an ingredient in the drink offered to Jesus on the cross; and it was a perfume used by Middle Eastern women.
- In addition, myrrh was commonly used to heal many ailments and as a purifying agent to remove impurities and to soften the skin.² Myrrh is bitter to the taste but gives a sweet aroma.
- For six months, the young ladies were given myrrh baths to cleanse them from their past life. The myrrh would penetrate deep into the pores of their skin, removing the grime of a rural, agricultural life.

- The myrrh baths would leave the young women with clean, soft skin that left no trace of their poverty-stricken life in the fields. After these myrrh baths, their skin was fit for a king.
- Symbolically speaking, myrrh baths represent the purification process that is required to be a worthy bride for Jesus. It symbolizes dying to self by embracing the cross.
- Jesus said, "Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:38). To become a bride who is "worthy" of Jesus, we must take up our own unique cross and die to ourselves so that we can be delivered from every sin and stronghold.
- Myrrh, as a healing agent, refers to God's healing power in our lives. All of us need God to heal us from any abuse, rejection, or trauma that we have encountered in this fallen world. Until we have dealt with our fears and the pains of our past, we are trapped inside—unable to receive love or to give love.
- God's healing power softens our hearts and helps us to receive His love at a deeper level. Just as it is with myrrh, this process often tastes bitter, but in the end, it yields a sweet aroma.
- Myrrh baths produce meekness in our lives. Meekness is a temperament of spirit in which we accept God's dealings with us as good, and therefore, do not dispute or resist them.
- When Esther was given the choice of taking whatever she wanted in to the king, she "did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised" (Est. 2:15).
- Through the preparation process, Esther had been broken of self-will, independence, and striving against authority. In the same way, our myrrh bath treatments cleanse us from the independence of Vashti while producing the meekness of Esther.

3. The preparation process will adorn the bride with great beauty.

- During the second six months, the young ladies were provided with "spices and the cosmetics for women" (Est. 2:12). Whereas the myrrh penetrated deep within the skin to purify, the spices and cosmetics—the "preparations for beautifying women"—produced an external beauty and a sweet aroma (Est. 2:12, NKJV).
- The rubbing with spices symbolizes the anointing of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Hebrew word for anoint means to rub or smear.³ The oil that God used to anoint the priests and the tabernacle consisted of oil mixed with sweet smelling spices.
- After we go through our myrrh baths, we are beautified by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control within us (Gal. 5:22).
- He empowers us to prophecy, to operate in great faith, to release healing and miracles, to have supernatural wisdom, and to know the secrets of men's hearts (1 Cor. 12:8-9).
- The Holy Spirit enables us to walk in the fruit of the Spirit and to minister in the power of the Spirit.

- As we are led by the Spirit in all things, we are God's sons who release the aroma of Christ to the Father (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 2:15).
- Just as Esther and the other young ladies were rubbed with oil mixed with spices, we are beautified by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

4. The preparation process is a prolonged time under the governmental hand of God.

- The entire preparation process took 12 months, which ensured that the ladies were not pregnant and gave the eunuchs enough time to make them ready for the king.
- The number 12 is also biblically significant. Twelve refers to God's governmental rule. For example, there were 12 leaders of the tribes of Israel and 12 apostles. There are also 24 elders before the throne of God (24 is a multiple of 12; see Rev. 4:4).
- Thus, our preparation process does not last for a literal 12 months; instead, our preparation is a prolonged season under the governmental hand of God.
- In summary, to be prepared for the king, Esther went through six months of myrrh baths and six months of being beautified with spices and cosmetics. In a similar way, when we say "yes" to be the Lord's wife, we will go through our own preparation process under the governmental hand of God.
- During this season, our wounds are healed, the defilement of sin is cleansed, and strongholds that have kept us in bondage are broken. The Lord trains us to walk in the fruit of the Spirit, to minister in the gifts of the Spirit, and to rely on the Holy Spirit for everything.
- We are broken of pride and rebellion. Meekness and love reign in our hearts. We go into the process seeking our own agenda, and we leave wanting God and God alone.
- This preparation process makes us beautiful to the Lord and produces within us the sweet fragrance of Christ. Like the maiden in the Song of Solomon, we come out of our wilderness of preparation "leaning on [our] beloved" (Song. 8:5).

3. The End-Time Church Will Be Intimate with Jesus.

1. Looking at Esther's life, we see two qualities that help us develop an intimate relationship with Jesus.

- Esther 2:16 states, "So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign" (Est. 2:16).
- Like Esther, all of the bridal candidates went into the king in the evening and then returned to the second harem the next morning to wait for the king to call her back.
- From the story, we know that the king loved Esther more than the others and chose her as queen (Est. 2:17). Why? There were two reasons.

- First, Esther had willingly submitted to the preparation process and was thus transformed by it.
- The Bible says that Vashti was beautiful, but Esther was both “lovely and beautiful” (Est. 2:7, NKJV). Vashti was beautiful on the outside, but Esther was beautiful on the outside and lovely on the inside. In other words, she was loving, caring, peaceful, humble, and meek.
- When we are born again, we are beautiful to God. Loveliness, however, is developed through brokenness. Because Esther willingly submitted to the preparation process, every form of independence was broken and loveliness was developed within her.
- The second reason Esther was chosen as queen is because she wanted to please the king more than she wanted to please herself.
- When Esther went in before the king, she only took what the king’s advisors suggested; she was not there to please herself. Because she pleased him in the secret place more than the other virgins, the king called her by name and chose her as queen.

2. The end-time church will be intimate with Jesus.

- Like Esther, as we willingly submit to the preparation process, seeking only to please the King, we will be transformed into a worthy bride and we will have an intimate relationship with Jesus.
- As it says in Esther, Jesus calls us by name into His presence (Est. 2:14). For too many years, the church has known Jesus from a distance. We have attempted to serve Him rather than partner with Him. But this way of relating to Jesus is changing.
- Knowing Jesus intimately and pleasing Him in the secret place is critical in the end times.
- We please Jesus in the secret place by going regularly and eagerly into His presence in worship, prayer, and to listen to His voice. We please Him as we put aside distractions and other good things to seek Him in intimacy.
- The end-time church will press in to know the Lord like no other time in history.

4. The End-Time Church Will Have Great Authority.

The bride of Christ will not be a spectator in end-time events. She will be a participator. She will be given great authority and will partner with Jesus to bring His kingdom from heaven to earth.

1. The bride of Christ will be given great power to exercise kingdom authority in the end times.

- Beyond being prepared for the king and bringing him pleasure, Esther was called to intercede for the deliverance of her people. As the story

goes, a crisis arose in the land and Mordecai called Esther to intervene on behalf of the Jews.

- When Esther realized the urgency of the times, she risked her life and asked the king to have favor upon the Jews. Read what happened:

Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace. When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter. Then the king said to her, "What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you." Esther said, "If it pleases the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him" (Est. 5:1-4).

- On the third day, Esther stood before the king in her royal robes, and he extended the golden scepter to her. The "third day" foreshadows Christ's resurrection, and Esther's royal robes symbolize the authority of the kingdom.
- Donning royal robes on the third day portrays the bride of Christ being clothed in resurrection power to exercise the authority of the kingdom.
- The golden scepter represents the authority of the king. When the king extended the scepter to her and offered her up to half his kingdom, the king was granting Esther the authority she requested (Est. 5:3). With this gesture, the king signified his willingness to grant her authority to act on his behalf.

2. Knowing Jesus in the secret place is the key to operating in kingdom authority.

- Why did the king grant Esther such authority—up to half of one of the largest kingdoms in world history? Because he "saw [her] standing in the court" (Est. 5:2).
- Esther confidently approached the king and thus gained his favor. And, more importantly, she was able to stand with confidence in the inner court because she had been there before.
- The inner court symbolizes the Holy of Holies—the secret place where we meet with God. Esther stood with confidence before the king, even at the risk of her life, because she had a history with the king. She had a history of submission to his will *and* a history of pleasing him in the secret place of his chambers. Because of this, she was able to go before the king, expecting him to answer her request.
- Esther came to the "door" of the throne room. When the king saw her, he granted her favor because he *knew* her in the secret place.
- The same is true in our relationship with Christ. As we grow closer to Him in intimacy, He entrusts us with greater authority.

3. With great authority, the bride of Christ will engage in spiritual warfare and intercede for God's end-time purposes to be established.

- Esther used her newly granted authority to intercede for her people. Think for a moment about what she did. She asked the king for favor on behalf of her people. That is, Esther *interceded*. Notice this passage:

Then Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my *petition*, and my people as *my request*; for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king." Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?" Esther said, "A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!" Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen (Est. 7:3-6).

- Esther's intercession quickly expanded from simple requests for favor and provision to asking for the destruction of her "enemy...[the] wicked Haman" (Est. 7:6). Her intercession transitioned from prayers for her people to asking for the defeat of her enemy.
- In response, the king had Haman's face covered and he was hanged. Immediately following this, Mordecai was given Haman's signet ring, signifying that he had been exalted to the position of power and authority that Haman once held (Est. 8:2).
- Esther's intercession continued as she implored the king to reverse Haman's evil scheme against the Jews (Est. 8:3-6). Once again, the scepter was extended to her, and the Jews were saved from destruction. In fact, the king gave the Jews the right to defend themselves against any enemy who might attack them in the future. As a byproduct of Esther's intercession, reverential fear came upon the nation, and many converted to Judaism (Est. 8:17).
- In a similar fashion, the bride of Christ will come before King Jesus and intercede on behalf of the church, Israel, and unbelievers as a one-world government, a rapidly deteriorating society, a universal religion, and a demonically controlled global economy begins to emerge (Rev. 17-18).
- In the end times, the bride of Christ will not sit idly by as the spirit of antichrist arises in the earth, our religious freedoms are taken away, and persecution intensifies against the State of Israel, Jews, and Christians.
- Just as Esther's intercession moved from petitions for deliverance to requests that her enemy be destroyed, the end-time church will engage in spiritual warfare like never before in history. She will take authority over, bind, and resist the demonic forces at work in the end times.

- Just as Esther's prayers resulted in the destruction of Haman and his 10 sons, the overcoming bride will partner with Jesus to release judgments against the Antichrist and his worldwide kingdom (Rev. 5:8, 8:1-6; Luke 18:1-8).
- Through prayer, she will partner with Jesus until "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). How exciting that the bride of Christ will be granted such great authority!
- The bride will also operate in great power, even doing greater works than Jesus (John 14:12).
- As Esther's intercession inspired many to convert to Judaism, the end-time church's prayers will lead to the greatest harvest in history, including the salvation of Israel (Rev. 7:9-17; Zech. 12:10).

5. The End-Time Church Will Receive Eternal Rewards.

1. The bride of Christ will celebrate at the marriage supper of the Lamb and rule the nations with Jesus in the Millennial Kingdom.

- After Haman and his 10 sons were defeated and the Jews were allowed to defend themselves, the Jews established the annual Feast of Purim to memorialize their great victory. They feasted and celebrated, rejoiced, and sent gifts of food to one another (Est. 9:17-19). They celebrated because their mourning and sorrow had been turned to gladness.
- In addition, King Ahasuerus elevated Mordecai to second in command, making him great among the Jews and giving him unprecedented favor in the nation (Est. 10:3).
- In a similar way, Jesus, along with His armies in heaven—the worthy bride included—will return, defeat the Antichrist, deliver Israel, and save the worldwide community of saints (Rev. 17:14, 19:11-21; Zech. 14).
- The marriage supper of the Lamb—the great feast celebrating the marriage between Jesus and His wife—will be held (Rev. 19:7).
- The Millennial Kingdom will be established, and Jesus will rule the earth from Jerusalem along with His triumphant bride.
- In that day, the bride will be glorious, honored, and feared throughout the earth. What a reward this will be!

Like Esther, let's embrace the preparation process and pursue intimacy with the King so that we will be transformed into a worthy bride for Jesus. Then we will be given great power to exercise kingdom authority in the end times and receive our fullest eternal reward.

Notes

1. <http://www.raptureready.com/featured/schaefer/seven.html>, referenced on March 11, 2009.
2. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), s.v. "Myrrh," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
3. New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary, (1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.), "anoint", referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. The end-time church will be utterly destroyed by the Antichrist but will triumph in the Millennial Kingdom.
- _____ 2. All believers, when they are born again, are automatically prepared for the end times.
- _____ 3. In order to be ready for the end times, the church must develop true intimacy with Jesus.
- _____ 4. Knowing Jesus in the secret place is a major key to operating in kingdom authority.
- _____ 5. Because of God's sovereignty, Jesus will defeat the Antichrist and his kingdom without any involvement from the end-time church.
- _____ 6. After the Lord returns, the bride of Christ will rule the nations with Jesus in the Millennial Kingdom.
- _____ 7. The bride of Christ will receive great eternal rewards after she has made herself ready.
- _____ 8. Being prepared for Jesus, although extremely important, does not affect our degree of intimacy with Him.
- _____ 9. Intercession is one of the main ways that the church will operate in great authority in the end times.
- _____ 10. During the season of preparation, our wounds are healed, the defilement of sin is cleansed, and strongholds that have kept us in bondage are broken.

Fill in the Blank

- 11. One reason Esther was chosen as queen is because she wanted to _____ the king more than she wanted to please herself.
- 12. The bride of Christ will not be a _____ in end-time events. She will be a _____.
- 13. The bride of Christ will be given great authority and will _____ with Jesus to bring His kingdom from heaven to earth.

14. Knowing Jesus in the _____ is a major key to operating in kingdom authority.

15. In the end times, Jesus will display His bride in all her _____ to the entire world.

Match the statement on the left with the appropriate characteristic of the end-time church on the right (You can use an answer more than once).

_____ 16. We must say "yes" to the Holy Spirit and willingly cooperate with His work in our lives.

_____ 17. Jesus' great desire is to display His bride's beauty to the entire world.

_____ 18. All of us need God to heal us from any abuse, rejection, or trauma that we have encountered in this fallen world.

_____ 19. The end-time church will desire to please Jesus more than she wants to please herself.

_____ 20. The overcoming bride will partner with Jesus to release judgments against the Antichrist and his worldwide kingdom.

Matches for 16-20

- a. The end-time church will be glorious.
- b. The end-time church will be prepared.
- c. The end-time church will be intimate with Jesus.
- d. The end-time church will have great authority.
- e. The end-time church will receive eternal rewards.

Session 6

The Bride Makes Herself Ready

This session covers:

- The call to make ourselves ready
- The distinction between the betrothed bride of Christ and the eternal wife of the Lamb
- Three ways that we make ourselves ready

This session corresponds to:

- Session 6 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

Called to Make Ourselves Ready

1. Out of the Father's great love for His Son, He is determined to give Jesus a wife worthy of His majestic splendor and great sacrifice.

- If you were searching for a wife for your son, you would not want him to marry a woman who was unfaithful to him—a woman who flirted with other men, who was captivated by other lovers, or who was deeply enmeshed in the world.
- You would only give him a wife who was totally devoted to your son, who loved him faithfully, and who severed all ties from every compromising relationship. The same is true with our heavenly Father.
- The Father will only give Jesus the very best.

2. The Scriptures tell us that every believer who wants to be the eternal wife of Jesus *must make themselves ready*.

- Many believers mistakenly think that they have already made themselves ready just because they are "Christians." Many believe that since they made a

decision to follow Christ, said the sinners' prayer at the church altar, attend church every Sunday, sing worship songs, say "amen" to the pastor's message, and are relatively good people, they have already made themselves ready.

- As important as these things are, they do not automatically make you ready as a worthy bride.
- Several scriptures confirm the need to make ourselves ready. A very important one is:

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God" (Rev. 19:7-9).

- Another of these scriptures is the parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-14). Jesus begins this parable by saying that the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. As the story goes, the king sent out his slaves to bring people to the feast. First, he sent them to those who had already been invited but were unwilling to come. He sent other slaves to tell the people that everything was ready, but this group paid no attention to the invitation. The third group who was invited persecuted and even killed the slaves. Finally, the slaves went to the highways to invite all they could find. As a result, the wedding hall was filled with those who accepted the invitation.
- But an interesting observation follows. The king came in to look over the dinner guests and found one man who was not dressed in wedding clothes. The improperly dressed man was immediately removed from the marriage feast. Why? He had accepted the invitation, but he had not clothed himself in wedding garments. That is, he *had not made himself ready*.
- Matthew 24 records Jesus' words to His disciples about the events surrounding His second coming. He tells them many things, but one statement stands out. Even though not specifically about His bride, He tells His followers in the end times:

Be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason *you also must be ready*; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will (Matt. 24:42-44).

- Again, the familiar end-time theme emerges: be ready!
- One chapter later, but still a continuation of His message from Matthew 24, Jesus tells the parable of the 10 virgins. As the parable goes,

10 virgins were waiting for the Bridegroom to come for the wedding feast. Five were *ready* and five were not. Only those who were ready went in. Notice what Jesus says:

And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and *those who were ready* went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut (Matt. 25:10).

- Once again, we see that only those who make themselves ready will be the eternal wife of the Lamb.

3. In addition, there are a number of other Scriptures that allude to the bride making herself ready by clothing herself in white garments, fine linen, or wedding clothes.

- In Revelation, the messages to the churches at Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea all refer to similar concepts, suggesting that only those who overcome will be prepared as a worthy bride for Jesus (Rev. 3:4-5, 3:12, and 3:18-21).
- In the Old Testament, several allegorical pictures from other books make the same point. The bride of Christ must make herself ready.
- Just like a bride in an ancient Jewish wedding made her own dress, we are called to make ourselves ready and "put on our wedding clothes" by living in obedience to the Holy Spirit.
- Revelation 19:8 states, "It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." In other words, the material of our wedding dress is the Spirit-led works that we do out of passionate love for God. Just like an ancient Jewish bride, we have to make our own wedding dress through our "righteous acts."

4. Understanding the distinction between the betrothed bride of Christ and the eternal wife of the Lamb helps us understand the need to make ourselves ready.

- 2 Corinthians 11:2 tells us that we are betrothed as a pure virgin to Christ.
- From Session 2, we know that a young Jewish woman who was betrothed to her husband was referred to as his bride.
- Putting these two concepts together, we see that every born-again believer has been betrothed to Jesus and is considered His bride. If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are Christ's betrothed bride.
- Nevertheless, Revelation 19:7 states that "the bride has made herself ready" by clothing herself in fine linen.

5. Examining the two Greek words used to describe a "bride" and a "wife" helps us understand this difference even more.

- The Greek word commonly used for a betrothed bride is *numphe* (noom-fay').

- *Numphe* is used to describe a bride or a young wife and is probably connected with the Latin *nubo*, which means “to veil” since the bride was often led veiled from her home to meet her bridegroom.¹
- Thayer’s Greek Lexicon defines this word as “a betrothed bride or a young wife.”²
- John uses this word to describe the bride in John 3:29 when he writes, “He who has the bride is the bridegroom.”
- The Greek word translated as “bride” in Revelation 19:7 is not *numphe*; it is the word *gune* (goo-nay’). This word is used for a woman of any age, married or unmarried.
- Moreover, it is normally used to denote a woman who lives in a consummated marriage relationship with her husband (1 Cor. 7:3-4; 1 Tim. 3:11).³
- Whereas *numphe* is used in some instances to indicate a woman in a consummated relationship, *gune* is never used in the New Testament to refer to a betrothed woman who has not consummated the marriage bond.
- For example, when the Angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, he tells him, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife (*gune*)” (Matt. 1:20). That is, he tells Joseph not to be afraid to consummate the marriage with Mary, his betrothed bride (even though there were no sexual relations until after Jesus was born).
- Notice that the Greek word used for wife is *gune*—the word that is never used for a betrothed bride who had not consummated the marriage relationship. Also, keep in mind that Joseph was already betrothed to Mary. Therefore, from this example, we see that *gune*, not *numphe*, was the Greek word chosen to refer to a betrothed bride who will consummate the marriage relationship and live as the life partner of her husband.
- That is why, when translating Revelation 19:7, several translations use *wife* rather than *bride* to describe the one who has made herself ready; others add a footnote to make the distinction.⁴
- When we accept Jesus as Savior and are born again, we are immediately betrothed to Him as His bride, his *numphe*.
- However, the ones who will be the eternal wife, the *gune*, of the Lamb—the ones who will consummate the marriage with Jesus at His second coming and rule the nations with Him—are the ones who have made themselves ready.
- To summarize, Jesus’ betrothed bride must make herself ready to be His eternal wife.⁵
- Most of us will be given 70 to 80 years to make ourselves ready for eternity and ready to be the eternal wife of the Lamb (Ps. 90:10). What an awesome privilege and responsibility!

Rising above the Multitudes

1. Those who want to be a worthy bride must rise above the lukewarm church and abandon themselves to Jesus.

- Esther had to leave her home to be selected as the queen.

- Ruth had to leave Moab to marry her kinsman-redeemer.
- The maiden in the Song of Solomon had to leave her comfort zone and follow the leading of her beloved as he cried out, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along" (Song. 2:10).
- Likewise, we must arise from the compromising church and follow our Bridegroom down the path of preparation.
- In the Song of Solomon, the beautiful allegory of Jesus and His bride, King Solomon tells his beloved, "Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters" (Song. 2:2, NKJV). Throughout this book, Solomon contrasts his bride to the daughters of Jerusalem, who were the rest of the young ladies in the land. In comparison with them, his bride is like a beautiful lily among thorns: sweet, lovely, kind, and soft—not hard, prickly, and independent.
- Similarly, when we awaken to our bridal identity and begin to make ourselves ready, Jesus views us differently than He does nominal Christians who are content with a free ticket to heaven.
- Those who want to be a worthy bride must rise above the compromising church and make themselves ready.

2. Abraham's quest to find a wife for Isaac is a picture of how we become the wife of Jesus.

- As Abraham grew older, he sent Eliezer, his servant, back to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24). He warned Eliezer not to take a wife from the land of Canaan, but from among his own people.
- Eliezer questioned, "Suppose the woman is not willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?" (Gen. 24:5). Abraham's answer was a resounding no—"Do not take my son back there" (Gen. 24:6).
- With those directions, Eliezer departed to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor, where Abraham's extended family lived. The city of Nahor was a pagan city where the people worshiped the moon god.⁶
- Eliezer took ten camels filled with gifts for Isaac's future wife. When Eliezer reached Nahor, he went to the well where all of the young ladies gathered to draw water.
- Immediately, Rebekah stood out among the young virgins. She was beautiful and she was submissive. She willingly cooperated with Eliezer's requests for water and even offered him a place to stay.
- In faith, Eliezer bowed low, worshiped the Lord, and said, "The God of my master Abraham...guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son" (Gen. 24:48).
- Eliezer then went to Rebekah's home and asked that she become Isaac's wife. She willingly agreed, and they departed for Canaan the next morning.
- This story paints a beautiful picture of how we become the wife of Jesus. Allegorically, Abraham is a picture of the Father, Eliezer the servant is a picture of the Holy Spirit, Rebekah is a picture of the willing bride of Christ, Isaac is a picture of Jesus, and Abraham's family dwelling amidst a pagan society is a picture of the compromising church.

- The Father has sent the Holy Spirit to invite the compromising church to separate from our godless culture and become the wife of the Lamb. However, saying “yes” to the invitation is not enough. Like Rebekah, we must leave our ungodly environment, our friends and relatives immersed in cultural Christianity, and even the comfort of our own compromises to follow the Holy Spirit fully.
- As we obey the Spirit’s leading, He will prepare us for our amazing eternal destiny.

How We Make Ourselves Ready

1. What must we do to prepare ourselves?

- After awakening to the call to make yourself ready, the question naturally arises: “What must I *do* to prepare?”
- To answer this question, let’s first look at what it is *not*. It is not doing more work for the Lord. Most of us know believers who wear themselves out serving the Lord and the church they attend. They are present at every work day. They volunteer for every activity. They try to do it all.
- Don’t misunderstand. These people with a servant’s heart are a great gift to the Body of Christ because they help keep the church functioning.
- Sometimes, however, people work like this to show the Lord they love Him and hopefully to be rewarded in heaven. But being made ready has very little to do with this type of activity.
- The parable of the talents gives us some insight into being made ready. In this parable, which is set in the context of the end times, Jesus says, “Well done good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21).
- Observe that He says “well done” and not “much done.”
- Jesus tells the faithful servant “well done” because he was a trustworthy steward. He was faithful with what had been entrusted to him.

Three Ways We Make Ourselves Ready

Instead of doing more works, we are called to do “righteous acts” (Rev. 19:8), which are the accumulation of daily choices and decisions to love Jesus and obey Him.

1. Pursue an intimate love relationship with Jesus.

- If you are married, think back to the time when you were dating your spouse. You wanted to be close to each other, and you were lovesick when you were apart. You desired intimacy with one another. In the

same way, as we pursue a bridal relationship with Jesus, we desire to hear His voice and enjoy His presence.

- The importance of an intimate relationship with Jesus is suggested in several of the Old Testament pictures of the bride.
- Esther was selected to be the wife of the king because she pleased him in the secret place.
- The Song of Solomon shows the maiden going into the king's chambers, feasting with him at the banquet hall, enjoying his presence, and longing for his kiss.
- Hosea 2:14-21, a prophecy to Israel and a picture to us, shows how the Lord will allure us to the wilderness and "speak kindly" to us during intimate conversations (Hos. 2:14).
- The passage that most clearly reveals the importance of intimacy with Jesus is the parable of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). In this parable, all 10 virgins received an initial supply of oil to keep their lamps burning. However, only the wise virgins who bought more oil during the Bridegroom's delay were allowed to enter the wedding feast. The oil, hidden in the internal parts of the lamp, symbolizes a hidden, intimate relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.
- How do we know that the oil symbolizes intimacy with the Holy Spirit?
- First, oil is frequently used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit in Scripture (1 John 2:20).

Second, Jesus tells the foolish virgins, who did not have sufficient oil, "I do not know you" (Matt. 25:12). Throughout Scripture, *knowing* is connected to intimacy—both physical intimacy between a man and his wife and spiritual intimacy between Jesus and His followers. So, Jesus was informing those who wanted to enter the wedding feast and become His wife that intimacy with Him in this life is an essential ingredient to being ready.

- Other Scriptures also suggest that intimacy is a critical part of being ready. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus connects dining with Him in deep fellowship and intimate communion as the key to overcoming lukewarm apathy and to receiving the reward of sitting down with Him on His throne (Rev. 3:21).
- Another part of overcoming and being ready is returning to our first love (Rev. 2:1-7).
- All of these Scriptures drive home the truth that developing an intimate relationship with Jesus is a critical part of making ourselves ready.

2. Overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.

- Overcoming every entanglement is another major part of making ourselves ready.
- Esther submitted to a twelve-month preparation process, which removed the impurities of her past, in order to be made ready for the king.

- In the Song of Solomon, the bride had to go into the wilderness of preparation in order to mature in love for her Bridegroom King.
- In Hosea, the Lord will send Israel into the wilderness to make her ready as a bride in the end times.
- All of these examples suggest the need for the betrothed bride to overcome.
- We see the need to overcome even more clearly in the book of Revelation. As we have already seen, Revelation 19:7 calls the bride of Christ to make herself ready,
- But in the immediate context of this verse, it does not say *how to make ourselves ready*. Why? Because Jesus has already shown us in Revelation 2-3. In these two chapters, Jesus calls the end-time church to overcome six different things.
- These are: 1) the loss of our first love, 2) trials and tribulations, 3) compromise with the world, 4) the influence of Jezebel, 5) spiritual slumber and apathy, and 6) pride, self-satisfaction, and indifference. To be ready, we must confront and defeat these six obstacles.
- Twice in this book, John promises great blessings to those who “keep...the prophecy” (Rev. 1:3, 22:7), meaning that we need to do as Jesus instructs and overcome the obstacles He mentions.
- Without a doubt, the greatest blessing that we will receive for keeping the prophecy is the honor of marrying Jesus!
- In addition, there is a call from heaven for the bride to come out of Babylon. John wrote, “I heard another voice from heaven, saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities’” (Rev. 18:4-5).
- Later in this chapter, he said, “And the light of a lamp will not shine in you [Babylon] any longer; and *the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer*; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery” (Rev. 18:23).
- To be made ready as a worthy bride, we must come out of Babylon. We must separate from the ungodly influences of our culture and overcome everything that would defile or entangle us.

3. Grow in authority and power.

- Growing in authority and power is another aspect of making ourselves ready.
- Once again, we see references to this throughout the Old and New Testaments.
- Esther was granted the golden scepter—a picture of authority—to defeat Haman and his 10 sons.
- Eve partnered with Adam in their God-given authority to take dominion over the earth.
- Jesus said that the church will do even greater works than He did (John 14:12).

- However, more than any other place in Scripture, the book of Revelation reveals the power and authority that will be given to the bride in the end times.
- As the end-time Tribulation unfolds, Satan and all his demons will be cast to the earth and he will give his throne to the Antichrist (Rev. 12:9, 13:2). Multitudes of demons will also be released from the bottomless pit and much of the world will worship Satan (Rev. 9:3, 16).
- The saints will overcome Satan, however, by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and because they will be willing to die rather than compromise their beliefs (Rev. 12:10-11).
- At that time, the praying church will defeat Satan and his antichrist system through the great power and authority that God will grant to His end-time bride (Rev. 5:8; Rev. 8:1-6). Talking about this concept, Mike Bickle states:

The Praying Church will overcome Satan and the Antichrist (Rev. 12:11; 15:2; 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7). The miracles of Exodus and Acts will be combined and multiplied on a global level. Fear need NOT dominate our spirit and extinguish our faith. We need not fear the Tribulation as powerless victims seeking to escape it. Jesus wrote, "The works that I do he will do also; and *greater works than these* he will do" (Jn. 14:12). End-time believers will engage in the prayer of faith to bind and loose according to God's will. This passage [John 14:12] is fulfilled on earth in the Tribulation with a victorious Church operating in power.⁷

Pursuing intimacy with Jesus, maturing as an overcomer, and growing in power and authority are essential dimensions of being made ready as a worthy bride for Jesus.

Beginning the Process

1. We must say "yes" to being made ready.

- Looking at the church today, especially in America, most believers are not actively and purposefully making themselves ready as a worthy bride. So how do we get started?
- First, we must say "yes" to being made ready.
- Wade Taylor in his book, *Unlocking the Mysteries of the Kingdom*, writes in a simple yet comprehensive manner what it means to accept this invitation:

Those who are making themselves unconditionally available to the Lord in every aspect of their being and life experience are

being made ready to participate with the Lord in the outworking of His end-time purposes. This requires our having a single eye in order to hear and respond to His work of preparation, and our spirit set toward the Lord, so we can obey all that is required of us. Only then will we be ready in that day to be lifted into a cooperative relationship with our Lord....This process will begin when we acknowledge our unconditional dependence upon the Lord, giving total, unqualified permission to Him to do with us all that may be necessary, so we will not only be able to sing this song [the song of victory recorded in Psalm 149:5-9], but also actively participate with the Lord in its full outworking.⁸

2. To be made ready as a worthy bride, we must pursue God's grace aggressively.

- Every work of God in our lives is accomplished by God's grace.
- Simply defined, grace is God's power released into our lives to accomplish His purposes in and through us (2 Cor. 12:9).
- However, a false view of grace has crept into the church. The thinking goes something like this: *God is in control; therefore, He will work out everything He wants to do in my life. I will just sit by passively and let Him do whatever He desires.*
- This type of passive attitude does not activate God's grace in our lives. When we are passive, things rarely change. This attitude toward the grace of God is unbiblical. Instead, we should pursue God's grace aggressively.
- We must aggressively desire change, aggressively pray for change, and aggressively make changes in our lifestyle.
- Realizing that we are helpless to change on our own, we aggressively cry out for God's grace, and the changes we need will occur.

3. The Holy Spirit is calling the end-time church to "eat the book" and to "keep the prophecy."

- Revelation 10:9 states, "So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, 'Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.'"
- In Revelation 22:7, Jesus says, "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (NKJV).
- When Jesus returns, He will reward us for studying His end-time plan (eating the book) and for overcoming whatever entangles us (keeping the prophecy) (Rev. 22:12).
- As we dig into the book of Revelation, along with other end-time Scriptures, and as we obey what is written, we will grow in intimacy with Jesus, we will mature as an overcomer, and we will have greater power and authority in ministry. In other words, we will begin our journey of making ourselves ready.

Let's begin this journey today by aggressively pursuing the grace we need to be transformed into a bride who is worthy of the Son of God.

Notes

1. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "Bride, Bridechamber, Bridegroom," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
2. *The Online Bible Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* (Ontario, Canada: Woodside Bible Fellowship and the Institute for Creation Research, 1993), s.v. "Numphe," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
3. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "Wife, wives," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
4. The King James Version, American Standard Version, and New King James Version all use the word "wife." The Open Bible adds a footnote describing bride as wife.
5. There is some disagreement on the idea that *gune*, as used in Revelation 19:7, should be cited to make the point that the one who would be consummated in their marriage relationship has made herself ready. The argument is based on the fact that the words *gune* and *numphe* are used interchangeably. Let me explain why I believe that *gune* refers to the wife who would consummate the relationship. The Greek word *gune* (Strong's number 1135) is used in 223 verses of Scripture in the New Testament. In the King James Version, it is translated slightly more often as woman or women than wife or wives. In the approximately 100 times it is translated wife or wives, it is always used to refer to a woman living in a consummated marriage relationship and is never used for a woman in a betrothed relationship. On the other hand, *numphe* is used in 9 verses in the New Testament. In these nine uses, it is used 7 times to refer to a young woman in a consummated marriage relationship (Matt. 10:35; 3 times in Luke 12:53; Rev. 21:2, 21:9) and 3 times in a betrothed relationship (John 3:29; Rev. 18:23; 22:17). So whereas *numphe* is used to refer to a consummated relationship, *gune* (the word used in Rev. 19:7 to describe the one who has made herself ready) is never used of a betrothed bride. Also, the verse of Scripture where a betrothed bride and consummated wife are used together, *gune* was the word chosen for the one to be in a consummated relationship (Matt. 1:20). Therefore, it is my belief that in Revelation 19:7, John purposefully used *gune* instead of *numphe* to make a distinction between the betrothed bride and the eternal wife who has made herself ready.
6. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1995-1996), s.v. "Haran," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
7. Mike Bickle, *Prophetic Dream: Victorious Church in the End-times (Rev 12:7-12)*. Section II, E-G, p. 3.
8. Wade E. Taylor, *Unlocking the Mysteries of the Kingdom* (Capitol Heights, MD: Wade Taylor Publications, 2007), pp. 22-23.

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. The Scriptures tell us that every believer who wants to be the eternal wife of Jesus must make themselves ready.
- _____ 2. We make ourselves ready by believing that Jesus is our Lord and Savior.
- _____ 3. The parable of the wedding feast teaches that we must make ourselves ready by putting on wedding garments.
- _____ 4. Knowing God intimately is one way that we make ourselves ready.
- _____ 5. The parable of the 10 virgins teaches that the wise virgins made themselves ready for the Bridegroom by pursuing an intimate relationship with Him.
- _____ 6. Obeying the Lord's words in the book of Revelation helps us to overcome the influence of the devil, but it does not make us ready as a bride.
- _____ 7. In Revelation, the messages to the churches at Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea suggest that only those who overcome will be prepared as a worthy bride for Jesus.
- _____ 8. Second Corinthians 11:2 teaches that every born-again believer is betrothed to Jesus as His bride.
- _____ 9. The use of two Greek words, *gune* and *numphe*, help us understand the distinction between being betrothed to Jesus as a bride and being made ready as His eternal wife.
- _____ 10. According to Jesus, believers who do not pursue intimacy with Him are foolish and they will not be ready when He returns.

Fill in the Blanks

11. The Greek word commonly used for a betrothed bride is _____.
12. The Greek word used for a woman of any age, married or unmarried, is _____.
13. The Greek word used for "bride" in Revelation 19:7 is _____.
14. _____ is the Greek word normally used to denote a woman who lives in a consummated marriage relationship with her husband.

15. Whereas _____ is used in some instances to indicate a woman in a consummated relationship, _____ is never used in the New Testament to refer to a betrothed woman who has not consummated the marriage bond.

Match the statement on the left with the appropriate way to make ourselves ready on the right (You can use an answer more than once).

_____ 16. John promises great blessings to those who "keep...the prophecy" (Rev. 1:3, 22:7).

_____ 17. There is a call from heaven for the bride to come out of Babylon.

_____ 18. The praying church will defeat Satan and his antichrist system.

_____ 19. Jesus said that the church will do even greater works than He did (John 14:12).

_____ 20. Only the wise virgins who bought more oil during the Bridegroom's delay were allowed to enter the wedding feast.

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. Pursue an intimate love relationship with Jesus
- b. Overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil
- c. Grow in authority and power

Session 7

Established In Love

This session covers:

- A look at how the bride of Christ matures in holy passion for Jesus
- Two different seasons in the Song of Solomon that awaken the bride to love and that establish her in love

This session corresponds to:

- Session 7 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

The Song of All Songs

1. In this session and the next, we will explore the Song of Solomon to better understand how to mature in holy passion.

- The Song of Solomon is a love song written by King Solomon about his pursuit of a humble shepherdess who has captured his affections.
- Though Solomon composed 1,005 songs, the Song of Solomon is called the “song of songs” because it expresses Solomon’s greatest pleasure in life (1 Kings 4-32-33; Song. 1:1).
- In eight short chapters, Solomon depicts his romantic journey from wooing to wedding the Shulammite.
- Though certainly a real romance, the Song of Solomon has been regarded as much more than that by rabbis and church fathers throughout history. This love song is actually an allegory that vividly illustrates God’s love for His people. And, if studied in such a light, the Song of Solomon inspires us to develop holy passion for Jesus.
- Hidden among the pages of this book are the *processes* that God employs, the *seasons* the bride must go through, and the *lessons* that Jesus wants to teach His bride on her journey toward mature love.

- Before we begin, we need to keep in mind that Solomon represents Jesus, our Bridegroom King, and the Shulammite portrays the individual believer as the bride of Christ.

Seasons that Produce Passion

1. From the beginning, God has ordained seasons.

- In Genesis, the Lord said, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22).
- A season is a division of the year that is characterized by differences in temperature, precipitation, amount of daylight, and plant growth.
- In many places of the world, a year consists of four distinct seasons—spring, summer, fall, and winter. In other places, there is the rainy season and the dry season. Whether there are two or four seasons where you live, each season has certain characteristics.
- When a season is over, a new season comes with unique traits.
- In the same way, God works in seasons to develop mature love in our hearts. In each season, the Holy Spirit wants to teach us unique lessons that will equip us in our journey toward holy passion.
- Once we have learned these vital lessons, the Holy Spirit moves us into a new season.

2. The Song of Solomon depicts several distinct seasons that we must go through to mature in love and obedience.

- The three major seasons that we will look at are: 1) The initial awakening to love, 2) The period of being established in love, and 3) The wilderness of preparation.
- Full cooperation with the Holy Spirit in these seasons will result in mature love, complete obedience, and a fiery seal of love in our hearts that cannot be quenched.

The Initial Awakening to Love

1. The bride’s initial awakening to love sets the stage for her ascent toward intimacy and partnership with Jesus.

- In Chapter 1 of the Song, we see the bride crying out, “May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (Song. 1:2).
- Let’s pause for just a moment here. Please don’t envision a Jewish man with a beard giving you a kiss. Remember that we are interpreting this allegorically.
- This verse shows us that the bride has awakened to love and wants to experience more of God’s affection. She wants to feel God’s love in a real and tangible way.

- She longs for spiritual intimacy with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. She wants to feel His presence, hear His voice, and be close to Him.

2. The bride has experienced God's love and knows that it is better than any pleasure this world can offer.

- The bride goes on to say, "For your love is better than wine" (Song. 1:2). This statement reveals why she wants to be kissed by the King.
- To her, the Bridegroom's love is intoxicating and deeply satisfying. Though she is still immature, the bride knows that Jesus provides more pleasure than anything the world can offer.
- She says next, "Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out" (Song. 1:3, NIV). In other words, His presence and His name fill her with great pleasure.
- For the first time, she discovers the superior pleasures and the majestic beauty of her Bridegroom King.

3. The bride's life-vision is to have deeper intimacy and a more mature partnership with Jesus.

- In response to experiencing the superior pleasures of God, the bride makes a two-fold request: "Draw me after you and let us run together!" (Song. 1:4). This request represents a major change in her life-vision.
- More than being successful in business, anointed for ministry, or famous in the eyes of man, the bride desires a much closer intimacy with her Bridegroom, and she wants to live in partnership with Him.
- Because she has been awakened to God in a new way, she knows that nothing compares. She is addicted to His presence.
- This two-fold prayer reveals the two major themes of Song of Solomon: deeper intimacy and a mature partnership with Jesus.

4. At this early point in her journey, the bride knows that she is really loved by the King, yet the darkness of her heart is before her.

- The bride says about herself, "I am black but lovely" (Song. 1:5).
- The bride is well aware that there are many dark areas of sin in her life; yet she knows something even more important. In spite of her condition, she is confident in God's love.
- The bride knows that she is lovely to her Bridegroom—even in her weakness and frailty.
- Why? Because the Bridegroom sees her *desire* for more and her *potential* for total devotion.
- Knowing her struggles, the Bridegroom tells her how lovely she is without mentioning her sin. He says that she is "like a mare among the chariots of Pharaoh" (Song. 1:9-10), affirming that she is choice and special.
- He says to her, "Your eyes are like doves" (Song. 1:15). Interestingly, doves do not have peripheral vision; they can only focus on the object that is directly in their line of sight.

- Hence, the Bridegroom is saying to His bride, "I see a new focus in you. You are focused on Me. I see your desire for more. I see your willingness to be totally devoted to Me, even in your weakness."

5. As this season unfolds, the bride experiences burnout because she has neglected her own heart.

- The bride says, "They have made me caretaker of the vineyards, but I have not taken care of my own vineyard [heart]" (Song. 1:6).
- In this song, wine is symbolic of pleasure, and a vineyard, which produces wine, symbolizes the heart.
- Notice that the *King* did not make her a caretaker—the *people* did.
- When she expresses burnout, the King tells her to go to the tents of the shepherds (Song. 1:8). In other words, He tells her to care for her own heart by receiving from ministers in the body of Christ.
- She was not to serve at the expense of her own spiritual life; she needed to be built up by the mature shepherds in the church. Through their teaching, ministry, and seasoned wisdom, her spiritual life would be nourished, whereas before she had neglected it to serve others.
- As she camped near the shepherds, she was refreshed by the Holy Spirit, nourished by the Word, and healed from the pain of her past and the shame of her sin.

Three Lessons from the "Initial Awakening to Love" Season

1. God's love is satisfying.

- Recall that the bride said, "Your love is better than wine" (Song. 1:2).
- God's love is more satisfying than any pleasure in this world. David said, "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you" (Ps. 63:3, NIV).
- Experiencing God's love is the greatest feeling in life. There is no pleasure or experience that compares to feeling God's personal affection.
- This is not about having head knowledge that Jesus loves you. This is about *experiencing* God's love. This is about the Holy Spirit revealing the love of Jesus in such a way that you are changed forever.
- Paul said, "That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17-19).
- God's love is something that must be experienced, for it "surpasses knowledge." You can't explain God's love with words, sermons, books, or songs. It must be communicated to us by the Holy Spirit.
- When we experience it, we will echo the bride and say, "Your love is better than any pleasure that I have ever experienced."

Our journey toward holy passion can't really begin in fullness until we know that God's love is more satisfying than anything in this world. If you have never experienced God's love in this way, then take a moment and ask Him to reveal His love to you in a real and tangible way.

2. God enjoys us in our immaturity.

- The bride says, "I am black but lovely" (Song. 1:5). Even though she is black with sin, she is confident in God's love for her.
- God knows our hearts much better than we do. God sees our sincere desire to obey Him even though we struggle. He knows our true intentions to be completely yielded to Him even though we stumble.
- Jesus told the disciples, including Peter and Judas who would both betray Him, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you" (John 15:9).
- Jesus enjoys us in our immaturity. He likes us even when we make major mistakes or commit grievous sins. His love for us is steady, unchanging, and sure.
- This is not an invitation to sin. Jesus will discipline us for sin—sometimes severely. But we have to be confident that He loves us at the beginning of the journey—not just when we are mature.
- John said, "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This means that we can't love Jesus as His bride until we experience His love for us. It takes God to love God.
- This first season in the bride's journey, when her heart is awakened in love, is by far the most important. Until we know Jesus' personal affections for us, we are restrained from loving Him as a passionate bride.
- We need to meditate frequently on how much God loves us, no matter where we are on the journey. We need to know that He thinks about us often, sings over us with great delight, rejoices over us with dancing, and likes us during every step toward maturity (Zeph. 3:17; Ps. 40:5).
- We also need to know that there is no condemnation, guilt, or shame for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). We need to get into the habit of running to God when we sin rather than running from God in shame.
- God's love and presence is what will set us free, restore us, and empower us to love Jesus as a worthy bride.
- We need to see ourselves as Jesus sees us. We are dearly loved by Him despite our sins and shortcomings. Understanding this truth is essential to going deeper with God.

3. We need to care for our own hearts first.

- The bride says, "They made me caretaker of the vineyards, but I have not taken care of my own vineyard" (Song 1:6).
- Taking care of your own heart is more important than serving—even than serving the body of Christ. We can only give out what we have received. We can only minister what God has poured into us.
- Many want to serve the body of Christ, but their own hearts are a mess. Take care of your own heart first, and then serve out of the overflow of what God has put into you.
- The Bible says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23).
- If you are always busy doing ministry—serving and working for God like the church at Ephesus—you will lose your first love (Rev. 2:1-7).
- Our external service should always be an overflow of our hidden life in God. The Lord's bride will make loving Jesus her first priority, more important than ministering to others.

Established in Love**1. Before the King leads His bride into the wilderness of preparation, He wants to establish her deeply in His love.**

- The Bridegroom says to His bride, "Let me see your form, let me hear your voice" in "the secret place of the steep pathway" (Song. 2:14).
- On the bride's journey toward mature love, there are steep hills that she must climb, deep valleys that she must endure, and narrow pathways that she must walk.
- That is why the King wants her to be "rooted and grounded" in God's love (Eph. 3:17).
- Though the bride was awakened to love in the first season, she is not yet firmly grounded in love. In her present condition, she is not ready for the wilderness of preparation where her faith will be tested.
- So the Bridegroom brings her into a season where He reveals His love for her at a deeper level, teaches her how to delight and rest in Him, and lets her experience the joy of sitting at His feet and listening to His words.

2. To establish His bride in love, the King takes her to the banquet hall.

- In Song of Solomon 2:3-5, the bride says:

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. In his shade I took great delight and sat down, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He has brought me to his banquet hall, and his banner over me is love. Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, because I am lovesick.

- The second season takes place at the banquet hall, which, when translated, literally means “wine house.” Here, at the wine house, the Bridegroom allows His bride to drink her fill of His love and feast from the abundance of His pleasures.
- At the banquet hall, the bride falls so in love with Jesus that she becomes “lovesick.”
- In this season, the bride does not yet see the King in His majesty and splendor, for she calls Him “an apple tree among the trees of the forest.” An apple tree is not a beautiful tree, but it yields a fragrant, tasty fruit.
- In her immaturity, the bride still sees the King as one who is there to meet her needs and fulfill her desires. At this stage, the King accepts her perception of Him because His goal is to establish her in His love. He knows that later she will become completely His and live solely for His purposes.

3. At the banquet hall, the bride finds “great delight” in the Bridegroom.

- At the banquet hall, the bride enjoys the shade and protection the Bridegroom provides. She realizes that she can sit down in His presence and rest. There is no striving to please Him or working to gain His approval. She learns to relax, let go of her worries, and listen to His voice.
- Being with Jesus refreshes the bride and gives her new strength and joy.
- At the banquet hall, Jesus raises His banner of love over her. In the Bible, banners helped rally an army or a nation. Banners also uniquely identified an army or a tribe, much like a flag identifies a nation today.
- When the King raises His banner of love over His bride, He is rallying her in His love and causing her identity to be rooted in Him. Under His banner, the bride knows that her identity is not in her accomplishments or failures. The only thing that really matters is that God loves her dearly.
- The bride is experiencing so much pleasure that she would be content to remain at the banquet hall for the remainder of her life.
- The King also wants His bride to stay in this season until she is fully secure in His love for her. He solemnly commands that no one should attempt to move her to the next season until she is ready—until she is motivated within her heart to desire more (Song. 2:7).

Three Lessons from the “Established in Love” Season

1. God wants us to delight in Him.

- At the banquet hall, the bride says, “In his shade *I took great delight* and sat down, and *his fruit was sweet to my taste*” (Song. 2:3).
- In this second season of being established in love, the Holy Spirit wants to train us how to delight in God. David said:

You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Ps. 16:11).

They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; and You give them to drink of the river of Your delights (Ps. 36:8).

Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart (Ps. 37:4).

- Many believers are so busy trying to work for God, grow their ministries, or achieve success that they do not know how to *delight* in God.
- Others are so weighted down with guilt, shame, and condemnation that they don't even realize that they *can* delight in God. They believe that God is mostly angry, boring, sad, or mad.
- Still others—those who are trying to find pleasure and satisfaction in succeeding at their careers, pursuing recreation, or amassing more toys—are too busy to delight in God.
- However, this lesson is so important that God will not let us move on in our journey until we learn to delight in Him.
- Have you ever delighted yourself in the Lord? When is the last time you came into God's presence and just soaked in His radiant love, experienced the overflow of His happy heart, and felt His all-accepting smile?
- Our God is filled with joy, delight, and happiness. We have been created by God to pursue pleasure. We have been created to enjoy, to delight, and to be satisfied. But only by delighting in the Lord can we find the deep and lasting satisfaction that our hearts crave.
- Before we go further in our journey of being made ready as a worthy bride, the Holy Spirit will make sure that we know how to delight in God and how to drink from the river of His pleasures.

2. God wants us to rest in His presence.

- The bride says, "In his shade I took great delight and *sat down*, and his fruit was sweet to my taste" (Song. 2:3).
- God wants us to rest in Him. Jesus said, "Come to Me....and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS" (Matt. 11:28-30).
- When we come to Jesus with no agenda, no lengthy prayer list, and nothing to gain but Him, He will reveal Himself to us, speak to us, and give us rest for our souls.
- True rest is found as we come to the restful God—the Prince of Peace, the Lord of the Sabbath. As we come to Him—seeking His face, worshiping Him, and quieting ourselves to hear His voice—we will be refreshed and restored. We will find rest for our souls.
- Just as the bride sat down in her beloved's presence, the Holy Spirit says to us, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10, NKJV). In the NASU version of the Bible, the footnote for this phrase translates it as "let go, relax."

- In this season of being established in God's love, the Holy Spirit wants us to learn how to "let go" of everything that creates stress, anxiety, and pressure, relax in God's presence, and trust Him to move on our behalf.
- Instead of trying to rush through our prayer time so that we can start our day, slow down, get quiet, rest in God's presence, and listen to His voice.

3. God wants us our identity rooted in His love.

- At the banquet hall, the bride declares, "His banner over me is love" (Song. 2:4). As we saw earlier, a banner signifies the identity of an army or a tribe.
- As the bride of Christ, Jesus wants our identity completely rooted in His love. When we are born again, Paul said that we are betrothed as pure virgins to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2).
- In a world where so many people struggle to know who they are, we can rest in our identity as the betrothed bride of Christ. Jesus loves us deeply and dearly—enough to die for us; therefore, we are successful and have great value and worth.
- So many people in the world and in the church are struggling to find their identities. They want to be great and feel important. Ironically, God has created us for greatness and significance, but most people try to fulfill this desire in the wrong way and thus never achieve it.
- Some try to find greatness and importance in sports, politics, fame, entertainment, or business. Many in the body of Christ try to feel important or become great by being a successful pastor with a large church, a famous author with best-selling books, a power evangelist who leads thousands to Christ, or an anointed worship leader with global influence.
- In the eyes of God, success and importance are not determined by any of this. We are great because Jesus loves us, cares for us, and died for us.
- We are important because we are His cherished bride. His love is what makes us significant. His love is the banner that identifies who we are.

Do Not Awaken Love until It's Time

1. For most believers, this season of being established in God's love takes time.

- Often, we are so wounded and scarred that we need to soak in God's love for years.
- Most of us have such distorted views of what God is like that we need to be completely rewired and reprogrammed.
- It usually takes a while before our Bridegroom can raise His banner of love over us, indicating that we have finally been rooted and grounded in His love (Eph. 3:17).

- Establishing the bride in His love is so important, the Bridegroom says, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you do not arouse or awaken my love until she pleases" (Song. 2:7).
- In other words, Jesus does not want us to leave this season until we are ready. It is that important to our development as a worthy bride.

2. When we have been fully established in love, the Holy Spirit will lead us into a new season.

- To ensure that we will not be offended at God when He takes us into the wilderness of preparation, the Holy Spirit patiently establishes us in God's love, enjoying every moment as we discover the endless depths of God's passion for us.
- Even so, we can't remain at the banquet hall forever. We must obey the Bridegroom's voice and journey with Him up the steep hills, down into the deep valleys, and through the narrow pathways.
- As much as we like this season of healing, revelation, impartation, love, joy, and rest, we can't remain here forever. We must listen for His voice and be ready to obey when He calls.

There will come a time when our Bridegroom will come to take us to the next season (Song. 2:8). And we must be ready to follow Him, even if the journey leads into the wilderness of preparation.

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. Hidden among the pages of Song of Solomon are the lessons that Jesus wants to teach His bride on her journey toward mature love.
- _____ 2. Because of God's holiness, He does not enjoy us in our immaturity until we repent and overcome whatever ensnares us.
- _____ 3. The bride's initial awakening to love sets the stage for her ascent toward intimacy and partnership with Jesus.
- _____ 4. The primary reason that the bride's love is awakened is that she has experienced His love and thus becomes aware that His love is more satisfying than any other pleasure.
- _____ 5. At the beginning of her journey, the bride is unaware of the darkness in her soul, and as a result, her sin hinders the Bridegroom from loving her fully.
- _____ 6. The Bridegroom takes the bride to the banquet house to establish her in His love before He brings her into the wilderness.
- _____ 7. Even though the banquet hall is a place where the bride finds great delight and full enjoyment, she is ready to move on when the Bridegroom calls her.
- _____ 8. In the season of awakened love, the bride learns to take great delight in her beloved.
- _____ 9. In the season of awakened love, the bride discovers the importance of having her identity rooted and grounded in the Bridegroom's love.
- _____ 10. If we experience burnout from ministering to others, the best thing that we can do is to persevere and continue serving.

Fill in the Blanks

11. Before the wilderness of preparation, the Bridegroom wants to _____ the bride in His love for her.
12. The Holy Spirit wants us to know how to _____ in God and how to drink from the river of His _____.
13. At the beginning of her journey, the bride discovers that the Bridegroom _____ us in our immaturity.

14. Once the bride has been awakened to the superior pleasures in God, the bride's life-vision is to have deeper _____ and a more mature _____ with Jesus.

15. Song of Solomon 1:4 reads, "_____ me after you and let us _____ together!"

Match the statement on the left with the appropriate season of the bride's journey on the right (You can use an answer more than once).

- _____ 16. The bride experiences the banquet hall, where the Bridegroom's banner of love is raised over her.
- _____ 17. God wants our identity to be rooted in His love.
- _____ 18. We discover that God's love is better than any other pleasure.
- _____ 19. A major change in the bride's life-vision takes place; she desires much deeper intimacy and a more mature partnership with her Bridegroom.
- _____ 20. We understand that God enjoys us in our immaturity.

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. The initial awakening to love
- b. The period of being established in love

Session 8

Mature in Love

This session covers:

- How the wilderness prepares the bride for the Bridegroom
- How the wilderness exposes fear and disobedience
- Jesus' three-fold strategy to produce obedience within us
- How obedience and suffering produces mature love

This session corresponds to:

- Session 8 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

The Wilderness of Preparation

1. While the bride is resting in God's pleasures and beauty, the Bridegroom wants to take His bride on a journey toward maturity.

- Sitting in the wine house of passionate love and superior pleasures, the Bridegroom is about to reveal Himself in a new way and take His bride on the journey of a lifetime.
- Up until this time, the bride has known her beloved as affectionate, enjoyable, and restful. Her primary interests have centered around getting her needs met, experiencing God's love, and delighting in Him.
- Her life has been completely transformed by His love and she is content to remain at the banquet hall forever.
- However, the Bridegroom comes to her "climbing on the mountains, leaping on the hills" (Song. 2:8). A new season has arrived, and He invites her to "come along" (Song. 2:8). The Bridegroom wants to take His bride on a journey.
- The Bridegroom wants her to love Him like He loves her. But her love is still immature, and He can't let

her remain in her current condition. For her love to deepen, the Bridegroom must lead his bride into the wilderness of preparation.

2. The wilderness is where the bride will be prepared for her Bridegroom.

- From Song of Solomon 2:8-8:5, we see that Bridegroom leads his bride into the wilderness, where He prepares the bride for her destiny.
- It is here that Jesus produces in her mature love, fire-tested faith, and complete obedience.
- It is here that Jesus transforms her into a worthy, overcoming bride.
- The wilderness of preparation is a season designed specifically for every believer who wants to be a worthy bride for Jesus.

3. The wilderness of preparation breaks us of all forms of pride as bridal love is developed within us.

- Song of Solomon 8:5 states, "Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?"
- The wilderness produces a "leaning" in our hearts as we are broken of disobedience, independence, pride, and self-will.
- The wilderness is where we learn to embrace the cross and the sufferings of Christ as necessary aspects of maturity.
- Though the wilderness is challenging, and, at times, difficult to endure, necessary change takes place here.
- Talking about the bride, Hosea prophesied:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness and speak kindly to her. Then I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope. And she will sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. "It will come about in that day," declares the LORD, "that you will call Me Ishi [Husband] and will no longer call Me Baali [a variation of the name of the false god, Baal¹]" (Hos. 2:14-16).

- It is in the wilderness of preparation that we really grow in bridal love for our King.

The Wilderness Exposes Disobedience

1. The wilderness reveals the bride's fear of trust and obedience.

- This new season begins as the Bridegroom says to His bride, "The time has arrived for pruning the vines" (Song. 2:12). The Bridegroom wants to prune her so that she can bear good and lasting fruit.
- As we soon discover, the bride is afraid to fully trust and obey her beloved (Song. 2:17).
- Even though He comes climbing on the mountains and leaping on the hills, indicating His sovereign power, the assignment seems daunting (Song. 2:8).

- Despite His reassurance that He will hold her close in the cleft of the rock and in the secret place of the steep pathways, she refuses to come along (Song. 2:14).
- She responds, "Until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of Bether" (Song. 2:17).
- The Bridegroom has just exposed the bride's fear of trust and obedience, but He has a plan to help her overcome it.

2. The Bridegroom temporarily withdraws His presence from His bride in order to develop trust and obedience within her.

- When the Bridegroom summons His bride to "arise...and come along" (Song. 2:10), she refuses and says instead, "Be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of Bether" (Song. 2:17).
- *Bether* means "separation"² and the bride's disobedience results in a temporary separation from her beloved.
- The Bridegroom withdraws His presence from her, not because He is angry, but because He wants to produce obedience within her (Song. 3:1).
- Although the bride does not want to leave her comfort zone, she cannot live for long without His presence (Song. 3:1).
- This act of divine discipline inspires a longing so deep within the bride that she says, "I must arise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves" (Song. 3:2).
- Separation from her beloved has created a lovesick desire. When she is finally reunited with Him, she says, "When I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let him go" (Song. 3:4).
- The bride has learned a valuable lesson from this act of divine discipline. In fact, none of her future crises originate from disobedience.
- Now that the bride has been disciplined, she knows that she must obey the Bridegroom's voice immediately. She must follow Him wholeheartedly as He leads her from season to season.

Three Lessons from the Bride's Disobedience

1. Mature love for God is expressed through obedience.

- The Bridegroom's objective in this season is to produce mature love in His bride.
- When she refuses to follow Him, it reveals that her love is still immature. Why? Because mature love for God is expressed through obedience.
- Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments....If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word....He who does not love Me does not keep My words" (John 14:15-24).
- We can have affection for Jesus, get goose bumps when we worship Him, and even pray to Him on a regular basis without having mature love.

- The Father's goal for our life is to produce His love for Jesus in our hearts (John 17:26).
- This kind of all-consuming passion is only expressed by wholehearted obedience. If we truly love Jesus we will fully obey His voice and His Word.

2. We must embrace the cross to obey Jesus and follow Him.

- Jesus said bluntly, "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is *not worthy of Me*" (Matt. 10:38). Put another way, we will only be worthy of Him *if we embrace the cross to follow Him*.
- That means that to become a worthy bride for Jesus we must embrace the cross.
- So, what does it mean to embrace the cross? The cross is the instrument that puts to death everything that stands in the way of our complete obedience to Jesus.
- Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, *he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily* and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).
- Embracing the cross is about self-denial, surrender, brokenness, and humility.
- Notice that we are called to "take up [our] cross *daily*." Embracing the cross is a day-by-day activity where we yield our will, purposes, pleasures, and desires to Jesus and make a fresh commitment to obey Him, no matter what the cost.

3. God corrects those He loves.

- Because the bride did not embrace the cross and fully obey her beloved, she went through a time of divine discipline. Jesus said, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline" (Rev. 3:19).
- If we are disobedient, wayward or entangled in sin, Jesus will discipline us—sometimes severely. In fact, the Bible says that if we are without discipline, then God is not really our Father (Heb. 12:8). The Lord "disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness" (Heb. 12:10).
- God's discipline is designed to keep us on the straight and narrow path of obedience. It keeps us attuned to His voice and His Word.
- We must always remember that God's correction is not the same as His rejection. Some believers think that God dislikes them when He disciplines them, which is never true. God corrects you so that you can fully partake of your eternal inheritance as the bride of Christ.

Letting the Lessons Sink In

1. Jesus wants His bride to always remember what she learned through this season of discipline.

- We resume the story in Song of Solomon 3:5. The bride has learned a valuable lesson about obedience, the cross, and God's discipline. But she still has not obeyed Him.

- At this point in the song, the Bridegroom once again gives the bride some time for these important lessons to sink into her heart. He says, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you will not arouse or awaken my love until she pleases" (Song. 3:5).
- Some lessons are too important to forget. When it comes to obedience, embracing the cross, and the Father's discipline, we should always remember how important these are to maturing in love.

Jesus' Three-Fold Strategy for Obedience

Because the Bridegroom will not relent in training His bride in obedience, He employs a three-fold strategy that will give her the courage to follow Him fully (Song. 3:6-4:5).

1. He reveals Himself as a Bridegroom King who is actively preparing a bride for a wedding.

- Song of Solomon 3:11 states, "Gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of his gladness of heart."
- Before this revelation, the bride has only known her beloved as an apple tree who nourished and refreshed her. Now she sees Him in His majesty and splendor as a royal King—a King who wants to marry her.
- The Bridegroom wants to deposit within His bride a vision of their wedding day so that she will have the courage to follow Him through the valleys and ravines and from the dens of lions and mountains of leopards (Song. 4:8).
- This new revelation of the Bridegroom King will help the bride embrace the cross and fully obey Him because now she realizes why she is in the wilderness in the first place—she is being prepared for her wedding day.

2. He reveals that He is safe and trustworthy.

- Because the bride was afraid to trust and obey her Bridegroom, Jesus wants her to know that He is a safe God.
- Song of Solomon 3:7-8 states:

Behold, it is the traveling couch of Solomon; sixty mighty men around it, of the mighty men of Israel. All of them are wielders of the sword, expert in war; each man has his sword at his side, guarding against the terrors of the night.

- The bride is comforted by the fact that following her King is safe. He is surrounded by 60 of the mightiest men of Israel. These expert warriors know how to use their swords with precision and skill.

- The bride realizes that these warriors will protect her as she obeys. This vision gives her confidence that she can safely abandon herself to the Lord.

3. He speaks words of affirmation that fill her with the courage to obey.

- To further inspire full obedience, the Lord praises the bride's "budding" virtues (Song. 4:1-5).
- To be sure, these qualities are only beginning to emerge, but the Lord sees her potential. He sees the end from the beginning and wants to give her courage and confidence to embrace the cross through full obedience.
- So He praises her single-minded devotion, her capacity to handle the meat of God's Word, her redemptive speech, and her determination to obey God.³
- He does not speak to her like a dictator or use fear to coerce obedience. He gently and affectionately fills her heart with the courage to obey.

The Bride's Sacred Vow

1. As a result of this three-fold strategy, the bride makes a sacred vow to embrace the cross and be devoted to prayer.

- The bride responds to this three-fold strategy by saying, "Until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" (Song. 4:6).
- Previously, when she resisted the call to the cross, she said, "Until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of Bether" (Song. 2:17).
- Now, after she receives a revelation of the Bridegroom King and her wedding day, after she is confident that following Jesus is safe, and after being filled with courage to obey, the bride makes a sacred vow to "go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense."
- Myrrh, which is bitter tasting and used as a burial spice, symbolizes trials and death to self. Frankincense or incense represents prayer (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8). The bride, in essence, is making a sacred vow to embrace the cross and be devoted to prayer.

Three Lessons From Jesus' Three-Fold Strategy for Obedience

1. We need a vision of Jesus as a Bridegroom King and of our future wedding day.

- Many believers only think of Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They are happy enough to have a ticket to heaven and assurance that they will

be escaping hell. They are content to view Jesus in one role: as a Savior who bore their sins on the cross.

- Obviously, all of us are eternally thankful that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. But to be transformed into a worthy bride, we also need to know Jesus as a Bridegroom King.
- In the Song of Solomon, the bride was called to “gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of his gladness of heart” (Song. 3:11).
- As a Bridegroom, Jesus has deep affection, passionate love, and jealous desire for us as His blood-bought bride.
- As a King, Jesus is returning to the earth to remove every hindrance to His rule, establish His kingdom in Jerusalem, and rule the nations with a rod of iron.
- We are betrothed to the King of the universe. As the bride of Christ, we have an amazing invitation to marry Jesus and partner with Him forever (Rev. 19:7-8).
- Having a vision of our future destiny fills us with the perspective we need to make ourselves ready and embrace the cross.

2. We can trust Jesus’ leadership.

- Most likely, fear keeps the bride from initially embracing the cross and following her Bridegroom. She knows He loves her, but she does not fully trust Him. That is, until she sees Him surrounded by 60 mighty experts in war.
- Trust is a firm belief or confidence in the honesty, integrity, reliability, and justice of another person. Trust is something that is earned over time.
- It is impossible to love Jesus with all of our hearts if we don’t trust His leadership in our lives.
- When the psalmist describes how God protects us from the snare of the trapper, destruction, deadly pestilence, the terror by night, and the arrow by day, he declares, “I will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress, my God, *in whom I trust!*’” (Ps. 91:2).
- If you do a search on the word trust in a concordance, you will find that David, the author of most of the Psalms, wrote more about trust than any other person. Why? Because he learned to trust God in the wilderness while he was running from King Saul. David said, “But as for me, *I trust in You, O LORD*, I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in Your hand” (Ps. 31:14-15). David learned that he could trust God because His plans are “to prosper [us] and not to harm [us]...to give [us] hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11-12, NIV).
- In the wilderness of preparation, we learn that our Lord is powerful, reliable, and just. We learn to “lean” on Him and trust Him fully (Song. 8:5).

3. God wants to fill us with the courage to obey Him fully.

- To fill the bride with courage to embrace the cross, the Bridegroom praises her eight budding virtues (Song. 4:1-5).

- Likewise, God does not define us by our weaknesses. He sees the seeds of virtue in our hearts. He sees our willing spirits that long to love Him more (Matt. 26:41). He sees what we set our hearts to do, not just what we attain.
- God is the ultimate encourager (Rom. 15:5).
- In the Old Testament, when Israel was attacked by the Midianites, Gideon hid in fear in the winepress (Judges 6). An angel of the Lord appeared and, seemingly in contradiction to Gideon's cowering appearance, greeted him, "O valiant warrior" (Judg. 6:12). God looked past Gideon's timidity and cowardice and saw seeds of faith, courage, and strength. Gideon went on to become one of Israel's greatest military leaders and is even listed in the hall of faith in Hebrews (Heb. 11:32).
- In the same way, Jesus called His friend Peter "the rock," even though Peter would deny Him three times (Matt. 16:18). Again, the Lord saw past his pride and fearful compromises and identified Peter as the leader he would become.
- In faith, God "calls things that are not as though they were"—including us (Rom. 4:17, NIV).
- He sees past our weak and fearful traits, and then He changes us into the strong, faithful believers He knows we truly are.
- How does this change come about? Primarily, God lets us know how cherished we are. By speaking encouraging words into our hearts, the stain of sin and shame is removed, and we are filled with the courage to obey Jesus and, consequently, to embrace the cross—the place of even greater transformation.

Obedience Produces Mature Love

1. Because of the bride's sacred vow, the Bridegroom's love for her deepens.

- After the bride makes a sacred vow to embrace the cross and devote herself to obeying Jesus fully, a subtle, but dramatic, shift takes place. For the first time, the Bridegroom uses the word *bride* to refer to His beloved (Song. 4:8). After that, He uses the word *bride* five times in the next nine verses (Song. 4:9-12, 5:1).
- Without careful observation, this profound transition could easily be missed. The bride's sacred vow of surrender, consecration, and devotion has deepened the Bridegroom's love for her.
- The bride is now worthy of Him because she is embracing the cross. The Bridegroom says to her:

You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you....You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride; you have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes, with a single strand of your necklace. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is

your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than all kinds of spices! (Song. 4:7-10).

2. The bride's obedience ravishes the heart of her Bridegroom.

- Because of her pledge to embrace the cross, the Bridegroom says, "There is no blemish in you."
- Whereas before, the bride was black but lovely, now the Bridegroom acknowledges the power of the cross to remove every blemish and bring about complete transformation.
- He goes on to say, "You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride." The New King James Version translates this as, "You have ravished my heart."
- *Ravish* means "to overwhelm with joy, pleasure, or delight."
- The Bridegroom's heart is overwhelmed with pleasure because His bride has surrendered her life to Him. He knows that she will follow Him to the ends of the earth.
- She is no longer in the relationship for herself; she now exists to bring Him pleasure.
- Because of her sacred vow, the bride's love for the Bridegroom is now "better [to the Bridegroom]...than wine."
- At the beginning of her journey, she said that *her beloved's* love was better than wine and more satisfying than any pleasure she had ever experienced. However, her own love was immature; her vineyard was uncultivated and in danger of being ruined by foxes (Song. 1:6, 2:15). She was selfishly more concerned about getting her needs met than living to please Him.
- Now, however, the Bridegroom says that *her love* mirrors His love for her. Through the Lord's discipline and the work of the cross, the bride's love has matured. Their love is now mutual.

3. The Bridegroom's expression of love leads the bride to become the inheritance of Christ.

- With confidence and security, the bride says:

Awake, O north wind, and come, wind of the south; make my garden breathe out fragrance, let its spices be wafted abroad. May my beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruits! (Song. 4:16).

- In essence, the bride is saying, "Do whatever it takes to make me a sweet aroma to You and to the world. Come into my heart and have Your way. I want to be Yours completely."
- This prayer is a major transition in the book. The first four chapters have been mostly about the bride discovering her inheritance in Christ. This prayer, however, shifts the focus to the bride *becoming* the inheritance of Christ.

- This request for the cold, harsh north winds of adversity and the pleasant, refreshing south winds of blessing will be instrumental in her preparation for the Bridegroom.
- Together, these two winds will break open her heart and release the fragrant aroma of Christ for His enjoyment. They will also release the knowledge of God through her to the nations.
- Immediately after her prayer, the Bridegroom says:

I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk. Eat, friends; drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers (Song. 5:1).

- In this one verse, the Bridegroom uses the word *my* nine times, indicating that His bride is now becoming His inheritance. She is becoming the fragrant aroma of Christ to God and to the nations.
- Paul said, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life" (2 Cor. 2:14-16).

Two Lessons About Mature Love

1. Our obedience ravishes God's heart.

- Immediately after the bride's vow to obey the Bridegroom and embrace the cross, He says, "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse" (Song. 4:9, NKJV).
- Though the Lord has great affection and passionate love for us in our immaturity, we actually *ravish* His heart when we obey Him and embrace the cross.
- Our obedience causes God's affection for us to deepen. Denying ourselves for Jesus' sake overwhelms God with pleasure and joy.
- In the book of John, Jesus said:

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him....If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him (John 14:21-23).

- God loves us deeply, even in our immaturity, sinfulness, and willful rebellion (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). However, Jesus' statement shows that God's love for us increases when we obey Him and keep His Word.

- He specifically says that if we obey Him, He and the Father will love us, reveal Jesus to us, and make their dwelling place with us.
- Obedience attracts God like a magnet. In the language of the Song of Songs, our obedience ravishes God's heart.

2. Our destiny is to love Jesus like the Father loves Him.

- The Bridegroom tells the bride, "How much better is your love than wine" (Song. 4:10). The wilderness has produced a mature love in the bride. In fact, the bride now loves the Bridegroom just like He loves her (Song. 1:2).
- In the same way, our destiny is to love Jesus like the Father loves Him. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed that "the love with which You [Father] loved Me may be in them" (John 17:26, NKJV).
- Recall the way the Father feels about Jesus. We discussed earlier that His love for Jesus is indescribably deep, passionate, and consuming. Words cannot articulate the infinite love that He has for His beloved Son.
- Amazingly, the Father wants to put His love for Jesus within us, so that we will be set ablaze with holy passion for Christ.
- In the wilderness of preparation, we discover that our destiny is to love Jesus like the Father.

Suffering Deepens Love

1. To mature the bride's faith and deepen her love, the Bridegroom leads her into a period of testing.

- Returning to the bride in Song of Solomon, we find that her prayer for the north winds of adversity is answered almost immediately. The Bridegroom takes her into what some have called "the dark night of the soul"—a time of testing to mature her faith and deepen her love.
- The Bridegroom allows her to be tested in two ways. First, He withdraws His presence from her (Song. 5:6). Previously in Chapters 2 and 3, the Bridegroom withdrew His presence because of her disobedience. This time it is because of her *obedience*.
- In a small way, the bride is experiencing what Jesus encountered at the cross when He said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).
- Without her beloved's presence, the bride feels abandoned and alone.
- At the same time, she is rejected by those in authority (Song. 5:7).
- We don't know the length of this period, but we do know that the bride patiently endures this time of loneliness and rejection without wavering in love.

2. This period of testing shifts the bride's focus from her inheritance in Christ to Christ's inheritance in her.

- At the beginning of her journey, the bride says, "My beloved is to me" (Song. 1:13-14).

- Consumed with getting her needs met, she is focused on her own satisfaction and fulfillment in the relationship. She is focused on receiving her inheritance, rather than on *being* an inheritance to her Bridegroom.
- A little later, she declares, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song. 2:16). Notice she still puts herself first, emphasizing what is "mine" before what is "His."
- Though her love is maturing, the Bridegroom's inheritance in her is still an afterthought.
- Now, after the dark night of the soul, she declares, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (Song. 6:3).
- She now places her beloved's needs above her own. She says, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me" (Song. 7:10).
- Jesus is now the center of her thoughts and desires. She is now His inheritance. Her love has fully matured.

3. Because the bride has embraced the sufferings of Christ, she is set apart in glory.

- The dark night of the soul set the bride apart. It made her unique. The Bridegroom says about His beloved:

There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number; but my dove, my perfect one, is unique: she is her mother's only daughter; she is the pure child of the one who bore her. The maidens saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines also, and they praised her, saying, "Who is this that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun, as awesome as an army with banners?" (Song. 6:8-10).

- The sufferings of Christ have perfected the bride's character and set her apart in glory.
- She emerges from the wilderness as a glorious, overcoming bride.
- She is "as awesome as an army with banners." Fully yielded to the Holy Spirit, she is now the Bridegroom's dove (Matt. 3:16).

A Lesson About Suffering

1. The cross transforms us into a glorious, overcoming bride.

- After the bride's time of loneliness and isolation, Solomon's queens, concubines, and maidens praise her, saying, "Who is this that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as pure as the sun, as awesome as an army with banners?" (Song. 6:10).
- The cross has produced the glory of the "pure...sun" and "full moon" within her.
- Speaking about the church at the time of Christ's return, Paul said, "That He might present to Himself the church *in all her glory*, having

no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:27).

- Before the Lord returns, the church will be glorious. However, this will not take place apart from the cross. Jesus said, "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26).
- Paul said that we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him*" (Rom. 8:17).
- Without suffering there is no glory. Paul also said that "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17).
- In addition to producing glory within us, the cross transforms us into an overcoming bride.
- The bride was praised for being "as awesome as an army with banners." Here, banners symbolize victory over the enemy. When the Israelites fought the Amalekites at Rephidim, Moses held up his hands as a living banner, symbolizing God's victory over His enemies (Ex. 17:8-16). After the battle, Moses built an altar and called it "Jehovah-Nissi," meaning "the Lord is my banner" (Ex. 17:15).
- The cross makes us victorious overcomers.
- What, exactly, are we called to overcome?
- Recall that in Revelation 2-3, Jesus spoke to seven churches, encouraging them to overcome the loss of their first love, trials and tribulations, compromise with the world, the works of Jezebel, spiritual slumber, and lukewarm love. Overcoming these entanglements is vital to making ourselves ready as a worthy bride (Rev. 19:7; Rev. 22:7).
- In addition, we are called to overcome the devil. Revelation 12:11 states, "And they overcame him [the devil] because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death." (Rev. 12:11, ASV).
- By embracing the cross and surrendering to the Lord, we will become a glorious, overcoming bride.

Sealed in Fiery Love

1. The bride comes out of the wilderness of preparation leaning on her beloved and mature in love.

- This song, which began with a kiss, ends with a fiery seal of love in the bride's heart. The Bridegroom says to her:

Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it (Song. 8:6-7).

- As the song ends, the bride is sealed in mature love for her Bridegroom.

- She loves Him with fiery zeal. The “very flame of the Lord” supernaturally empowers her with passionate love that many waters cannot quench or overflow.
- She is now secure in His love, broken of self-will and independence, and fully trusting His leadership. The bride loves Him with a burning passion that she did not possess at the beginning of her journey.

2. The Holy Spirit invites each of us on a similar journey of holy passion.

- God wants to break us of our self-centeredness and self-sufficiency and develop within us a mature love characterized by humility, obedience, and a willingness to embrace the cross no matter the cost.
- The Holy Spirit wants us to experience the kiss of the King along with His burning fire in our hearts as He leads us to enjoy the superior pleasures of God, deep friendship with Jesus, unconditional surrender, and affection-based obedience.

To begin our journey of being awakened to love, established in love, and matured in love, let's pray, as the bride prayed to begin her journey, “Draw [us] after you and let us run together” (Song. 1:4).

Notes

1. Baali, Strong's number 1180, *The Online Bible Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*, 1993, Woodside Bible Fellowship, Ontario, Canada. Licensed from the Institute for Creation Research.
2. BETHER, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois, 1988.
3. Mike Bickle, *The Song of Songs*, God School with the Forerunner School of Ministry, Kansas City, 2007, p. 85.

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. The wilderness of preparation is designed to awaken the bride's love.
- _____ 2. Before going into the wilderness of preparation, the bride's primary interests have centered around getting her needs met, experiencing God's love, and delighting in Him.
- _____ 3. In the wilderness of preparation, Jesus produces mature love, fire-tested faith, and complete obedience in His bride.
- _____ 4. The wilderness of preparation is designed to make the bride strong and independent by weaning her from dependence upon the Bridegroom.
- _____ 5. The wilderness of preparation exposes the bride's disobedience.
- _____ 6. In the wilderness of preparation, the Bridegroom reveals Himself as a demanding King who is actively preparing a bride to be His servant.
- _____ 7. In the wilderness of preparation, the Bridegroom reveals Himself as safe and trustworthy.
- _____ 8. Before entering the wilderness, the bride had already embraced the cross.
- _____ 9. To be fully prepared, we need to see ourselves as Christ's bride and we need a vision of our upcoming wedding day.
- _____ 10. The bride's maturity has little effect on the Bridegroom's love for her.

Fill in the Blank

11. The first four chapters of the Song of Solomon are mostly about the bride discovering her inheritance in Christ whereas the last four focus on the bride becoming the _____ of Christ.
12. Our obedience _____ God's heart.
13. To mature the bride's faith and deepen her love, the Bridegroom leads her into a period of _____.
14. The sufferings of Christ have perfected the bride's _____ and set her apart in glory.

15. Song of Solomon 8:6-7 reads, "Put me like a _____ over your heart, like a _____ on your arm. For _____ is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very _____ of the LORD. Many _____ cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it."

Match the phrase on the left with the appropriate phrase from the right.

- _____ 16. To overwhelm with joy, pleasure, or delight
- _____ 17. Deepens faith and matures love
- _____ 18. The result of being prepared in the wilderness
- _____ 19. Place where the bride embraces the sufferings of Christ
- _____ 20. Transforms us into a glorious, overcoming bride

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. Testing
- b. Song 4:16
- c. Cross
- d. Ravish
- e. Sealed in love and faith

Session 9

Total Devotion

This session covers:

- How we become totally devoted to Jesus
- An overview of the book of Ruth
- Seven principles from the book of Ruth that help us become totally devoted to our Bridegroom

This session corresponds to:

- Session 9 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

The Journey toward Devotion

1. The bride of Christ will be totally devoted to Jesus.

- When the Pharisees asked Jesus to describe the greatest commandment in the Law, He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment" (Matt. 22:37-38).
- Known today as the first commandment, this statement clearly reveals that the most important thing in life is to love God fervently with *all* that is within us. In other words, *we are to be totally devoted to Jesus*.
- Devotion is dedicating ourselves to someone with a serious and earnest vow. Then we keep our vow by making disciplined and determined decisions to yield ourselves completely to them.
- Devotion, unlike passion, is usually not something we feel. Devotion, rather, is choosing to follow through with our commitments—whether we feel like it or not.

- This is clearly illustrated in marriage, where the feelings of passion may come and go, but devotion is the glue that keeps a husband and wife together. Devotion is making the loving decisions to fulfill the covenant vows we voiced at our weddings.
- In the same way, Jesus will have a worthy bride who is totally devoted to Him. He will have a bride who loves Him with *all* of her heart, *all* of her soul, and *all* of her mind.
- Make no mistake about it—loving the Lord like this is a process.

2. Peter is a great example of how we mature in our devotion to Jesus.

- Peter, perhaps the greatest leader in church history, had to mature in his devotion to Jesus.
- Following Jesus' resurrection and Peter's denial of Him, the Lord asked Peter three times if he loved Him (John 21:15-17). Twice in his questions, Jesus used the Greek word *agapao* (ag-ap-ah'-o), which means "deep and constant love" that inspires "implicit obedience to [God's] commandments."¹ In other words, *agapao* is a love that gives all, as Jesus had just illustrated by sacrificing His life on the cross. Jesus was therefore asking Peter if he was, in return, totally devoted to Him.
- Peter, however, answered, "You know that I love (*phileo*) You" (John 21:15-16). Peter answers with *phileo*, or "brotherly affection," because only a few days earlier, Peter had denied Jesus three times. He knew that could not say that he loved Jesus with complete and total devotion.
- The Lord then restored Peter, and he matured quickly in his devotion to become the leader of the early church. He gave a bold message on Pentecost that resulted in 3,000 salvations, wrote two books of the New Testament, and according to tradition, was crucified upside down because he did not consider himself worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.
- Just as Peter matured in his devotion to Jesus, we also must mature in our devotion.

3. The book of Ruth is an excellent picture of how we mature in our devotion to Jesus.

- Ruth's journey begins in the pagan land of Moab, where she has been widowed, and ends in Bethlehem, where she will marry Boaz, her kinsman-redeemer—the one in position to deliver her from poverty into life of destiny and prosperity.
- During her journey from Moab to marriage, Ruth's heart changes. She makes several important decisions along the way that result in total devotion to her future husband.
- Let's look at Ruth in more detail, so that we, too, can grow in devotion to our future Bridegroom, Jesus.

An Overview of Ruth

1. In a time of famine, Elimelech and his family went to live in Moab.

- During the time in history when the judges governed Israel, a devastating famine hit the land. To provide for his family, Elimelech took his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, from their home in Bethlehem to the neighboring land of Moab to wait out the famine.
- While living in Moab, both sons married Moabite women—Orpah and Ruth. During the 10 or so years they lived in Moab, Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion all died.

2. When the famine ended, Naomi and Ruth decided to return to Bethlehem.

- Naomi, now a widow, heard that the famine had ended in Israel and prepared to return home to Bethlehem. Before leaving, she encouraged her two daughters-in-law to remain with their families in Moab, but Orpah and Ruth both wanted to go with her to Bethlehem.
- After some intense conversations, however, Orpah decided to remain in Moab, whereas Ruth was still adamant about returning with Naomi.

3. In Bethlehem, Ruth worked in the grain fields of Boaz, who provided abundantly for her.

- When the two women arrived in Bethlehem, Ruth went almost immediately to the barley and wheat fields belonging to a man named Boaz, who was a kinsman of Elimelech.
- There, Ruth gleaned, or collected, the grain left by the reapers.
- Boaz took notice of her and treated her with great kindness. He not only allowed her to glean from the extra piles of grain, but he even gave her additional grain stalks from the bundled plants.
- Day after day, as Ruth would go to the grain fields to glean food, Boaz would provide abundantly for her.

4. Eventually, Ruth marries Boaz, and through their lineage, a future king of Israel is born.

- Toward the end of the harvest season, Naomi wanted Ruth to rest from her labors and, quite possibly, to marry Boaz.
- So she told Ruth to wash herself, anoint herself with ointments, put on her best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor where Boaz was resting.
- Ruth obeyed. When she approached Boaz, she received his favor, and the two were later married.
- Some years later, Ruth and Boaz gave birth to Obed, the grandfather of King David.
- As you can see, the book of Ruth is a wonderful rags to riches story. A poor Moabite widow marries a wealthy Israelite, and through their lineage, a future king of Israel is born.

- More astoundingly, if you read the genealogy of Jesus in the book of Matthew, guess whose names you will find? That's right, Boaz and Ruth (Matt. 1:5). What a beautiful story of redemption and grace!

The book of Ruth contains types and shadows of how we transition from living a worldly lifestyle to becoming a worthy bride for Jesus. Hidden in the pages of this book are seven principles that will help us become totally devoted to our Bridegroom King.

Principle #1: Determine to Leave Moab.

1. When the time came to leave Moab, Orpah could not leave the familiarity of her family, friends, and culture.

- When it was time for Naomi to return to Bethlehem, she urged her two daughters-in-law to remain in Moab where they were comfortable, had their own family ties, and were familiar with the customs of the land (Ruth 1:6-9).
- Orpah and Ruth's response to her was clear: "No, but we will surely return with you to your people" (Ruth 1:10).
- Initially, they both made a *decision* to leave Moab; however, Orpah could not resist the seduction of Moab, and she returned "back to her people and her gods" (Ruth 1:15).
- As Jeremiah suggested, Moab was a place of "uncircumcised living" where the people practiced the rite of circumcision yet lived as though they had never been circumcised (Jer. 9:25-26).
- The Moabite people participated in pagan worship, most likely with human sacrifices and cult prostitution. Moab was a place of many seductions, and Israel was not immune to its lure.
- Orpah and Ruth were both comfortable in their culture. If they were like us, they were sentimental about life in Moab.
- Ties to family and friends, along with their customs, heritage, and religion, made it difficult to leave the familiarity and comfort of their homeland.
- Orpah weighed all of these factors and ultimately determined not to go to Bethlehem.

2. Ruth, on the other hand, was determined to leave with Naomi.

- After counting the cost and weighing the consequences of her actions (Ruth 1:11-15), Ruth made a six-fold declaration of her commitment to leave Moab and go to Bethlehem.
- She said to Naomi:

Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you;
for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me (Ruth 1:16-17).

- Ruth was determined to leave Moab in order to follow Naomi, but even more importantly, to pursue Naomi's God.

3. In a similar way, if we want to grow in devotion to our Bridegroom, we must be determined to leave Moab.

- With sexual immorality, pornography, prostitution, homosexuality, secular humanism, materialism, pleasure seeking, abortion, and alcohol and drug abuse on the rise, most of our world is like Moab.
- For many, there is a powerful lure to this lifestyle. Many believers are like Orpah. They have made a decision for the Lord Jesus, and they sincerely meant it at the time. But when it comes time to leave their present-day Moab, they can't do it. The temptations are too entrenched, the seductions too strong, the old friendships too alluring.
- Jesus said, "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'" (Luke 14:28-30).
- For all who had made a decision to follow Him, Jesus called them to count the cost so that they would not start following Him if they were not able to finish the journey.

If we truly desire to become a worthy bride for Jesus, we must count the cost and make the same six-fold declaration that Ruth made.

4. Ruth's first declaration was "where you go, I will go."

- We must say to the Lord on a regular basis, "I will go where You tell me to go, and I will do what You tell me to do."
- In our lives, we will have to live out this declaration on many occasions. In some cases, the decisions will be easy, but others will require major acts of surrender.
- To pursue Jesus, we quite possibly might have to lay down a job, abandon a career path, and surrender many personal comforts and pleasures.

5. Ruth's second declaration was "where you lodge, I will lodge."

- When we say this to God, we are vowing to accept a lifestyle of waiting on Him.

- Even in seasons of silence when we can't hear His voice or in times of confusion when we don't know which direction to turn, we must wait.
- We decide that we are not going to do our own thing; we are going to wait on God until He speaks.

6. Ruth's third declaration was "your people shall be my people."

- Quite possibly, Orpah did not follow Naomi because she did not want to leave her friends and family—even though they were involved in pagan activities.
- However, for us to develop a life of devotion to our Bridegroom, we can't emulate Orpah. We must leave behind any relationships that would ensnare us in a lifestyle of compromise and worldliness.
- Pursuing Jesus requires us to put Him ahead of all other relationships (Luke 14:26).

7. Ruth's fourth declaration was "your God will be my God."

- To make this declaration real in our lives, we must forsake every god that leads us into idolatry.
- Most of us don't keep wooden idols on our mantle or burn incense to a statue, but we can make idols out of things like recreation, pleasure, jobs, and possessions.
- God wants us to enjoy many of these things (1 Tim. 6:17). But when any of these hinder us in our pursuit of God, we must lay them down.

8. Ruth's fifth declaration was to die where Naomi died.

- For us, this means that once we make a radical decision to follow Christ, there is no turning back.
- We must burn every bridge that would take us back to Moab. We must make an irrevocable decision that no matter what happens—or doesn't happen—we are not turning back to our old ways and lifestyles.
- We must decide that we will die before we go back to Moab.

9. Ruth's sixth declaration was to be buried where Naomi was buried.

- Likewise, we must bury our life in surrender. Jesus said that a grain of wheat must fall into the earth and die—implying that it must be buried—in order to bear fruit (John 12:24).
- Explaining what He meant by this, the Lord said, "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal" (John 12:25).
- If we want to be like Ruth and live totally devoted to our Bridegroom, we must surrender our life daily in order to follow Him fully.

To really leave our old “before Christ” lifestyle, we must make six lifetime commitments. We must decide to go where He goes, to wait on Him, to leave all ungodly relationships and temptations, to forsake all idols without looking back, to repeatedly choose to die to ourselves, and to surrender everything to God in order to be prepared as a worthy bride for Jesus and live in God’s blessings.

Principle #2: Release All Bitterness.

1. Naomi was bitter because she falsely believed that God was responsible for everything bad that happened to her in Moab.

- When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, “all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’” (Ruth 1:19).
- Immediately, Naomi responded, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20).
- In Hebrew, Naomi means “pleasant”² while Mara means “bitter.”³
- Naomi went on to say, “I went out full [to Moab], but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?” (Ruth 1:21).
- The truth is, however, that God never sent her family to Moab. It was her *husband’s* decision to go to Moab during the famine. The Lord never sent him there or even hinted at the idea of going.
- God had wanted Naomi’s family to remain in Bethlehem and trust Him for provision during the famine.
- Because she wrongfully blamed God for her circumstances, which were really the result of her husband’s presumption, she was fostering bitterness.

2. We need to release all bitterness and receive healing because it is impossible to love Jesus and, at the same time, be bitter toward Him or others.

- Bitterness—an intense and prolonged animosity, resentment, or anger against someone that causes us to be distant, contemptuous, or spiteful—permeates the body of Christ.
- We can *believe in* God and even *believe in* Jesus for salvation while still having bitterness in our hearts. But it’s nearly impossible to *love* God while remaining bitter.
- Bitterness can take root in people’s hearts for many reasons. Young men may have been severely rejected by their fathers. Young women may have been physically, emotionally, and sexually abused. And sometimes, both men and women have made devastating lifestyle choices and are now suffering the consequences.

- In this world, we all experience hurt and pain—sometimes from circumstances outside of our control and sometimes from choices we directly make. Either way, we have to deal with our rejections and disappointments without giving in to bitterness.
- Blaming God for allowing our circumstances or blaming the one who caused our pain keeps us entrenched in our hurts, entangled in the roots of bitterness.
- Bitterness makes it very difficult to receive God’s amazing love and experience intimacy with Him. It is impossible to blame God for our circumstances while at the same time hungering for His presence.

3. Like Ruth, we must make a decision to surrender all bitterness.

- Naomi and Ruth both went through difficult circumstances in Moab. Both lost their husbands and struggled to find provision. Both had the same opportunity to choose bitterness over meekness.
- However, Ruth made a decision not to be bitter toward God, and as a result, went on to fulfill her destiny. If we want to become a worthy bride, then, like Ruth, we must make a decision to surrender all bitterness.
- If you struggle with feelings of bitterness, ask the Lord to help you release the bitterness from your heart and allow the Holy Spirit to heal you of every emotional scar and pain.
- Your pain may be so deep that you wonder if this is even possible. However, the Bible tells us that God’s grace is powerful enough to remove deep-seeded bitterness (Eph. 4:31; Heb. 12:15).
- If you are bitter, forgive God and the one who hurt you from the bottom of your heart. Then release those who harmed you from owing you anything in the future (Matt. 18:21-35).
- As you release bitterness from your heart, you will be liberated to love Jesus much more deeply.

Principle #3: Appreciate Jesus As Your Kinsman-Redeemer.

1. The idea of a kinsman-redeemer originates in the Old Testament Law.

- After Ruth and Boaz were married, the women of Bethlehem told Naomi, “Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a *kinsman-redeemer*. May he become famous throughout Israel!” (Ruth 4:14, NIV).
- Seven times in the book of Ruth, the New International Version of the Bible translates the Hebrew word *go’el* as “kinsman-redeemer.”
- This word means “to redeem, to avenge, to revenge, or to ransom”⁴ and has the basic meaning of “coming to the help or rescue”⁵ of one in need.
- The idea of *go’el* originates in the Old Testament Law. The basic concept is that the nearest male relative was responsible for certain aspects of his family, such as avenging harm done to a family member or redeeming a relative in great need.⁶

- In addition, the kinsman-redeemer was responsible for marrying his relative's widow, but only if it was his brother who had died. Otherwise, he was under no obligation.
- The closest living male relative was the first one responsible to fulfill the duties of a redeemer. If for some reason he were unable, the responsibility would fall to the next closest living male relative who had the ability to redeem.
- There were three basic qualifications for being a kinsmen-redeemer. First, he had to be a close relative; second, he had to have the ability to redeem; and third, he had to be willing to pay the price of redemption.

2. Boaz is a beautiful picture of Jesus, our Kinsman-Redeemer.

- As we examine Boaz's relationship with Ruth, we see that he met the three conditions of a kinsman-redeemer. He was a close relative to Elimelech's family (Ruth 3:12). He had the ability to redeem since he had great wealth (Ruth 2:1). And he was willing to pay the price of redemption and take Ruth as his wife, even though he was under no obligation since Elimelech was not his brother (Ruth 4:9).
- Interestingly, there was another relative of Elimelech who was actually closer in kinship to Ruth, but he, due to obligations and hindrances, was unable to do redeem Ruth. Therefore, Boaz took his place as Ruth's kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 4:1-6).
- What a beautiful image of our loving Bridegroom! As Boaz was a close relative to Ruth, Jesus is our close relative; in fact, He is our brother (Heb. 2:17-18).
- Just as one came in line before Boaz to redeem Ruth but did not have the means to complete the task, Adam attempted to take dominion over the earth but could not do it.
- However, just as Boaz was able to purchase Elimelech's land, redeem Naomi, and take Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:9-13), Jesus is the only One who is able to redeem mankind and to complete what Adam could not do.
- And the great news for us is that Jesus was not only *able* to purchase us from the slave market; He was also *willing* to do it.
- Because of His great love for us, He willingly left the glory of heaven to purchase us from bondage and to take us as His eternal wife (Phil. 2:5-8).

3. Seeing Jesus as our Kinsman-Redeemer fills us with appreciation and motivates us to become more devoted to Him.

- When we realize that only Jesus was able to redeem mankind and that He was also willing to do it, it makes us so appreciative of His great love.
- Seeing what Jesus has done as our Kinsmen-Redeemer inspires us to pursue Him wholeheartedly, to grow in devotion for Him, to demonstrate how much we love Him, to express our thankfulness for what

He has done, and to look forward with great anticipation to our upcoming wedding day.

Principle #4: Develop Spiritual Disciplines.

1. Ruth gained favor with Boaz because of her discipline, work ethic, and perseverance.

- Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem at the beginning of the harvest season (Ruth 1:22). Immediately after learning of Boaz, Ruth asked to go to the harvest fields and ended up gleaning from the fields of Boaz (Ruth 2:1-3).
- She stated very clearly that her intention was to gain "favor" from the owner of the fields (Ruth 2:2). Upon finding Boaz's field, she went regularly and remained there for long periods of time.
- Several interesting things happened to Ruth as she gleaned in the fields. Boaz saw her diligence and began to take notice of her (Ruth 2:5-6, 11).
- He wanted the Lord to bless Ruth for her work and sacrifice (Ruth 2:12).
- He fed her in abundance and allowed her to glean from the bundled grain, a much easier task than gleaning from the fields (Ruth 2:14-15).
- In addition, he told his servants to give her some extra grain from among the bundles (Ruth 2:16).
- So, as we see, Ruth received great favor from Boaz. Because of her discipline, work ethic, and perseverance, Boaz took notice of her.
- Ruth's discipline had positioned her for blessings from her kinsman-redeemer.

2. There are four spiritual disciplines that will produce favor in our lives and result in blessings from our Kinsman-Redeemer.

- *The first discipline is to dig deep into the Word on a regular basis.*
 - Ruth went daily to the fields to glean, and she "remained there" (Ruth 2:7).
 - If we want God's favor in our lives, we must find a way to consistently glean from the Word of God.
 - We should not read the Word of God religiously in order to gain God's approval. Instead, we should dig into the Word in order to be "doers of the Word" so that we "will be blessed in what" we do (James 1:22-25).
 - Obeying God's Word is the pathway to receiving God's favor and blessings.
- *The second discipline is to commit yourself to a local church family (Ruth 2:8, 21-23).*

- In His sovereignty, God has chosen for us to grow in favor, not only by our individual efforts, but also in community with other believers.
 - The early church devoted themselves to the community of believers, and as a result, they gained favor with God and man (Acts 2:42-47).
- *The third discipline is to serve the Lord through a local church.*
 - Boaz told Ruth that all she had *done* for Naomi had been “fully reported to him” (Ruth 2:11). The Lord takes notice of us, as well, when we serve the vision of a local church.
 - Peter also exhorts us to use our gifting to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10).
- *The fourth discipline is to drink from the corporate anointing that comes from the leaders of the church.*
 - Just as Ruth drank from the water drawn by Boaz’s servants, we should develop the habit of receiving the anointing from leaders in the church (Ruth 2:9).
 - Whether through a teaching, a prophetic word, or a ministry action, God uses the corporate worship service to do things that will not happen in other settings.

Discipline does not *earn* us God’s favor or provision. We have His favor through grace alone. But discipline does *position* us to be able to receive God’s provision, acceptance, favor, security, and protection. And as we experience God’s blessings, our natural response is to devote ourselves more fully to our Bridegroom.

Principle #5: Desire Jesus Above His Blessings.

1. Like Ruth, the Lord’s bride will desire Him more than His blessings.

- Though Ruth had enjoyed the favor of Boaz, she wanted more than his blessings. She desired a relationship with him (Ruth 3:1-2). She wanted Boaz to be her husband.
- In a similar way, there comes a time in our walk with the Lord when we transition from seeking the Lord’s hand to seeking His face.
- Even though seeking the Lord’s hand of blessing is a good thing, seeking the Lord’s face is much more satisfying. The good news is that we don’t have to choose one or the other. We can have both.

- However, like Ruth, the Lord's bride will desire Him more than His blessings. Her love will compel her to be near Him, hear His voice, know Him more deeply, and encounter His presence in worship.

2. Desiring Jesus more than His blessings is a work of the Holy Spirit that prepares our hearts as a worthy bride.

- Paul said, "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5).
- It takes God to love God. The Holy Spirit is the One who empowers our hearts to love Jesus with passion.
- This is not something that we passively wait for God to do. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to produce this type of love for Jesus in our hearts.
- This type of longing and desire for more of Jesus prepares our hearts as a worthy bride and produces total devotion within us.

Principle #6: Say "Yes" to Being Made Ready For Your Bridegroom.

1. Boaz married Ruth because she was a woman of excellence.

- At the end of harvest season, Ruth came to Boaz at the threshing floor in the middle of the night. Resting after celebrating the end of the harvest, Boaz asked, "Who are you?" (Ruth 3:9).
- Ruth answered, "I am Ruth your maid" (Ruth 3:9).
- Because Boaz knew and respected Ruth, he responded, "May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter....I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence" (Ruth 3:10-11).
- According to the Law, Boaz could have redeemed the property for Naomi without marrying Ruth. Instead, he decided to marry her because she had pursued him faithfully, prepared for their meeting at the threshing floor, and demonstrated excellent character (Ruth 3:10-11).
- Boaz knew Ruth and respected her integrity, discipline, and godly character.

2. Ruth said "yes" to making herself ready for Boaz.

- Before the encounter at the threshing floor, Naomi told Ruth to make herself ready for Boaz.
- She told her to wash herself, anoint herself, put on her best clothes, meet Boaz at the threshing floor, keep herself hidden until she was ready, and lie at his feet (Ruth 3:3-4).
- Ruth's response to Naomi was simple but profound: "All that you say I will do" (Ruth 3:5).
- In other words, she said "yes" to being made ready for her future husband.

3. Like Ruth, we need to say "yes" to being made ready for our eternal Husband.

- Revelation 19:7 says, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."
- Just as Ruth said "yes" to being made ready for her earthly husband, we need to say "yes" to being made ready for our eternal Husband.
- When called to make herself ready, Ruth said, "All that you say I will do."
- Have you ever made a similar response to the Holy Spirit's calling to make yourself ready? Have you ever said "yes" to this high calling? If not, do so right now.
- With deep sincerity, give the Holy Spirit full permission to do whatever is necessary to make you ready as a worthy bride for Jesus.

Principle #7: Actively Prepare Yourself For Your Bridegroom.**1. Like Ruth, we must actively prepare ourselves for our Bridegroom.**

- To prepare for her future husband, Naomi told Ruth to:
 - Wash herself
 - Anoint herself
 - Put on her best clothes
 - Go down to the threshing floor
 - Do not let herself be known
 - Lie at his feet
- As previously stated, Ruth said "yes" to being made ready for her future husband, and then "she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her" (Ruth 3:6).
- In a similar fashion, saying "yes" to being made ready is not enough. We must actively prepare ourselves for our Bridegroom King.
- We must cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He leads us from season to season.
- We must devote ourselves to an ongoing work of preparation.

2. To be made ready for Jesus, we must do the same six things that Naomi instructed Ruth to do.

- Just as Ruth washed herself, the Holy Spirit wants to cleanse us with the blood of Jesus and wash us with the water of the Word (1 John 1:5-10; Eph. 5:26).
- Just as Ruth anointed herself with fragrant anointing oil, the Holy Spirit wants to anoint us with His power and presence.

- Just as Ruth put on her best clothes, we are called to cloth ourselves with wedding garments, which are righteous acts leading to an overcoming lifestyle (Matt. 22:12; Rev. 19:8).
- And, finally, just as Ruth went secretly to the threshing floor and lay at Boaz's feet, we are also called to lie at Jesus' feet at the threshing floor.
- In an agricultural society, the threshing floor was a place where the grain was separated from the chaff. The grain was separated by placing it on a hard surface and beating it.
- It is at the threshing floor, where we are sifted like wheat, that we meet Jesus as our Bridegroom (Luke 22:31-34). Laying at His feet in worship and bowed low before Him in humility, our selfish, chaff-like nature is separated from our Christ-like character.
- And like Ruth's encounter with Boaz, all of this is done in secret for an audience of One.
- After Ruth made herself ready and appeared to Boaz at the threshing floor, Boaz went before the city elders and asked them for permission to redeem Elimelech's land and take Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:1-8).

Like Ruth, let's actively make ourselves ready for Jesus by yielding completely to the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to transform us into people of excellent character that capture the heart of our Kinsman-Redeemer. Like Ruth, let's become totally devoted to our Husband, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Notes

1. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "love," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
2. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1995-1996), s.v. "Naomi," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
3. *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc., 1994), s.v. "Mara," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
4. *The Online Bible Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* (Ontario, Canada: Woodside Bible Fellowship and the Institute for Creation Research, 1993), s.v. "go'el," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft 2001).
5. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Kinsman," referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
6. Ibid.

Review QuestionsTrue or False

- _____ 1. The book of Ruth offers an excellent picture of how the bride must mature in devotion to her Bridegroom.
- _____ 2. Orpah and Ruth began their journey of devotion by determining to leave Moab.
- _____ 3. To leave Moab, we must make the decision to leave friends and worldly seductions that hinder our abandonment to Jesus.
- _____ 4. Many in the body of Christ love the Lord with all their heart even though they are offended at Him.
- _____ 5. Boaz is a beautiful picture of Jesus, our Kinsman-Redeemer.
- _____ 6. Ruth gained favor with Boaz because of her discipline, work ethic, and perseverance.
- _____ 7. As Ruth illustrates, it is not necessary to actively to say "yes" to the Holy Spirit to be made ready as a worthy bride.
- _____ 8. Holding onto bitterness makes it very difficult to love Jesus as a Bridegroom.
- _____ 9. It is at the threshing floor, where we are sifted like wheat, that we meet Jesus as our Bridegroom.
- _____ 10. Boaz chose Ruth to be his wife because she was known as a woman of excellence.

Fill in the blanks

- 11. Just like Ruth, there are _____ things we must do to make ourselves ready to meet our Bridegroom.
- 12. Some of those are: 1) _____ and _____ ourselves; 2) Put on our best _____; 3) Go down to the _____.
- 13. A spiritual discipline that we need is to be committed to a local _____.
- 14. Another discipline that we need is to dig deep into the _____ on a

regular basis.

15. Ruth 1:16-17 reads, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you _____, I will _____, and where you _____, I will _____. Your _____ shall be my _____, and your _____, my _____. Where you _____, I will _____, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Match the phrase on the left with the appropriate principle from the right.

- _____ 16. Call me Mara
- _____ 17. Gained favor with Boaz
- _____ 18. Desiring Boaz more than the grain of his fields
- _____ 19. Lie at his feet
- _____ 20. Leave the familiarity of family, friends, and culture

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. Principle 1: Determine to leave Moab.
- b. Principle 2: Release all bitterness.
- c. Principle 3: Appreciate Jesus as Your Kinsman-Redeemer.
- d. Principle 4: Develop spiritual disciplines.
- e. Principle 5: Desire Jesus above His blessings.
- f. Principle 6: Say "yes" to being made ready for your Bridegroom.
- g. Principle 7: Actively prepare yourself for your Bridegroom.

Session 10

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

This session covers:

- An overview of the parable of the ten virgins
- The need to be on the alert and to purchase more oil for our lamps
- How to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus

This session corresponds to:

- Session 10 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

An Overview of the Parable

1. The parable of the 10 virgins compares the kingdom of heaven to 10 virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the Bridegroom.

- As the story goes, five were wise and five were foolish.
- All 10 had an initial supply of oil to fuel their lamps, but the foolish did not take any extra oil in their flasks.
- While the Bridegroom delayed, they all got drowsy and began to sleep.
- At midnight, when the shout came that the Bridegroom was coming, all 10 virgins rose up to meet him. But the foolish virgins did not have enough oil to keep their lamps burning.
- So, when they asked the wise for some of their oil, the wise answered, "No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves" (Matt. 25:9).

- While the foolish virgins went to make the purchase, the Bridegroom came and those who were ready—that is, those who had enough oil for their lamps—went into the wedding feast and the door was shut.
- Later, when the foolish virgins wanted to come into the wedding feast, the Bridegroom said to them, “Truly I say to you, I do not know you” (Matt. 25:12).
- Jesus concludes the parable with this challenge: “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour” (Matt. 25:13).

2. This parable is a prophecy of what the church will look like and how it will function in the end times.

- This parable is set in the context of a larger section of Scripture, which begins with Jesus’ disciples asking Him, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3).
- Jesus answered this question with a detailed description of end-time events, stating that there will be famines, earthquakes, wars, upheavals, offenses, apostasy, persecution, and even the worship of the Anti-christ (Matt. 24).
- However, what many people don’t notice is that Jesus’ answer does not end with this list. He goes on in the next chapter to tell the parable of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25).
- Like the five wise virgins, we are to live with the same type of anticipation for our upcoming wedding day. Though we don’t know the day or the hour, we do know that the Bridegroom will return soon.
- Like an ancient Jewish bride waiting with great anticipation for her wedding day, we need to be alert, watchful, and focused on getting ready for our marriage to Jesus.
- Before the Lord returns, the church will know her bridal identity, she will make herself ready, and she will be seeking to know Jesus as a Bridegroom God.

Who Are the Five Foolish Virgins?

1. The way people interpret this parable determines how much energy they put into making themselves ready.

- Those who apply this parable to someone other than themselves rarely take this call seriously. Many who think this way believe they are automatically wise virgins because they are born again.
- On the other hand, those who view both the wise and the foolish virgins as true believers usually see the urgent need to make *themselves* ready.
- So the question we must answer is: Who are the five foolish virgins?

2. Some interpret the five foolish virgins as non-believers.

- A number of scholars interpret the five foolish virgins as individuals who profess Christ as their Savior but are not really converted to the faith.¹

- Others interpret the foolish virgins as the Jews who rejected Jesus at His first coming.²
- Few scholars from earlier generations have viewed the foolish virgins as true believers.

3. As the Holy Spirit unveils the mystery of the bride of Christ in our day, many leaders now view the foolish virgins as true believers.

- Mike Bickle of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City and Bob Sorge of Oasis House Ministries, for example, both concur that all 10 virgins are sincere believers.³
- Rick Joyner of Morningstar Ministries writes in his book, *The Final Quest*, that the foolish virgins are true believers who possess eternal life, but they occupy the lowest rank in heaven.⁴

4. There is strong scriptural evidence that all 10 virgins are true believers who are waiting for the Bridegroom to return.

- First, Paul called believers “pure virgin[s]” betrothed to one Husband, Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 11:2).
- When we are born again, we become like a virgin in the site of God. The blood of Jesus justifies us, washes away our sins, and makes our spirit new (Rom. 5:1; Heb. 12:23). So, it would be biblically consistent for Jesus to use this same symbolism in His parable.
- In addition, consider that both the wise and the foolish had an initial supply of oil. Traditionally, some have reasoned that the foolish virgins did not have any oil; therefore, since the oil represents the Holy Spirit, they were never truly born again.
- However, notice what Matthew 25:8 says: “The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’”
- The word for “going out” in the Greek means “to extinguish, quench, to put out.”⁵ You can only extinguish a fire that is burning. You can’t extinguish something that has never burned.
- Therefore, this Greek word shows us that the foolish virgins’ lamps were being extinguished, meaning they once had light in them. And since you can’t have light without oil, all 10 virgins must have had an initial supply of oil in their lamps.
- Another point is that all 10 virgins went out to meet the Bridegroom when He came (Matt. 25:6-7). Unbelievers, or those only superficially professing to believe in Jesus, would not be interested or eager to meet Him. Only born-again believers would be waiting for His coming.
- Finally, the number of virgins—10—supports the idea that the virgins represent all believers.
- In the ancient east, symbolism was often used to convey and emphasize a particular truth. Biblically speaking, 10 represents the *totality* of the issue or circumstance being discussed.⁶
- For example, the totality of God’s Law was summarized with 10 commandments. The totality of God’s judgments upon Egypt was released through 10 plagues. The totality of testing for some believers in the church of Smyrna was carried out in 10 days (Rev. 3:10).

- So, when Jesus said that 10 virgins went out to meet Him, He was saying that the totality of the church—that is, every born-again believer—will go out to meet Him when He returns.
- In summary, there is strong biblical evidence that *all 10 virgins were true born-again believers*. And as we will see in the next section, only half were wise!

The Wise Virgins Contrasted with the Foolish Virgins

1. The wise virgins' lights shined brightly because they were empowered by their secret life in God.

- In this parable, the lamps symbolize the virgins' external life in God, and it shined forth the light of their relationship with Jesus.
- Observe what Jesus said:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

- The wise virgins' light was their godly character. It was the fire of their passion for Jesus and the brilliance of their ministry, service, and good works. It was the power of God working through them because they were fully yielded to the Holy Spirit.
- In summary, their light represented the external fruit of their personal walk with the Lord.
- The lamps described in this parable were actually torches that were fed by a small vessel containing oil.
- These vessels held a small amount of oil and had to be frequently replenished. Without the constant supply of oil, the light would go out quickly.⁷
- The oil that fueled these lamps was hidden by the vessel that contained it.
- Just as oil was hidden in flasks, the wise virgins lamps burned brightly because of their hidden relationship with the Bridegroom.
- This oil of intimacy could only be purchased by each virgin individually, and it could only be purchased in the secret place of intimacy with Jesus (Matt. 25:9; Rev. 3:18).

2. The wise virgins pursued intimacy with the Bridegroom whereas the foolish did not.

- The Greek word for foolish is *moros*, which basically means being dull or sluggish.⁸

- The foolish virgins were not evil; they were good people who were dull and sluggish in their walk with the Lord. Because they took their position as the bride of Christ for granted, they grew lukewarm.
- Rather than living in the Spirit, the foolish virgins lived by human reason, logic, and self-will (1 Cor. 2:12-16). Though they were born again, they were entangled in the busyness of life and were weighed down by the cares of the world.
- Because they did not make intimacy with Jesus their number one priority, Jesus spoke these sobering words to them: "Truly I say to you, I do not know you" (Matt. 25:12).
- Throughout the Bible, the word "know" often suggests knowing someone fully or intimately. In fact, the Hebrew word for "know" is sometimes used to describe physical intimacy between a husband and wife (Gen. 4:1, NKJV).
- The Greek word used for "know" in this parable is *oida*, which means "fullness of knowledge." This type of knowledge is fully developed, as opposed to knowledge that is still growing.⁹
- Thus, Jesus was not saying He did not know who the foolish virgins were, for He is omniscient. He was saying that He did not know them intimately.
- In contrast, the wise virgins developed an intimate relationship with Jesus.
- The wise virgins lived differently than the foolish. They paid the price to purchase the oil that kept their lights burning brightly.
- They also remained awake and alert (Matt. 25:13).
- The wise virgins went to the secret place on a regular basis to meet with their Bridegroom, and as a result, developed an intimate relationship with Jesus.
- When the Bridegroom returned, therefore, the wise virgins had plenty of oil, their lamps burned brightly, and Jesus knew them intimately.
- Because the wise virgins took their personal relationship with God seriously, they were ready for the Bridegroom's coming and were welcomed at the wedding feast (Matt. 25:10).

Alert at His Coming

1. In this parable, Jesus challenged His disciples to be spiritually alert and to look for His coming.

- Jesus said, "Be on the alert...for you do not know the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13).
- Throughout the gospels, Jesus called His followers to remain alert in anticipation of His coming (Matt. 24:42-43, 25:13; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:37, 21:36).
- The interesting observation is that He did not give this admonition to the Pharisees, Sadducees, or any unbelievers. He was speaking directly to His disciples.
- In Matthew, Jesus said:

Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the

house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will (Matt. 24:42-44).

2. How do we stay spiritually alert?

- We must keep our attention focused on our relationship with Jesus. We can't just go to church on Sunday and forget about Him Monday through Saturday. We must think of Him daily.
- We must exercise discipline in order to be attentive to His voice, meditate on His Word, and pursue His presence.
- We must fight off passivity and defend ourselves against spiritual slumber.
- We must keep our spirits ready to receive from God as we rest in His presence.

Getting Oil for our Lamps

1. Each of us needs a constant supply of oil to keep our lights burning brightly.

- As previously stated, oil represents our private life in God that produces a bright light in a dark world.
- This type of oil is produced or "purchased" as we meet with our Bridegroom in the secret place.
- As we purchase more oil for our lamps, we will develop a passionate love relationship with the Lord that will result in deep intimacy and maturity.
- Then, we will be known by our Bridegroom, experience the joy of the wedding feast, and partner with our Bridegroom King for all eternity (1 Cor. 8:3).

2. Each of us must purchase our own supply of oil.

- As Jesus so clearly tells us in this parable, we cannot borrow oil from anyone else—we have to purchase it for ourselves.
- Just like we can't depend on another's faith for our salvation, we can't depend on anyone else for an intimate relationship with Jesus.
- We must go to the dealers ourselves (Matt. 25:9), and we must go often to keep our oil supplies replenished.

3. Purchasing oil will cost us time, money, and even friends.

- Though buying oil is expensive, the small price that we pay cannot even compare to the rewards we will experience at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

- The wise virgins knew the expensive cost of oil, but they considered being eternally prepared for Jesus worth any price.
- It is not always easy to buy oil for our lamps. Bob Sorge in his book, *Secrets of the Secret Place*, explains some of the challenges that we will face:

I connect viscerally with the pain of countless believers who carry the conviction that the secret place is central to an overcoming life but who struggle on a regular basis to maintain the secret place as a daily lifestyle. I know what it's like to live below what the Christian walk could be and yet feel almost powerless to change anything. I've watched myself return persistently to the sources which are no source. For example, when wanting to get revitalized from a draining day, we will look to television, as though its distractions will renew us—only to be left empty for the umpteenth time. Or, we will attend a church service in the hope that the preacher's walk with God will infuse us with fresh energy for the journey. But deep down we know that sermons and teachings, although edifying, can never replace the carrying power we find when we sit at His feet and hear His word for ourselves. We don't need to add another condemning word to the berating voices we all know so well. What we need, rather, is for our eyes to be lifted to the glorious hope we already carry within.¹⁰

- For many believers, setting aside time and energy to meet with God on a regular basis is one of the most difficult disciplines of the Christian faith.
- It's much easier to go to church, attend a conference, serve in a ministry, or even to take part in a corporate fast than to regularly set time apart to seek God personally.
- Despite our good intentions, the cares of the world, busyness of life, careers, children, recreation, and so many other "good" things distract us from the secret place.
- Despite the challenges that we face in pursuing intimacy with God, our mandate is to stay alert, press through the opposition, and remain focused on our relationship with Jesus.
- We must overcome the oppositions and distractions in order to buy more oil in the secret place.
- As we do this, we will become wise virgins whom the Lord knows intimately, and we will be welcomed into the eternal wedding feast.
- Writing about the need to purchase more oil, Bob Sorge states:

The secret place is where we buy oil. As we come aside to commune with our Lord, we are renewed in the Holy Spirit, and our oil levels are replenished....Oil in the lamp represents having an inner reservoir of Holy Spirit reality....It doesn't cost much to get oil for ministry, but it will cost you a lot to get the oil of an intimate relationship with Jesus....The oil of authentic relationship is bought at the cost of investing time and energy

in the secret place. The foolish will allow urgent matters of the moment to pull them away from the secret place after having a minimal filling. The wise will stay and continue to be filled with oil until their hearts are energized by their love relationship with Jesus....Devote yourself to the secret place until your heart is overflowing with love and zeal for your Beloved. Then, make it the first priority of your day to keep that oil replenished. The secret is right here....The secret place is the threshold for resourcing the replenishment you need to sustain through the dark night of Christ's delays.¹¹

Developing an Intimate Relationship with Jesus

1. There is no secret formula for developing a relationship with God.

- Because everyone is different, there is no one-size-fits-all program that guarantees intimacy with the Bridegroom.
- We each have a unique makeup and personality. We learn differently and have varying levels of personal discipline. The different seasons of life further contribute to our individuality.
- When we are single or married with no children, there is more time than when we have small children.
- At times, our careers are overly demanding.
- And then, as we reach retirement age, we often have more time to devote to our personal relationship with the Lord.

While there is no secret formula for developing intimacy with Jesus, there are seven scriptural keys that—regardless of personality or life stage—will help you along your journey.

Seven Keys to an Intimate Relationship with Jesus

1. Make time to sit at the Lord's feet and dine with Him in His presence.

- As Jesus relaxed at Martha's house, her sister Mary was "seated at His feet, listening to His word" (Luke 10:39).
- When Martha complained that Mary was not helping her with dinner preparations, Jesus told her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but *only one thing is necessary*, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).
- Jesus said that the one necessary thing is to push away the distractions in our busy lives and make time to sit at His feet.

2. Develop a lifestyle of meditating upon the Word.

- The psalmist wrote, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees....I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word" (Psalm 119:11-16, NIV).
- As Jesus was teaching His disciples about the importance of intimacy, He said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).
- Throughout the Scriptures, God stresses the importance of abiding in, studying, meditating, and hiding the Word in our heart.
- Knowing Jesus through the Word is a critical dimension to a life of intimacy.

3. Meet with God in the secret place through prayer and fasting.

- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is *in the secret place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matt 6:6, NKJV).
- He says the same thing about fasting (Matt. 6:18).
- In essence, the Lord is saying that we can meet with the heavenly Father in the secret place of intimacy through prayer and fasting.
- Jesus also said, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Matt. 9:15-16, NKJV).
- Fasting and prayer are important disciplines that help us develop a greater intimacy with our Bridegroom.

4. Learn to hear God's voice.

- Throughout the Scriptures, as God's people heard His voice, they were drawn closer to Him.
- Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).
- What a powerful verse! Not only does hearing His voice position us to follow Him, it also positions us to be *known* by Him. This is exactly what Jesus taught in the parable of the 10 virgins.
- As we learn to hear the Lord's voice, we are known by Jesus.

5. Develop a lifestyle of obedience.

- Knowing His Word and hearing His voice won't automatically lead to intimacy, however, unless we also obey what we know and hear.
- Jesus told His disciples, "You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:14-15).

- Notice that we are only Jesus' friends *if we do what He commands us*.
- Jesus also said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him" (John 14:21).
- Obedience proves that we really love God, and it draws us closer to the Father.

6. Develop a heart of worship.

- The Lord loves those who press in to His presence in worship.
- Revelation 4-5 offers us a glimpse of God's throne room, where we see that worship is the predominant activity of heaven. Those who are closest to the Lord's throne worship Him the most.
- As we worship the Lord, we draw close to Him. A lifestyle of worship helps us cultivate an intimate relationship with our Bridegroom.

7. Walk in humility.

- God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.
- Moses, who was the most humble man on the earth, communicated with God to face to face (Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:3).
- Those who walk in humility will have deep intimacy with the Bridegroom.

Let's strive to be wise virgins. Let's stay alert and make ourselves ready for the eternal wedding feast. Let's check our lamps often, and, if it's running dry, not delay in purchasing more oil.

Notes

1. J.C. Ryle, *Matthew* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1993), pp. 238-239. Also, James M. Boice, *The Parables of Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), pp. 98-99.
2. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 320-321.
3. Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place* (Kansas City, Missouri: Oasis House, 2008), pp. 200.
4. Rick Joyner, *The Final Quest* (New Kensington, Pennsylvania: Whitaker House, 1996), pp. 89.
5. *The Online Bible Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* (Ontario, Canada: Woodside Bible Fellowship and the Institute for Creation Research, 1993), s.v. "sbennumi" and "zbennumi," referenced from PC Study Bible v3.2 (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft 2001).
6. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1995-1996), s.v. "Number," referenced from PC Study Bible v3.2 (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).

7. *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "lamp", referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
8. *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "fool, foolish, foolishly, foolishness", referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
9. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "know, knowledge, known, unknown", referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
10. Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place*, pp. 4-5.
11. *Ibid*, pp. 199-201.

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. In the parable of the ten virgins, the wise virgins refer to true believers in Jesus and the foolish ones refer to non-believers.
- _____ 2. The parable of the ten virgins is a prophecy of what the church will look like and how it will function in the end times.
- _____ 3. As God unveils His last day plans, many leaders in the Body of Christ believe that all ten virgins refer to true believers.
- _____ 4. Even though the Scriptures are silent on the issue, the primary reason that many leaders think all 10 virgins are true believers is that they have heard God speak to them concerning this issue.
- _____ 5. The wise virgins' lights shined brightly because they were empowered by their secret life in God.
- _____ 6. Believers buy oil by faithfully attending church services and by committing to the vision of a local church.
- _____ 7. There are several scriptural keys that will help us develop intimacy with Jesus.
- _____ 8. One key to developing an intimate relationship with Jesus is to develop a
- _____ 9. As the parable of the ten virgins teaches, we are ready for the eternal wedding feast when we accept Jesus as Savior and get our initial supply of
- _____ 10. The two primary teachings of the parable of the ten virgins are to stay spiritually alert and to develop an intimate relationship with the Lord.

Fill in the blanks

11. Each of us needs a constant supply of _____ to keep our lights burning brightly.
12. Oil is produced or "purchased" as we meet with our Bridegroom in the _____ place.
13. Purchasing oil will cost us _____, _____, and even _____.

14. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must make time to _____ at His feet and _____ with Him in His presence.

15. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must also develop a heart for deep _____.

Match the statement on the left with the appropriate theme from the parable of the ten virgins from the right (You can use an answer more than once).

_____ 16. Dine with Jesus.

_____ 17. Exercise discipline in order to be attentive.

_____ 18. You do not know the day nor the hour.

_____ 19. Resist passivity.

_____ 20. Learn to hear God's voice.

Two main themes from the parable of the ten virgins:

- a. Develop an intimate relationship with Jesus.
- b. Stay spiritually alert.

Session 11

Overcoming Jezebel

This session covers:

- The counterfeit bride in the end times
- The call to overcome Jezebel
- The demonic spirit behind Jezebel called the queen of heaven
- Eight ways that we overcome Jezebel

This session corresponds to:

- Session 11 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

The Counterfeit Bride in the End Times

1. At the end of the age, two movements will capture the attention of heaven and earth.

- Following His return, Jesus will have a worthy bride who will sit on His throne and rule the nations with Him.
- In direct opposition, Satan is preparing a counterfeit bride who will partner with the Antichrist and seduce the nations into idolatry, immorality, witchcraft, and blasphemy.
- John described this counterfeit bride as a harlot who partners with the kings of the earth to intoxicate the nations with her immorality (Rev. 17:2).

2. In the days preceding Jesus' return, the counterfeit bride will stand in stark contrast to the true bride.

- The counterfeit bride, described as a harlot, will be clothed in purple and scarlet whereas the true bride will be clothed in fine linen, white and clean (Rev. 17:4, 19:7-8).

- The true bride will be humble and meek whereas the harlot will be proud and pompous.
- The harlot will be rich, extravagant, and alluring. She will be adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls.

3. Through the harlot, Satan will deceive the nations and persecute the church.

- The harlot will cause many Christians to fall away from the faith in the end times (Matt. 24:10; 2 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1).
- In fact, John saw the harlot “drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” (Rev. 17:6). The harlot will kill many believers who resist her immorality.
- Her beauty will also be a delusion to the nations, for “all the nations [will be] deceived by [her] sorcery” (Rev. 18:23).
- Ultimately, all who are seduced by her will bow their knee to the Anti-christ and worship Satan (Rev. 13:3-4).

4. The harlot refers to a future world-wide religious network that will deceive the nations and prepare them to worship the Antichrist.

- The harlot in Revelation 17-18 refers to a future world-wide religious network of idolatry and demon worship that will seduce the nations and cause them to depart from the living God.
- In the Old Testament, the prophets often referred to Israel as a harlot because they worshiped idols (Ezek. 16; Hos. 4).
- Hosea said, “My people consult their wooden idol, and their diviner’s wand informs them; for a *spirit of harlotry has led them astray*, and they have *played the harlot*, departing from their God” (Hos. 4:12).
- In his commentary on Revelation, Mike Bickle writes that the harlot will manifest as a counterfeit justice movement that will unify multitudes from the largest religions on the earth. He goes on to say that this movement will offer great benefits, such as humanitarian aid, a unified religion that minimizes war and religious conflict, and a prosperous world economy.¹
- The harlot will probably be some type of integrated religious system that combines parts of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.
- This harlot religion will have great prominence and will be well-respected by leaders in government, business, and even in the church.
- This movement will be attractive because it will be a religion of affirmation and toleration, it will appear to bring temporary peace, and there will be no moral absolutes.
- It will be a counterfeit justice movement that will feed the poor and be deeply involved in humanitarian projects while not requiring adherence to any set of moral standards.
- No matter how attractive it will appear, the harlot will be the very embodiment of hell on earth, as she will “become a dwelling place of de-

mons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird" (Rev. 18:2).

- Ultimately, Satan will use this harlot religion to weaken the conscience of the nations and prepare the earth to worship him through the Anti-christ.

5. The bride must separate from all aspects of the harlot.

- It is certainly no coincidence that before the bride has made herself ready (Rev. 19:7), "the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you [the great harlot] any longer" (Rev. 18:23).
- Why? Because God will call His people to separate from her. John wrote:

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "*Come out of her, my people*, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities (Rev. 18:4-5).

- In the original language, the verb form of "come out" expresses a deep urgency to separate from the harlot.² It is an urgent summons to leave the enticements of her idolatry, sensuality, compromise, and worldliness.
- Before the bride will be fully ready for Jesus, she will have first separated from the harlot and her seductive ways.

Though this harlot system has not yet fully emerged, the spirit behind her has been around throughout history. Most notably, in the woman Jezebel. In fact, Jesus specifically called the church at Thyatira to overcome Jezebel. Let's look at Jesus' message to the church of Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29) to see how this relates to becoming a worthy bride for Jesus and separating from the emerging harlot.

The Church at Thyatira

1. The culture of Thyatira caused idol worship to thrive.

- Though Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities mentioned in Revelation 2-3, the church in this city received the longest message.
- Thyatira was prosperous because of the city's famous craftsmen's guilds, which were unions of men in similar crafts or trades who upheld certain standards and protected the members of the union.
- There were guilds for wool workers, linen workers, manufactures of outer garments, dyers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers,

slave dealers, and bronze smiths.

- Pagan worship thrived in Thyatira because each trade guild had its own guardian god, and every guild member was expected to attend the guild festivals and eat the food that had been offered to their god.
- After the feast, the people would pay homage to the guild's god by participating in immoral activities, including drunkenness and fornication.
- If someone left before this, they would experience ridicule, suffer persecution, and possibly lose prosperous business opportunities.

2. While commending the church for its faith and love, Jesus rebuked them for tolerating Jezebel.

- In the midst of such an idolatrous and immoral culture, Jesus commended the church at Thyatira for its increase in ministry, vibrant faith, and love for Him (Rev. 2:19).
- The issue at Thyatira, however, was their lack of zeal for moral and doctrinal purity.
- Jesus rebuked them for tolerating idol worship and sexual immorality.
- Jesus told them, "I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (Rev. 2:20).

3. There was a woman in the church who acted just like the Old Testament Jezebel.

- Jesus used the name Jezebel to identify a woman in the church who was a false teacher and prophetess.
- Most likely, Jezebel was not this woman's real name. Instead, Jesus used the name Jezebel to associate her actions with the Old Testament Jezebel, the Phoenician wife of King Ahab, who led the northern kingdom of Israel into idolatry, causing them to worship Baal and Ashteroth.
- Jezebel also lowered the nation's moral standard, leading to a significant increase in sexual immorality and witchcraft (1 Kings 18-2 Kings 9).
- Although Israel began worshiping Baal and Ashteroth during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-7), Jezebel brought it to an entirely new level.
- Jezebel was so enmeshed in this cult that 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah ate regularly at her table (1 Kings 18:19).
- As historical evidence testifies, pagan worship usually involved overt witchcraft, astrology, prophetic oracles from demonic spirits, gross sensuality and lasciviousness, drug use, lewd dancing, erotic music, ceremonial prostitution and sexual rites, human sacrifice, the emasculation of males, and homosexuality.³
- In short, Jezebel caused Israel to "play the harlot," seduced her into gross abominations, and led her away from the one true God.

4. The Jezebel at Thyatira led the church into compromise.

- Like her Old Testament counterpart, the Jezebel at Thyatira seduced Jesus' servants to "commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (Rev. 2:20, NKJV).
- Because the Jezebel at Thyatira claimed to have special revelations from God and even called herself a prophetess, the church leaders gave her authority to teach.
- As a result of her unbiblical teaching, many in the church believed that God's grace gave them the freedom to indulge the flesh and participate in the guild festivals, including paying homage to false gods and committing acts of sexual immorality.

5. Jesus' message to Thyatira—and to us—is that we must overcome Jezebel's works, character, and influence in our sphere of authority.

- The church at Thyatira did not hate lawlessness and evil—they tolerated it. Instead of resisting the evil influence of Jezebel, they allowed her to seduce them into immorality and idolatry.
- To become a worthy bride for Jesus, we must overcome Jezebel's pride, rebellion, control, witchcraft, idolatry, sensuality, and sexual immorality. We must cleanse ourselves from all of her abominable defilements.
- As was promised to the church at Thyatira, those who overcome will be given authority to rule the nations with Jesus in the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 2:26-27).

The Spirit Behind Jezebel

1. Before we discuss how to overcome Jezebel, we first need to understand that there was a demonic spirit that empowered her.

- The Jezebel at Thyatira called herself a prophetess, and she had many followers. Most likely, people followed her because she had a supernatural gift; she could possibly tell them unknown information about themselves or perhaps even predict certain future events.
- Though Jezebel was gifted prophetically, she was not empowered by the Holy Spirit. Her gift was demonic. It was very similar to the slave girl in Acts 16:16-18 who had a spirit of divination and brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.
- The demonic spirit that empowered the Jezebel at Thyatira is the same spirit behind the Jezebel of the Old Testament⁴, the great harlot of Revelation 17-18, the goddess worship in ancient Babylon, and pagan worship throughout history.

2. The demonic spirit behind Jezebel is a world ruler called the queen of heaven.

- To better understand this false queen's identity, we need to understand what Paul taught the Ephesians about spiritual warfare. He re-

vealed that hell has a hierarchy with different degrees of authority and power. Specifically, he identified "rulers of the darkness of this age" or "world forces of this darkness" (Eph. 6:12, NKJV, NASU).

- In other words, there are demonic world rulers who influence the nations.
- The queen of heaven is a world ruler who has influenced the world's religions, cultures, and morality throughout history.
- Talking about the judgment of the great harlot, a voice from heaven said, "To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, '*I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning*'" (Rev. 18:7).
- "I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning" is a direct reference to Isaiah 47:5-9.

3. Isaiah 47 refers directly to the queen of heaven and reveals that she was the power behind the religion of ancient Babylon, which has influenced most of the world.

- Many scholars assert that Isaiah 47 is a fulfilled prophecy of Babylon's fall in 539 B.C.
- However, if you look closely at this prophecy, it is not about the fall of Babylon as an empire, but the demise of ancient Babylon's religious influence, which has affected most of the world.
- And as Revelation 18:7 makes clear, this prophecy will not actually be fulfilled until the end times.
- Writing about Babylon's religious heritage, John Walvoord states:

Babylon was important not only politically but also religiously. Nimrod, who founded Babylon (Gen. 10:8-12), had a wife known as Semiramis who founded the secret religious rites of the Babylonian mysteries, according to accounts outside the Bible. Semiramis has a son with an alleged miraculous conception who was given the name Tammuz and in effect was a false fulfillment of the promise of the seed of the woman given to Eve (Gen. 3:15).

Various religious practices were observed in connection with the false Babylonian religion, including the recognition of the mother and child as God and of creating an order of virgins who became religious prostitutes. Tammuz, according to the tradition, was killed by the wild animal and restored to life, a satanic anticipation and counterfeit of Christ's resurrection.⁵

- According to tradition, Semiramis was a virgin, and she was worshiped in Babylon as the queen of heaven.⁶
- The mother-child worship that Semiramis created in Babylon was then exported to most of the world. Writing about this, Mark Hitchcock notes:

The legend of Semiramis and Tammuz spread around the world. Their names were changed in different places, but the

basic story remained the same. In Assyria, the mother was Ishtar, the son was Tammuz. In Phoenicia, the mother was As-tarte and the son was Baal. In Egypt, she was Isis and her son was Osiris, or Horus. In Greece, she was Aphrodite and her son was Eros. For the Romans, the mother was Venus and the son was Cupid.⁷

- The reason why this is so important is that the harlot of Revelation 17-18 has written on her forehead, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Rev. 17:5).
- Babylon, as the first city completely dedicated to a network of false gods and Satan worship, is the mother of all harlots, and she has influenced all the nations.
- With that background, we can better understand Isaiah 47. Isaiah begins this prophecy by stating, "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no longer be called tender and delicate" (Isa. 47:1).
- Notice that Isaiah is not talking to Babylon. He is speaking directly to the "virgin daughter of Babylon"—queen Semiramis—the idol that the Babylonians worshiped as the virgin queen of heaven. He is telling this goddess that she will no longer have a throne.
- Here is where it gets interesting. Paul said, "What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons" (1 Cor. 10:19-20).
- In essence, Paul is telling us that behind every idol is a demon. And when people worship idols, they are really worshiping demons.
- Returning to Isaiah 47, we see that the demon behind Semiramis is the queen of heaven (Jer. 7:18, 44:17-25).
- This is not a lower-level demon, but a world ruler that has influenced most of the earth and will gain her greatest degree of power in the end times.
- God says to this demonic world ruler behind Semiramis, "Sit silently, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for you will no longer be called the queen of kingdoms" (Isa. 47:5).

4. The queen of heaven is the demonic spirit behind much of the defilement in the earth.

- The queen of heaven is the demonic spirit behind false religion, idolatry, sexual immorality, witchcraft, control, and compromise. It is the spirit behind sensuality and sexual perversion. It is the source of witchcraft and the occult.
- The queen of heaven seeks to emasculate men and is the driving force behind homosexuality. This spirit is also behind the feminist movement, abortion rights groups, and the New Age movement.

- It is the power behind astrology and much of the music and entertainment industries.
- The queen of heaven is also violently opposed to godly families, especially to male leadership in the home.
- In addition, this world ruler is behind drunkenness, drug abuse, sensuous dancing, sexual immorality, and perversion.
- And as we have already seen, the queen of heaven is the world ruler behind false religion.

5. The queen of heaven has power to the degree that she remains hidden.

- Isaiah said that this queen feels “secure in [her] wickedness” because, in her own words, “No one sees me” (Isa. 47:10).
- As long as the truth about her is covered, as long as she is shrouded by darkness, she “dwells securely” and boasts in her heart, “I will be a queen forever....I am, and there is no one besides me. I will not sit as a widow, nor know loss of children” (Isa. 47:7-8).
- Yet God promises that her “nakedness will be uncovered” and her “shame also will be exposed” (Isa. 47:3).
- As God unveils the queen of heaven, those under her influence will be liberated. In the words of God, she will know “loss of children...in full measure” (Isa. 47:9).

6. The queen of heaven wants to stop the bride of Christ from maturing.

- The background we have just discussed is crucially important because it highlights the war going on in the spirit realm regarding the bride of Christ.
- The queen of heaven wants to “be a queen forever” (Isa. 47:7), and she does not want to give up her authority to the bride of Christ—the true queen of heaven.
- So she is fighting against the bride of Christ with all of her might. She wants to defile the bride through idolatry, sexual immorality, and witchcraft so that she can maintain her position of authority and world-wide influence.
- It is interesting that the bride of Christ does not make herself fully ready until God destroys the harlot Babylon (Rev. 17-18, 19:7).

If we want to become a worthy bride for Jesus and become the true queen of heaven, we must overcome the false queen. Like Jesus said, we must overcome Jezebel.

As we examine Jezebel in the Old and New Testament and the queen of heaven in Isaiah 47, there are eight areas that we must overcome if we want to be a worthy bride and rule the nations with Jesus.

Eight Areas That We Must Overcome

Overcoming Jezebel means that we must repent of the character and the works of the Old and New Testament Jezebel, and we must be liberated from the influence of the spirit behind Jezebel—the queen of heaven.

1. We must overcome compromising religious beliefs.

- Just as 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah ate at Jezebel's table and caused Israel to "play the harlot," false religious beliefs are leading many of God's people into compromise.
- Because of religious wars, a disdain for religious bigotry, and the desire not to discriminate on the basis of religion, there is mounting pressure to unite the world's religions and create "unity." Government leaders wrongly tell us that all religions worship the same god; they just call him by different names.
- Churches are mixing Christianity with Islam.
- We see both church and government leaders reaching out with peace initiatives toward leaders of false religions.
- Even within the Protestant Church, the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith are being weakened in order to reach seekers, appear more relevant to the world, and appeal to those who reject Christianity.
- These movements are using good things like justice, mercy, unity, and compassion inappropriately to appear less rigid and more tolerant of those from different religious backgrounds.
- These subtle compromises are setting the stage for the great harlot to emerge in the end times.
- A worldwide religious system of toleration and acceptance is beginning to emerge that will ultimately unite multitudes from the largest religions of the earth, facilitate economic prosperity, and foster world peace—at the expense of honoring the true God.
- By the time the Antichrist comes to power, those who refuse to compromise their religious beliefs will stand out from the one-world religion. This includes Christians who hold fast to the Word of God.
- Just imagine how the media will portray Christians who resist this one-world religion. We will be viewed as old-fashioned, narrow-minded,

intolerant bigots.

- In fact, Revelation says that many believers will be killed because they refuse to compromise their beliefs (Rev. 17:6).
- In this context, the Lord says to come out of the harlot—this world-wide religious movement—in order not to receive of her plagues (Rev. 18:4).
- The overcoming bride must separate from religious compromise—one of Jezebel's long-time webs of deceit—by holding fast to the Word and to the truth that Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6).
- We separate by moving beyond religious rituals to a faith-walk with Jesus that is real and deep.
- In addition, we must cling to our doctrinal beliefs and refuse all forms of compromise that would make us more accepted by the world.

2. We must overcome sexual sin.

- Isaiah called the queen of heaven a "sensual one" (Isa. 47:8).
- In Hebrew, this word means "voluptuous,"⁸ or "full of, producing, or characterized by sensual delights and pleasures; sensual; arising from sensual gratification."⁹
- The queen of heaven is the demonic spirit behind sensuality, fornication, sexual perversion, pornography, and homosexuality.
- Jesus said that the Jezebel at Thyatira led His servants into "acts of immorality" (Rev. 2:20). Enmeshed in the trade guilds at Thyatira was the worship of false gods, sexual perversion, ceremonial prostitution, substance abuse, lewd dancing, and erotic music.
- We live in a culture where sexual immorality is the accepted norm and abortion is a form of birth control. We live in a day when Internet pornography is at an all-time high. The very definition of marriage is being threatened by gay activists who are pushing to legalize homosexual marriage. Those who believe that homosexuality is a sin are now viewed as narrow-minded and bigoted.
- Our culture of sensuality, immorality, and perversion has influenced the clothes we wear, the magazines we read, the television shows we watch, and the movies we pay money to see.
- Regularly, we hear of a Christian leader lured by Jezebel's seductions into an affair or a homosexual relationship. Often, there is very little difference between believers and unbelievers.
- If we want to be a worthy bride for Jesus, we must overcome every sexual sin. We must aggressively pursue God's grace and allow the Holy Spirit to remove all sexual immorality, sensuality, moral impurity, and perversion from our lives.
- We must strive to be cleansed in body, soul, and spirit from Jezebel's work of sexual immorality and perversion. Jesus' bride will be pure, spotless, and blameless.

3. We must overcome pride.

- The Old Testament Jezebel was arrogant and proud, the New Testament Jezebel called "herself a prophetess" (Rev. 2:20), and the queen

of heaven says in her heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me" (Isa. 47:10).

- Those who are influenced by this spirit often think that they are the most important or the most spiritual. They feel as though God made a mistake by not making them the pastor.
- Their spiritual pride leads them to criticize, judge, or gossip about those in authority. In some cases, their burning desire to be in charge motivates them to manipulate or control.
- Jezebel is focused totally on herself, whereas the worthy bride is called to a Sermon-on-the-Mount lifestyle of surrender and humility.
- To become a worthy bride, we must resist pride and learn to walk in humility. We must repent of Jezebel's arrogance by choosing to be submitted to authority and Christ-exalting.

4. We must overcome rebellion and independence.

- The name *Jezebel* literally means "non-cohabited or unhusbanded."¹⁰ Essentially, *Jezebel* means "one who is without co-habitation."
- Recall that the queen of heaven boasts in her heart, "There is no one besides me" (Isa. 47:8).
- Those influenced by Jezebel are usually independent or rebellious. They often have a difficult time submitting to the vision of a local church, preferring to pursue their own vision.
- Everyone should pursue their God-given vision. However, many people's personal vision would better be fulfilled as they served the vision of a local church. God places more value on what we do corporately than on what we achieve individually.
- If those with an independent spirit would choose to fulfill their ministry calling by serving the vision of a local church, God would exalt them and give them a ministry of much greater influence.
- Often, those influenced by Jezebel refuse to cooperate with the pastor and church leadership. They even have a hard time becoming a committed member of the church. Instead, they float about from one fellowship to another as "church hoppers." They are like spiritual groupies who follow the prophet of the month around town.
- Some "church hoppers" under the influence of Jezebel claim that they are called to the "church of the city," rather than to a particular congregation. As a result, they are not planted in the house of God, they live with no accountability to spiritual leadership, and they never mature as a believer. This is a widespread and serious issue facing the end-time church.
- We live in a generation when God is raising up everyone in the body of Christ to minister. The day of the pastor or prophet doing all the ministry is over. However, this only happens as people are submitted to the corporate vision and to the God-ordained leadership of the church.
- To make ourselves ready as a worthy bride, we must repent of rebellion and independence, get connected to a local church, and serve the corporate vision with an attitude of meekness and humility.

5. We must overcome control and manipulation.

- Jezebel also wants to dominate, control, and manipulate.
- People influenced by this spirit will attempt to dominate their children, control their spouses, intimidate pastors, and even control entire churches.
- This spirit desires to control others beyond their God-given authority. Jezebel definitely lives up to her name. She will not co-habit with anyone unless she can dominate the relationship.
- A person influenced by Jezebel will put on a facade of submission in order to gain some advantage or to seize greater control. Usually, this is very subtle. They will often use flattery, sweetness, encouragement, or even prophetic words to manipulate people's emotions and control a situation.
- This spirit influences parents when they discipline their children. They quickly move from proper discipline to control and domination. More often than not, people who control, manipulate, and dominate their children eventually lose their relationship with them.
- Marriages are not exempt, either. Wives who attempt to control their husbands or husbands who attempt to dominate their wives usually end up with a troubled marriage. They are robbed of experiencing an intimate friendship or satisfying relationship.
- Controlling wives tend to produce passive husbands who are indifferent toward God. They may be very successful businessmen, but they do very little in the kingdom of God.
- Controlling husbands, on the other hand, produce intimidated and insecure wives who walk on eggshells. They are in bondage to their husband's fears, finances, and schedule, as if they live in prison.
- To become a worthy bride for Jesus, we must repent and overcome all forms of control and manipulation.

6. We must overcome dead religion and super spirituality.

- Both Jezebels were very religious. As we mentioned, the Old Testament Jezebel invited over 800 demonically-empowered prophets to dine regularly at her table. The New Testament Jezebel at Thyatira had a demonic gift of prophecy and taught regularly in the church.
- Jezebel appears very religious, usually in one of two ways. First, some who are influenced by this spirit are very ritualistic. They perform all of the religious exercises. They attend church twice on Sunday and are there when the doors open every Wednesday. They light candles, burn incense, and say impressive-sounding prayers. But often their religious experience is superficial. They are more connected to the rituals and ceremonies than they are to Jesus.
- This is not an attack on mainline denominations who value these practices as a part of heart-felt worship. Rather, it is an admonition for us all—regardless of denomination—to be aware of superficially going through the motions of a ritual or tradition while remaining distant from God in our hearts.
- Jezebel wants to make sure that we remain an immature child with a

form of godliness that lacks any real power or authority.

- Jezebel also tries to appear super spiritual. Individuals under this influence are always eager to boast about their latest word from the Lord, prophetic dream, or vision, without regard for what anyone else has to say.
- They display their spirituality with manifestations that do not seem motivated by the Holy Spirit. They act spiritual and can be excessively demonstrative and loud, sometimes disrupting the entire service.
- Jezebel manifests in a variety of religious ways, but the primary purpose is to appear spiritual.
- In contrast, the Lord's bride will be real—not religious or super spiritual.

7. We must overcome intimidation.

- Jezebel wants to keep the bride of Christ from maturing. One way that she does this is through fear and intimidation.
- Isaiah said that the queen of heaven tries to cause trembling or terror (Isa. 47:12).
- The Old Testament Jezebel caused the mighty prophet Elijah to cower in fear and lose his ultimate calling (1 Kings 19:1-4). Even though Elijah called fire down from heaven and destroyed the prophets of Baal, Jezebel's intimidating threats motivated Elijah to run in fear to Beersheba and say, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4).
- Because of Jezebel's fear, discouragement, and intimidation, Elijah fell short of his calling and had to pass on his mantle to Elisha.
- The queen of heaven boasts, "I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning" (Rev. 18:7). This spirit wants to be a queen forever, and she uses fear and intimidation to keep the bride of Christ from maturing (Isa. 47:7).
- To become a worthy bride for Jesus, we must overcome Jezebel's intimidation, fear, and discouragement.

8. We must overcome witchcraft.

- Jezebel is also the power behind witchcraft. Talking about the queen of heaven, Isaiah stated:

Stand fast now in your spells and in your many sorceries with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you will be able to profit, perhaps you may cause trembling. You are wearied with your many counsels; let now the astrologers, those who prophesy by the stars, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you from what will come upon you (Isa. 47:12-13).

- The queen of heaven is the spirit behind overt witchcraft practiced in the remote villages of Africa, South and Central America, and even among some groups in the United States.

- It is the force behind sorcery, astrology, the Ouija Board, séances, and the occult.
- It is the driving power behind Freemasonry, fortune tellers, palm readers, and tarot cards.
- To overcome Jezebel, we must repent of our involvement in all forms of witchcraft and separate from them.
- The church can no longer play around with these deep things of Satan. We must no longer look to our horoscopes to see how our days might go. We must not participate in Freemasonry or any other secret society. Nor should we watch movies like *Harry Potter* or read books that promote witchcraft.
- To become a worthy bride for Jesus, we must resist all forms of witchcraft.

Make it a high priority to overcome Jezebel's influence in your sphere of authority, including your heart, home, church, business, city, and nation. Don't give Jezebel an inch. Hate her works of witchcraft, sensuality, and idolatry. Separate from her influence and overcome her character so that you can be made ready as a worthy bride for Jesus. Do not "tolerate the woman Jezebel" any longer (Rev. 2:19).

Notes

1. Mike Bickle, *Book of Revelation Study Guide* (Kansas City, Missouri: Forerunner Books, 2009), pp. 68.
2. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22, An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), pp. 320.
3. Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1993), pp. 76-78 and Jonas Clark, *Jezebel, Seducing Goddess of War* (Hallandale, Florida: Spirit of Life Ministries, 1998), pp. 65.
4. Paul said that when people worship idols, they become "sharers in demons" (1 Cor. 10:20). That is, they come under the influence of the demon that they worship. They become demonized. This is how we know that the Old Testament Jezebel was controlled by the queen of heaven, which was the demon behind Ashteroth—the goddess that Jezebel worshiped and made one of the preeminent gods in Israel.
5. John F. Walvoord, "Revelation" in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill: Victor Books, 1993), 2:970-71.
6. Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons* (Ontario, Canada: Chick Publications), pp. 141 and <http://ldolphin.org/semir.html>, referenced on July 3, 2009.
7. Mark Hitchcock, *The Second Coming of Babylon* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), pp. 42.

8. *The Online Bible Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* (Ontario, Canada: Woodside Bible Fellowship and the Institute for Creation Research, 1993), s.v. "ִּאֲדִינ," referenced from PC Study Bible v3.2 (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).
9. *Webster's New World Dictionary & Thesaurus*, s.v. "voluptuous."
10. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988) s.v. "Jezebel," referenced from PC Study Bible v3.2 (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. The harlot of Revelation 17 and 18, while an interesting concept to study, has no real significance to the end-time church.
- _____ 2. The harlot refers to a future world-wide religious network that will deceive the nations and prepare them to worship the Antichrist.
- _____ 3. Before the bride will be fully ready for Jesus, she will have first separated from the harlot and her seductive ways.
- _____ 4. Jesus' message to Thyatira was that it had overcome Jezebel's works, character, and influence.
- _____ 5. The spirit behind Jezebel is the queen of heaven.
- _____ 6. Isaiah 49 refers directly to the queen of heaven and reveals that she was the power behind the religion of ancient Babylon.
- _____ 7. The queen of heaven is the demonic spirit behind false religion, idolatry, sexual immorality, witchcraft, control, and compromise.
- _____ 8. Although they have similar traits, the harlot and the queen of heaven are not closely connected.
- _____ 9. Jezebel leads believers into rebellion and independence.
- _____ 10. Those who overcome Jezebel must separate from compromising religious beliefs.

Fill in the blanks

11. The queen of heaven wants to stop the bride of Christ from _____.
12. The queen of heaven has power to the degree that she remains _____.
13. The demonic spirit behind Jezebel is a world ruler called the _____
_____.
14. Isaiah chapter _____ refers directly to the queen of heaven and reveals that she was the power behind the religion of ancient Babylon, which has influenced most of the world.

15. The queen of heaven is the demonic spirit behind much of the _____ in the earth.

Match the phrase on the left with the appropriate way that we must overcome Jezebel from the right.

- _____ 16. Stand fast in your spells
- _____ 17. Dominate children and spouse
- _____ 18. Manifestations not motivated by the Holy Spirit
- _____ 19. Sensuality, moral impurity, and perversion
- _____ 20. Causes trembling

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. We must overcome compromising religious beliefs.
- b. We must overcome sexual sin.
- c. We must overcome pride.
- d. We must overcome rebellion and independence.
- e. We must overcome control and manipulation.
- f. We must overcome dead religion and super spirituality.
- g. We must overcome intimidation.
- h. We must overcome witchcraft.

Session 12

So Doing

This session covers:

- The need to be found "so doing" when Jesus returns
- Seven things that we need to do to make ourselves ready as a worthy bride

This session corresponds to:

- Session 12 of *Understanding the Bride of Christ* CDs

Be Found "So Doing"

1. Our new identity as a betrothed bride will transform how we think, feel, and act.

- Accepting a bridal identity will change our entire perspective on life, including ministry.
- As we live in our new bridal identity, we will be supernaturally motivated to "be about [our] Father's business" (Luke 2:49, NKJV).
- Living as the bride of Christ will naturally inspire us to partner with Jesus to do what He's doing.

2. Jesus challenged us to be found "so doing" when He returns.

- Jesus said:

Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds *so doing* when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions (Matt. 24:45-47).

- What are we to be found “so doing” when He comes? In this session, we will look at seven things that the Bible says we should be doing when Jesus returns.
- If we incorporate these seven things into our lives, we “will do well” in our journey of making ourselves ready as a worthy bride for Jesus (Acts 15:29).

1. Pursue An Overcoming Lifestyle.

1. Those who want to make themselves ready as a worthy bride must overcome what Jesus listed in Revelation 2-3.

- In the last session, drawing from Jesus’ message to the church at Thyatira, we saw the need to overcome Jezebel in order to be a worthy bride.
- In addition to this message, Jesus gave six other messages in Revelation 2-3, which also contain crucial information for those who want to make themselves ready.

2. In these six messages, a clear connection emerges between overcoming and inheriting our full reward as Jesus’ bride.

- Jesus promised the saints at Pergamum “hidden manna” if they overcame (Rev. 2:17).
 - This reward is deep revelation that comes out of intimacy with Jesus.
 - Jesus Himself is the hidden manna that will satisfy our souls and enrich our resurrected bodies as we partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb and feast upon Him for all eternity.
- Jesus also told the believers at Pergamum, “To him who overcomes...I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it” (Rev. 2:17).
 - In the days of the Roman Empire, white stones were given to honor those who offered valiant service to the community or were victorious in battle or athletic competitions.
 - Recipients of the white stones were given privileges like admission to special events, including the games and feasts hosted by the Roman Empire.
 - The white stone in Revelation likely refers to admittance to the marriage supper of the Lamb, where we will dine with Jesus in deep intimacy.
- To Thyatira, He promised the overcomers that they will rule the nations with Him during the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 2:26).
- To the overcomers at Sardis, Jesus promised that “they [will] walk with Me in white, for they are worthy” (Rev. 3:4). Most likely, walking

with Jesus in white refers to receiving wedding garments and participating in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

- To ancient Philadelphia, Jesus said, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore" (Rev. 3:12).
 - To be a "pillar in the temple" is to have a position of honor and authority in God's throne room.
 - All believers are part of God's spiritual temple (Eph. 2:21-22), but some will be pillars who hold a special position of authority and honor in the Millennium and for all eternity.
- Jesus also said to Philadelphia, "I will write on him...the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God" (Rev. 3:12). Later in Revelation, the New Jerusalem is identified as the bride who will come down from heaven (Rev. 21:2, 9-23).
- Even to lukewarm Laodicea, Jesus offered those who overcame the magnificent reward of sitting with Him on His throne—close to Him in intimacy and participating with Him in authority.
- In summary, Jesus promised the overcomers intimacy, authority in the nations, a privileged position in His temple, the name of the New Jerusalem written on them, and a throne.
- These are all rewards that relate specifically to our role as the bride of Christ.

3. To receive our full reward as Jesus' bride, there are specific issues that we must overcome.

- Jesus commanded the church at Ephesus to overcome losing their first love (Rev. 2:1-7).
 - While commending them for their service, perseverance, and commitment to doctrinal purity, He pointed out that their love for Him and others had grown cold.
 - His message to Ephesus is that overcomers must make love the preeminent attribute of their lives.
- Jesus encouraged the church at Smyrna to overcome fear, afflictions, trials, and tribulations (Rev. 2:8-11).
 - Because of Smyrna's close ties to Rome, the city was enthusiastic about emperor worship.
 - Those who refused to worship the emperor were persecuted and even killed.
 - In light of this persecution, Jesus exhorted them to remain faithful and stand firm without wavering.
- Jesus called the church at Pergamum to overcome compromise with the world (Rev. 2:12-17).

- Although this church held fast to the Word in a culture similar to Smyrna, there was false teaching in the church that was leading some into sexual immorality and idolatry.
 - Jesus exhorted them to overcome this defiling influence and remain true to the faith.
 - In essence, He told Pergamum to resist all forms of seduction and compromise.
- As we have already seen, Jesus admonished the church at Thyatira to overcome Jezebel and to stop tolerating her influence in their sphere of authority (Rev. 2:18-29).
- Jesus urged the church at Sardis to overcome spiritual slumber and apathy (Rev. 3:2-6).
 - At one time, Sardis had been a wealthy and virtually unconquerable city. As a result, the people of Sardis gloried in their fame. By the time Jesus spoke these words to them, their glory had passed.
 - In this context, Jesus told the church to wake up and overcome their current passivity.
 - In essence, Jesus told Sardis that they must not rely upon their reputation or what they did in the past.
 - Instead, they must remain spiritually alert and focused.
- Jesus encouraged the church at Philadelphia to live as overcomers until He returned (Rev. 3:7-13). Though not rebuked in any way, they were admonished to hang on to what they had. That is, they were to live as overcomers until the end.
- Jesus warned the church at Laodicea to overcome lukewarmness, pride, indifference, and self-satisfaction (Rev. 3:14-22).
 - These believers were not passionate for Jesus. Their fire had waned, leaving them stagnant.
 - Their biggest problem was self-deception; they couldn't see their true condition.
 - Blinded by pride, they didn't think they needed anything else in their relationship with God.
 - Jesus rebuked them for being self-satisfied and advised them to buy from Him gold refined by fire, white garments, and eye salve.
 - Jesus' message to Laodicea is that true overcomers remain passionate for Him.

These seven messages are very pertinent to the end-time church. Though the details vary from church to church, the central premise is clear: The bride of Christ makes herself ready by overcoming what Jesus listed in Revelation 2-3.

2. Engage in Kingdom-Focused Prayer.

1. Before the end-time judgments are released, the bowls of incense—which are the prayers of the saints—will be full.

- Notice what the book of Revelation tells us about the prayers of the saints:

When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, *which are the prayers of the saints* (Rev. 5:8).

- A few verses later, we read the following:

Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to *the prayers of all the saints* on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them (Rev. 8:3-6).

- Think about it for a moment: Before the seal judgments are released (Rev. 6:1-17) and the trumpet judgments are activated (Rev. 8-11), the prayers of the saints will fill heaven's incense bowls.
- The sweet aroma of our intercession will ultimately motivate our heavenly Father to activate the events that will result in our Bridegroom's return.

2. The end-time church will be deeply involved in kingdom-focused prayer prior to the Lord's return.

- Talking about the end times, Jesus said, "Now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. *However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*" (Luke 18:7-8).
- Will He find faith for what? *For prayer.*
- In other words, will the end-time church be praying when He comes? Definitely it *will* be praying because as Revelation just stated, Jesus will not return until the prayers of the saints have filled the bowls and activated the events that lead to His coming.
- Just as Esther interceded before the king for the defeat of Haman, we must be found "so doing" by being engaged in kingdom-focused prayer.

- Esther did not just pray for herself; she interceded for her people. In the same way, we are called to pray for Israel, the nations, end-time events, God's righteous judgments, and the Bridegroom's return.
- The specific prayers will be many and varied, but one thing will be the same—the end-time church will be engaged in kingdom-focused prayer that asks for God's kingdom to come and for His will to be done in the earth.

3. Fast On a Regular Basis.

1. Those who want to make themselves ready for Jesus must fast.

- The Old Testament saints fasted. Jesus fasted. The early church fasted. And we must fast.
- Jesus said, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and *then they will fast*" (Matt. 9:15).
- In this passage, Jesus affirmed that His disciples would fast in the future. While Jesus was on earth, His disciples were to celebrate His presence. But when the Bridegroom was taken away from them, then they would fast because they would be so desperate to be with Him.

2. Fasting enhances our prayers and prepares our hearts for Jesus' return.

- The call to fast is reaffirmed in the book of Joel.
- Joel, an Old Testament prophet who called the end-time church to fervent prayer in light of the coming Day of the Lord, stated with great clarity that fasting is an integral part of prayer. He wrote:

Consecrate a *fast*, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD (Joel 1:14).

"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, and with *fasting*, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments."...Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a *fast*, proclaim a solemn assembly (Joel 2:12-15).

- Right now, there is an ever-increasing longing in the heart of Jesus' bride for His return.
- We fast because we are desperate for the Bridegroom's presence.
- As the Spirit and the bride cry, "Come," fasting will enhance this cry and prepare our hearts for the His return (Rev. 22:17).

4. Go Deep in Worship.

1. In the end times, the bride will go deep worship.

- During the last day tribulations, as the earth is shaken like an olive tree, Isaiah said that there will be worshipers who choose to glorify God rather than succumb to chaos, fear, and terror. (Isa. 24:13-16). He prophesied:

They raise their voices, they shout for joy; they cry out from the west concerning the majesty of the LORD. Therefore glorify the LORD in the east, the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, in the coastlands of the sea. From the ends of the earth we hear songs, "Glory to the Righteous One" (Isa. 24:14-16).

- In the end times, the bride will be found "so doing" by pressing in to the secret place of God's holy presence in passionate, fervent, and deep worship.

2. Worship is one of the primary ways that we invite Jesus to return.

- Toward the end of the book of Revelation, John wrote that "the Spirit and the bride [will] say 'come'" (Rev. 22:17).
- Worship is one of the primary ways that we invite Jesus to "come."
- Worship is how we express our holy passion for our Bridegroom and let Him know of our desire for more of Him.
- As the bride's praises ascend to heaven and her worship penetrates deep into the heart of the Father, He will send Jesus back for His bride.

5. Dine with Jesus.

1. Jesus invites us to dine with Him.

- Jesus told the Laodiceans, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20).
- The Greek word for *dine* in this verse is *deipneo*, which is derived from *deipnon*. In Revelation 19:9, *deipnon* is used to describe the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- This suggests that there is a strong connection between "dining" with Jesus in this life and participating in the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- In fact, dining with Jesus is one of the primary ways that we make ourselves ready as a worthy bride.

2. When Jesus invites us to dine with Him, He is offering us the opportunity to experience deep communion, intimacy, oneness, and friendship with Him.

- In biblical days, table fellowship was a common image for deep communion and strong bonds of affection and companionship. Dining brought people together and gave them an opportunity to share intimate conversations. In biblical times, dining was one of the most enjoyable experiences of life.
- Even in our day, the dining table is the place where we let our guard down and connect with people. When we share a meal with someone, we usually become real and communicate with them on a heart-to-heart level.
- Dining with Jesus is similar to having a special meal with our spouse. As we linger together in a relaxing environment over great food and soothing background music, our hearts are connected through intimate conversation.
- Similarly, we dine with Jesus by lingering in His presence, talking to Him, and listening to His voice.
- We don't come with a long list of wants or needs; we come simply to be with Him.
- Dining with Jesus involves setting aside time to listen to His voice with an attitude of expectancy.
- We dine with Jesus by feasting upon His Word, worshiping Him in the secret place, and telling Him we love and desire Him.
- Mark wrote that Jesus "went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, *so that they would be with Him* and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons" (Mark 3:13-15).
- Before the disciples went out to minister, Jesus called them to Himself so that they might be with Him.
- In the same way, the bride of Christ will be found "so doing" as she develops a lifestyle of dining with Jesus in the secret place.

6. Minister to Jesus' Bride.

1. God is calling many people to minister in a forerunner spirit and prepare the bride of Christ for the end times and eternity.

- John the Baptist referred to himself as a friend of the Bridegroom (John 3:29). As a forerunner in the spirit and power of Elijah, John prepared the hearts of the Jewish people for Jesus' earthly ministry (Luke 1:17).
- That is, he ministered to Jesus' bride, prepared her to expect Jesus' appearance in Israel, and turned the hearts of the Jews back to God.
- This same task has been given to many of God's end-time servants. These forerunners are called to prepare the bride of Christ for the Bridegroom's return.

- The Holy Spirit is calling friends of the Bridegroom, like John the Baptist, to help awaken the sleeping bride and prepare her for the upcoming wedding.
- As friends of the Bridegroom, these ministers are not doing ministry for their own glory or fame. Nor are they building their own empire or kingdom. They truly desire one thing—to see the Lord’s bride made ready for Him.
- With such a heart, they can bring healing to emotional wounds. They can also bring freedom and encouragement, nourishment from the Word, and prophetic exhortations.

7. Invite Others to the Wedding Feast.

1. We are called to invite people to the wedding feast.

- In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son” (Matt. 22:1-14).
- We discussed earlier that in this powerful story, the father sent out his slaves to invite people to the feast.
- On two different occasions, his slaves called those who had already been invited, and in both instances the people refused. The third time, he sent out his slaves to invite everyone they could find.
- So they went to the main highways and the streets and invited everyone—both the good and the evil.
- Likewise, the Father wants us to go out into the highways and the streets, into the neighborhoods and the businesses, to invite people to the wedding feast. He is sending us into the marketplace to invite others to the soon-coming wedding.
- Whether people are believers who are unfamiliar with the bridal paradigm or unbelievers who don’t know Christ, the Holy Spirit is calling us to be found “so doing” by going into the harvest fields and inviting all that we find to the wedding feast.

Let’s awaken to our bridal identity and pursue an overcoming lifestyle, participate regularly in kingdom-focused prayer and fasting, routinely press in to God’s throne room in worship, dine with Jesus in the secret place, frequently minister to Jesus’ bride, and invite others to the wedding feast. Let’s actively make ourselves ready so that we may be found worthy on that day.

Review Questions

True or False

- _____ 1. Jesus is not that concerned about what we will be doing when He returns because we will be raptured before the second coming.
- _____ 2. There are certain things that Jesus wants us to be found "so doing" when He returns.
- _____ 3. The end-time church will be deeply involved in kingdom-focused prayer prior to the Lord's return.
- _____ 4. Those who want to make themselves ready as a worthy bride must overcome what Jesus listed in Revelation 2-3.
- _____ 5. Because of Jesus' love for His bride, He will rapture her from the earth before life gets too difficult; therefore, prayer is not a major issue in God's end-time plan for the church.
- _____ 6. Those with a forerunner spirit will be teaching people about Jesus' first coming as John the Baptist did.
- _____ 7. Our identity as a betrothed bride will transform how we think, feel, and act.
- _____ 8. Jesus' call to be found "so doing" is part of His message about the dynamics of the end times.
- _____ 9. Revelation 2 and 3 make a clear and definite connection between overcoming and being made ready as a worthy bride.
- _____ 10. When Jesus offers the reward to the overcomers at Sardis, He is inviting them to participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Fill in the Blanks

11. To be found so doing, the worthy bride will be found engaged in _____
_____ prayers.
12. Those who want to make themselves ready must deny themselves and _____ on a regular basis.
13. To be found so doing, the bride must go deep in _____.
14. _____ with Jesus is how we experience deep communion, intimacy,

oneness, and friendship with Him.

15. We are called to invite others to the _____.

Match the phrase on the left with the appropriate activity from the right that we should be doing when the Lord returns.

- _____ 16. Prepare the bride for the Bridegroom's return
- _____ 17. How we experience intimacy, communion, oneness, and friendship with Jesus
- _____ 18. Jesus' messages to the seven churches in Revelation
- _____ 19. Enhances our prayers and prepares our heart for Jesus' return
- _____ 20. Necessary before end-time events take place in fullness

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. Pursue an overcoming lifestyle.
- b. Engage in kingdom focused prayer.
- c. Fast on a regular basis.
- d. Go deep in worship.
- e. Dine with Jesus.
- f. Minister to Jesus' bride.
- g. Invite others to the wedding feast.

Answer Sheet

Session 1

1. T
2. T
3. F
4. T
5. F
6. F
7. T
8. T
9. F
10. T
11. love
12. Hosea
13. 22, 25
14. wedding
15. Bridegroom
16. e
17. b
18. a
19. d
20. c

Session 2

1. T
2. F
3. F
4. T
5. T
6. F
7. F
8. T
9. F
10. F
11. wedding ceremony
12. born again
13. preparation
14. huppah
15. Holy Spirit
16. d
17. e
18. a
19. c
20. b

Session 3

1. T
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. F
7. T
8. F
9. T
10. T
11. mature
12. discipline
13. worthy bride
14. loves, same
15. unrelenting
16. b
17. a
18. b
19. c
20. b

Session 4

1. T
2. T
3. F
4. T
5. F
6. T
7. T
8. F
9. T
10. T.
11. end time
12. Holy Spirit
13. Jesus
14. Vashti
15. Antichrist
16. c
17. e
18. a
19. b
20. d

Session 5

1. F
2. F
3. T
4. T
5. F
6. T
7. T
8. F
9. T
10. T
11. please
12. spectator, participator
13. partner
14. secret place
15. glory
16. b
17. a
18. b
19. c
20. d

Session 6

1. T
2. F
3. T
4. T
5. T
6. F
7. T
8. T
9. T
10. T
11. numphe
12. gune
13. gune
14. gune
15. numphe, gune
16. b
17. b
18. c
19. c
20. a

Answer Sheet

Session 7

1. T
2. F
3. T
4. T
5. F
6. T
7. F
8. T
9. T
10. F
11. establish
12. delight, pleasures
13. enjoys
14. intimacy, partnership
15. draw, run
16. b
17. b
18. a
19. a
20. a

Session 8

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. F
7. T
8. F
9. T
10. F
11. inheritance
12. ravishes
13. testing
14. character
15. seal, seal, love, flame, waters
16. d
17. a
18. e
19. b
20. c

Session 9

1. T
2. F
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. T
7. F
8. T
9. T
10. T
11. 6
12. wash, anoint, clothes, threshing floor
13. church
14. word
15. go, go, lodge, lodge, people, people, God, God, die, die
16. b
17. d
18. e
19. g
20. a

Session 10

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. F
7. T
8. T
9. F
10. T
11. oil
12. secret
13. time, money, friends
14. sit, dine
15. worship
16. a
17. b
18. b
19. b
20. a

Session 11

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. F
7. T
8. F
9. T
10. T
11. maturing
12. hidden
13. queen of heaven
14. 47
15. defilement
16. h
17. e
18. f
19. b
20. g

Session 12

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. T
5. F
6. F
7. T
8. T
9. T
10. T
11. kingdom focused
12. fast
13. worship
14. Dining
15. wedding feast
16. f
17. e
18. a
19. c
20. b

Understanding the Bride of Christ Final Exam

The following questions are true or false. Place a "T" for true or an "F" for false in the space provided (2 points per question).

- _____ 1. Three of the five aspects of the Jewish wedding system closely parallel the activities associated with us becoming a worthy bride for Jesus.
- _____ 2. The Greek word *numphe* is used to describe a bride or a young wife.
- _____ 3. Because the heavenly Father passionately loves the Son, He is determined to give Him a worthy bride.
- _____ 4. The harlot of Revelation 17 and 18 refers to a woman who will arise in the end times and seduce key leaders of the church.
- _____ 5. As important as it is, the bridal paradigm is presented in an obscure way in the Scriptures.
- _____ 6. A believer's basic identity is a betrothed bride being made ready for her Bridegroom.
- _____ 7. Every born-again believer is ready for the Bridegroom.
- _____ 8. The book of Esther is an allegory that describes several important dimensions of the end-time bride of Christ.
- _____ 9. At the beginning of her journey in the Song of Solomon, the bride is unaware of the darkness in her soul, and as a result, her sin hinders the Bridegroom from loving her fully.
- _____ 10. In the parable of the ten virgins, the oil symbolizes spreading the gospel to a lost and dying world.

Fill in the Blanks (2 points per question)

11. According to Song of Solomon, the _____ is where we are prepared to be a worthy bride for Jesus.
12. The Greek word for bride (or wife depending on the translation) in Revelation 19:7 is _____.
13. Jesus told His followers that when He returns, they should be found _____.

14. According to Matthew 22, the kingdom of God is like a _____ arranged by our heavenly Father for His Son.
15. The _____ of Revelation 17 and 18 refers to a future world-wide religious network that will deceive the nations and prepare them to worship the Anti-christ.
16. The book of Ruth is an excellent picture of how we mature in our _____ to Jesus.
17. The Greek word used for a betrothed bride is _____.
18. According to Song of Solomon 4, the bride's obedience _____ the heart of her Bridegroom.
19. In the book of Esther, _____ represents that part in all of us that is independent, self-willed, rebellious, and unwilling to submit to authority.
20. Getting oil for our lamps refers to the believer developing a lifestyle of _____ with Jesus.
21. God's eternal _____ in creation is to give His Son an equally-yoked bride that will partner with Him for all eternity.
22. The demonic spirit behind Jezebel is a world ruler called the _____ of _____.
23. To be ready as a worthy bride, according to Revelation 2-3, believers must pursue an _____ lifestyle.
24. The one who desires to be a worthy bride must pursue a lifestyle of _____ prayer and fasting.
25. One of the first steps in maturing as a worthy bride is to develop a true bridal _____.

Multiple choice: Circle the correct answer (2 points each)

26. Which of the following customs of the Jewish wedding system parallels the second coming of Christ?
- a. The arrangement of marriage
 - b. The betrothal ceremony
 - c. The preparation period between the betrothal and the wedding
 - d. The wedding ceremony
 - e. The wedding feast
27. Which of the following characters from the book of Esther most closely pictures those who are called as friends of the Bridegroom to make ready a bride for Jesus?
- a. Mordecai
 - b. Haman
 - c. Hegai
 - d. Ahasuerus
 - e. Vashti
28. Which of the following is not correct?
- a. The Father loves the Son with great passion.
 - b. The Father loves us enough to crush His Son.
 - c. The Son loves us with great passion and desire.
 - d. The Father loves us almost as much as He loves Jesus.
29. According to this class, which of the following is most correct about the foolish virgins?
- a. The foolish virgins are non-believers.
 - b. The foolish virgins are those who have made a profession of faith but really have not been converted to the faith.
 - c. The foolish virgins are Jews who rejected Christ.
 - d. The foolish virgins are true believers who have not replenished their oil supply by pursuing intimacy with Jesus.
30. Which of the following best describes the theme of this class?
- a. The bride of Christ is automatically ready for the Bridegroom.
 - b. Every born-again believer will be married to the Lord and rule with Him forever.
 - c. The worthy bride must make herself ready for the Bridegroom.
 - d. The church as a bride pictures purity and devotion to the Lord Jesus.

31. Revelation 18:4 states that the bride must come out of Babylon. Which of the following does this apply to?
- a. The harlot
 - b. Jezebel
 - c. The queen of heaven
 - d. The counterfeit bride
 - e. The future world-wide religious network that will deceive the nations
 - f. b, d, and e
 - g. All of the above
32. Based on Session 12, which of the following is not one of the seven activities that we are to be found "so doing" when Jesus returns.
- a. Pursue an overcoming lifestyle.
 - b. Be engaged in kingdom-focused prayer.
 - c. Try to predict the timing of Jesus' return.
 - d. Dine with Jesus.
 - e. Invite others to the wedding feast.
33. Our foundational identity as a believer is:
- a. A servant of the Most High God
 - b. A friend of the Bridegroom
 - c. A betrothed bride who is making herself ready for her Bridegroom
 - d. A soldier in God's end-time army
34. Based on our study of Song of Solomon, which of the following happens in the wilderness of preparation.
- a. Love is awakened in our hearts.
 - b. Mature love is established in our hearts.
 - c. We are established in God's love for us.
 - d. We learn to delight in the Lord.
35. Which of the following best describes the bridal paradigm?
- a. God's eternal purpose of creation is to give His Son a worthy bride.
 - b. The kingdom of God is like a wedding.
 - c. Our foundational identity is a betrothed bride who is making ourselves ready for our Bridegroom.
 - d. All of the above

Discuss in your own words (10 points each)

36. Based on our study of Esther, describe the five characteristics of the end-time bride of Christ.

37. Explain the need to make ourselves ready as a worthy bride. Be sure to explain the distinction between the betrothed bride and the eternal wife of the Lamb. Also list the ways the bride makes herself ready.

38. Discuss the three dimensions of God's unrelenting love and how each affects the believer as the betrothed bride of Christ.