

## GOD'S MARRIAGE ANNIVERSARY

All Christians are familiar with the terms Old and New Testaments, which are the names for the two sections of the Bible. But fewer are aware that these sections could have also been called the old and new covenants, because the Bible refers to an old or “first covenant” and a “new covenant,” (Heb. 8:6-9). The word covenant simply means an agreement, which may come in many forms. In the biblical context, we see that the old covenant was an agreement between God and ancient Israel.

This passage in Hebrews was lifted from the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:31,32, where we are told what type of covenant that was. The key words are: “I was a **husband** to them.” So the old covenant was, among other things, a **marriage** covenant! In Isaiah 54:5 we read, “For your maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name...” The wedding took place at Mt. Sinai, and the ceremony is recorded in Exodus 19:4-8. In this marriage agreement/covenant, Israel pledged obedience to God, and God pledged to exalt Israel above all nations.

Not surprisingly, God's wedding day was like no other, and so we read, “Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly....The blast of the **trumpet** sounded long and became louder and louder...” (Ex. 19:18,19; Heb. 12:18,19).

God certainly wanted Israel to remember her wedding day. In fact, He went on to institute a yearly festival celebration by setting aside a day in which Israel could remember her **commitment** to her marriage vows. This day is called the Feast of Trumpets because it memorializes Israel's wedding day when she heard the blast of the trumpet sound long and loud. In Leviticus 23 we read, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a **memorial** of blowing of **trumpets**, a holy convocation’” (v23:24).

But we all know the sad story of this marriage. Israel was an unfaithful wife. She cheated on her husband by worshipping other gods. For centuries God sent marriage counselors through the voices of the prophets, but his wife refused to heed their warnings, even killing many of them. Finally, the marriage ended in divorce (Jer. 3:8). Yes, God, who says “He hates divorce” (Mal. 2:16), is Himself a divorce! All because Israel failed to keep her commitment to her husband and live up to the vows she took on her wedding day.

The glory and majesty of the Feast of Trumpets—God's and Israel's marriage anniversary—had become obsolete. Or had it? The New Testament tells us that all the festivals of Leviticus 23, including the Feast of trumpets, had a dual, prophetic meaning. In fact, the apostle Paul called these festivals “shadow[s],” when he wrote,

“Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a **festival** or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a **shadow** of things to come, but the **substance is of Christ**” (Col. 2:16,17).

And in Hebrews we read,

“For the law [of offerings], having a **shadow** of the **good things to come**, and not the **very image** of the things...” (Heb. 10:1).

These verses teach a metaphor. For instance, if the sun is shining in the right direction, and you see a shadow shaped like a person coming from around a hidden corner, you know somebody is about to appear from around that corner. The shadow **teaches** you that. The festivals foreshadow, precede the real “substance” or “image.” They teach us about the “good things [which were] to come” through Christ.

So we must ask: what good things to come did the Feast of Trumpets foreshadow, and what is the real image—picture—of this celebration? Actually Jeremiah and Hebrews have already told us. God prophesied that He would make a “new covenant” with the New “Israel of God”—all Christians (Gal. 6:16). This is the same covenant that Jesus ratified with his own blood at his crucifixion. It is the covenant in which Christians agree to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and to obey his words. And in return, Jesus agrees to make Christians “joint heirs” with him of his Father (Rom. 8:14-18).

Paul wrote, “...I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (II Cor. 11:2). So the New covenant is an **engagement** agreement between Jesus and the saints!

Jesus told his future wife, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15,21), so the words of Jesus comprise the terms of the new marriage covenant. Christians are given a stern warning about marital fidelity in Hebrews,

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the **blood of the covenant** by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Heb. 10:26-29).

“For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a **trumpet**, and the voice of words...But you have come to Mount Zion...to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling...See that you do not refuse him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven” (Heb. 12:18-29).

We should ask, why would anyone ever “turn away” from their engagement to marry God in Christ? All Christians would have thought this unthinkable on the day of their repentance, baptism, and commitment to submit to Jesus as their Lord and savior. What happens to some Christians who “turn away”?

In his “parable of the sower” (Mtt. 13:18-22), Jesus explained that some people early on allow Satan to steal their knowledge, so that they never reach understanding of God’s love. Others never worked hard enough to be grounded deeply in the truth. Still others allow the way of the world to “choke [out] the word[s]” of life.

In his very poignant parable of the “ten virgins” (Mtt. 25:1-13), Jesus warned those who are not stirred up with the zeal of the Holy Spirit may find themselves “shut” out of their own wedding! Paul said some can “depart from the faith” by allowing their “conscience [to be] seared with a hot iron” (I Tim. 4:1,2). This is a description of a Christian who has so long compromised his faith

through disobedience that he no longer even feels the pain of guilt. Their conscience and faith are “shipwreck[ed]” (I Tim. 1:19), perhaps hopelessly.

I have seen many people over the years cite the sins of others (real or imagined) as a reason for leaving a congregation. Sometimes this can be a legitimate reason. But all too often I have seen that later on they have broken their engagement to Jesus as well. This leads me to believe that some simply use the example of others as an excuse to desert the “good fight.” I call this exit theology because these people were only looking for a so-called reason to walk away. Let’s call them what they are: quitters and deserters!

But for those who remain faithful to the covenant, Revelation gives a glimpse into their future wedding following the return of Jesus,

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints....Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” (Rev. 19:7-9).

This is only a foretaste of the “good things to come.” The “substance” and “image” of the Feast of Trumpets pictures the marriage of faithful Christians to their husband, Jesus Christ.